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BEYOND BLUE AND WHITE:
UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY PRESIDENTS
AND DESEGREGATION, 1941-1987

DISSERTATION

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the
College of Education
at the University of Kentucky

By

Mark W. Russell

Lexington, Kentucky

Director: Dr. Richard Angelo

2014

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

BEYOND BLUE AND WHITE: UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY PRESIDENTS AND DESEGREGATION, 1941-1987

This dissertation fills a gap in the historiography of southern higher education by focusing on five university presidents and their role in the desegregation of a non-elite flagship university in the Upper South. While historian Melissa Keane has studied the presidential role at elite private southern universities during the initial phase of the desegregation process, no study has yet examined desegregation from the president's office at a southern land-grant university. Building upon historian Peter Wallenstein's thesis that desegregation is not a single event in an institution's history but rather an ongoing process, I argue that it was also process that clearly involved the university presidents.

Though much has been written about desegregation in Kentucky generally and the University of Kentucky specifically, and the pioneering African-American students who desegregated UK, almost no scholarship has focused on the specific role of the UK presidents in the ongoing desegregation process. In much of the existing literature, the presidents are portrayed as spectators, they occupy a backseat, or they sit on the sidelines as the action unfolds. Often their story ends with the initial desegregation of UK's graduate and undergraduate programs. Passive observers they were not; however, Herman Lee Donovan, Frank Graves Dickey, John Wieland. Oswald, Albert Dennis Kirwan, and Otis Arnold Singletary implemented policies that impacted the course of desegregation at the University of Kentucky.

KEYWORDS: Desegregation, University of Kentucky, University Presidents, Southern Higher Education, African-American History

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BEYOND BLUE AND WHITE: UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY PRESIDENTS AND DESEGREGATION, 1941-1987

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For Charles Lamont Eubanks

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Family members have also been instrumental in helping me complete this project. To my mother, Harriette Weiser Russell of Bluffton, South Carolina, I did not always appreciate your constant reminders about completing what one starts, but, as these pages show, I did, in fact, complete the dissertation after all. My mother was perhaps the first person to influence my thinking about what university presidents can and should do because she attended a university which failed in its attempt to desegregate peacefully. Though I am still disturbed by some of the stories she told me about Ole Miss, I am thankful that under the direction of recent presidents, that institution has worked hard to atone for the sins of its past. My late uncle, Reverend Frederick Sheely Weiser of New

Oxford, Pennsylvania, also contributed indirectly to this dissertation because of his success as a writer on Pennsylvania German *Fraktur* and as the family historian. I often thought to myself: if he can write, so can I. My maternal grandparents, Donald Koehler and Elizabeth Sheely Weiser, have been dead for many years, but it was in their hometown of Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, that I developed a love for history and an interest in colleges. Both were extremely loyal to their alma maters: he to Gettysburg College where he served as a trustee; she to Hood College in Frederick, Maryland. Only later did I understand that both of these institutions engaged in the same exclusionary policies as the southern universities I investigated. To my brother Craig, who died in December of 2008 and shared an interest in the South, I wish you had been here to see the completion of this dissertation. You left us too soon. My cousin, John Conrad Weiser of New York City has for years been a quiet supporter of me and my work.

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it is clear to them, and I hope it will be apparent to all who read these pages, that I have a strong belief in what former Emory University president James Laney called the "moral authority" of the university presidency.

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Chapter One

Introduction

Many Americans *think* they know how the desegregation of historically white southern public universities unfolded, but thanks to the popular media, their thoughts almost never focus on those white university presidents who oversaw this complex process. Some older members of the public falsely assume the images they witnessed of public school desegregation at Little Rock High School in 1957, where stern-faced members of the military escorted the first black students onto campus as enraged whites shouted obscenities at them, applied to higher education as well. Others, recalling video footage from the PBS series *Eyes on the Prize,* in which the Ole Miss campus erupts in flames after black student James Meredith arrived to register under court order in 1962, believe that such mob behavior was typical at the South's public universities.[1] Finally, a generation of younger Americans has probably seen the 1994 Hollywood blockbuster *Forrest Gump,* where actual documentary footage of Governor Wallace making his infamous last stand at the school house door is interwoven with a fictional scene in which the well-meaning undergraduate Forrest picks up a notebook dropped by a black coed, presumably Vivian Malone, as she breaks the color line and walks through the door and into history at the University of Alabama.[2] In truth, Vivian Malone was already in her dorm and not present at the schoolhouse door when Wallace made his last stand, and the desegregation of most southern universities seldom involved angry mobs and random violence. Those mythical intransigent southern governors who blocked the entrance to

[1] *Eyes on the Prize* was a multi-volume documentary on the Civil Rights Movement that aired on Public Television. For the Meredith affair, see Volume 3 "*Fighting Back*" 1957-1962.
[2] *Forrest Gump,* dir. Robert Zemeckis, perf. Tom Hanks. Paramount, 1994.

southern universities were the exception, not the rule, and to overlook the role of the administration, particularly the presidents, in the planning and execution of desegregation of the historically non-black university or college prevents a full understanding of the scope of this complex process.[3]

While most specialists in the history of American higher education understand the significance of Charlayne Hunter-Gault, Harvey Gantt, and James Meredith and can name the institutions they desegregated, most would be hard pressed to identify, much less explain, the role of O.C. Aderhold, Robert Edwards, J.D. Williams, and Herman Lee Donovan, the university presidents who oversaw the initial admission of the first black students to the Universities of Georgia, Clemson, Ole Miss, and Kentucky, respectively. In most cases, the individual university president's role in the desegregation of historically white colleges and universities remains somewhat of a mystery, obscured by legal battles and political interference, or dwarfed by the more heroic (and presumably more interesting) stories of the pioneering black students who broke the color barrier.

For years, scholars have ignored singling out the complex role of the white southern state university presidents in the desegregation of their non-black institutions. In the early years, these presidents determined the pace and tone of desegregation, they corresponded with both opponents and proponents of racial change, they met and deliberated with trustees and politicians over the matter, and later they coaxed their coaches into understanding the need for black athletes on university athletic teams. Finally, they decided how much publicity would be given to desegregation once the first black students arrived on campus and during the era of Black Power, many of these men

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[3] Peter Wallenstein is responsible for the concept of desegregation as a "process" and not an "event." See Peter Wallenstein, "Black Southerners and Non-Black Universities: Desegregating Higher Education, 1935-1967," *History of Higher Education Annual*, 1999. 124.

knew well to listen. These white southern university presidents were involved in every step of the desegregation of their campuses and later oversaw the transition from all-white athletic teams to integrated ones, they knew of and in some cases championed the hiring of the first black faculty, they responded to the Black Power Movement, and they answered civil rights officers when it was determined the pace of segregation was not going fast enough.

In time, more than a few of these presidents assumed that the public wanted to hear their stories, and some did tell them, in speeches and in books or oral histories, sometimes filling their accounts of desegregation with half-truths, sometimes indulging in back patting and self-congratulation, sometimes explaining their part in desegregation in the most minute of details. One of the most interesting narratives of the desegregation of a southern land-grant university is told by Dean Colvard in his text *Mixed Emotions*. Colvard's diaries were the fodder for a step-by-step description of his actions during the initial desegregation of Mississippi State University, one of the last state schools in the South to desegregate in 1965.[4]

Continuing to Overlook Gaps in the Story of the Desegregation of American Higher Education

In his 2008 anthology, *Higher Education and the Civil Rights Movement: White Supremacy, Black Southerners, and College Campuses,* Virginia Polytechnic Institute historian Peter Wallenstein issued what might best be described as a call-to-action in his final chapter titled "Unfinished Business." Here Wallenstein proposed several research

[4] Several university presidents gave accounts of the desegregation of their schools. See Herman Lee Donovan, *Keeping the University Free and Growing,* (Lexington: University Press, 1959). Harvie Branscomb's, *Purely Academic: An Autobiography, (*Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1978) and Dean Colvard's *Mixed Emotions: As Racial Barriers Fell A University President Remembers (Danville, Illinois: Interstate Publishers, 1985).*

areas he believed should be properly explored in order to shed light on the complete spectrum of the desegregation of American higher education. Wallenstein, who argued that "Every facet of desegregation requires further exploration," suggested researchers investigate the "enrollment of the first black students in exceptional programs," "the presence or absence of black construction workers who built the campus," and "subsequent developments as the active recruitment of black students."

But, conspicuously absent from Wallenstein's plea was any call to investigate what role the presidents of historically white institutions of higher education played in the desegregation of their schools. Wallenstein, who undoubtedly would second my call to study the presidential response to desegregation, wrote a brief history of his own institution, in which he discussed how the white presidents of Virginia Tech reacted when the first black applicants came knocking on the door of the Blacksburg land-grant institution.[5]

Breaking Paradigm Paralysis: Moving Away from the Heroic Stories of the First Black Students on the Historically-White Campus and Focusing on the University Presidents Who either Orchestrated or Impeded Social Change

In this dissertation, I have answered Wallenstein's call for the exploration of every facet of desegregation by focusing on one institution, the University of Kentucky, and the involvement of its presidents in the desegregation process. In doing so, I join a conversation begun by historian Marcia Synnott with her seminal text the *Half-Opened Door: Discrimination and Admissions at Harvard, Yale, and Princeton, 1900-1970* in which she examined the discriminatory admissions policies of Harvard, Yale, and

[5] Peter Wallenstein. *Higher Education and the Civil Rights Movement: White Supremacy, Black Southerners, and the College Movement.* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2008) 233-234. For Wallenstein's treatment of Virginia Tech's desegregation, see *Virginia Tech: Land Grant University: 1882-1997: History of a School, A State, a Nation, (*Roanoke: Pocahontas Press, 1997).

Princeton Universities from the turn of the century to World War II. Synnott exposed the bigotry of several presidents, including President Lawrence Lowell of Harvard, who worked to placate wealthy white alumni by excluding blacks from dormitories and enforcing quotas on the numbers of Jews and other minorities admitted.[6] Her research made clear that these Ivy League college presidents had a powerful effect on determining who attended their schools, and she shed light on a dark chapter at three of America's most prestigious universities. Surprisingly, it was only after the defeat of Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan during World War II that the administrators of Harvard, Yale, and Princeton began to champion the concept of diversity as we know it today.

More recently, Rice University historian Melissa Kean in *Desegregating Higher Education in the South: Duke, Emory, Rice, Tulane and Vanderbilt* found that after World War II the presidents of several elite private Southern universities understood the inevitability of school desegregation and were determined to lead their institutions through it. Although the presidents in her study were not necessarily racial reformers, they understood well that their universities stood to lose precious federal funding, not to mention the respect of the national academic community, if they did not desegregate their student bodies. Blocking their way, however, were conservative white male trustees who had to be coaxed into understanding that desegregation would allow their institution to enter the American mainstream, prevent it from losing federal funding, and avoid the censure of the accrediting agencies.[7]

[6] Marcia Synnott. *The Half-Opened Door*. (Westport, Ct: Greenwood Press) 1979.
[7] Melissa Kean's text examines presidential involvement in the desegregation of several elite universities. See Melissa Keane, *Desegregating Private Higher Education in the South: Duke, Emory, Rice, Tulane, and Vanderbilt (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 2004).*

Kean, however, ends her narrative with the admission of blacks to these elite schools suggesting this is where the story, and the involvement of her presidents in the desegregation process, ends.

Kean is perhaps the first scholar to have studied the desegregation of private southern universities by focusing on the office of these white southern university presidents—men who considered themselves the "intelligent white men of the South" and guided the desegregation of Rice, Tulane, Duke, Emory, and Vanderbilt Universities.[8] Not only do I believe Kean was on to something in her book, I argue that the desegregation of public higher education in the South can only be understood if the presidential role in it is exposed and discussed. Kean demonstrates that university presidents had the power to create a climate conducive to change, and thus it seemed only natural to employ her text as a model for this dissertation, but I have gone farther than Kean by following the presidents of the University of Kentucky over time, beyond the date of 1965, which for many marked the end of the desegregation era in higher education. Clearly, the desegregation process did not stop with the first arrival of blacks on a historically non-black college campus. In fact, the arrival of black students at historically white colleges and universities was just the beginning of a newer struggle for equity and access that has proved ongoing, not only at UK, but at every school which had once forbidden blacks from matriculating there.

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[8] Kean employs the term "intelligent white men of the South", first used by an Emory president, Goodrich White, in an essay in the 1999 *History of Higher Education Annual.* See *Guiding Desegregation: "The Role of the Intelligent White Men of the South," Volume 19.*Roger Geiger and Susan R. Richardson, editors.

Joining in the Conversation: UK Presidents Desegregate

Like most flagship state southern universities, the University of Kentucky, founded from the remnants of a denominational college in 1865 under the Morrill Land Grant provisions, avoided violence when it began desegregation in 1949. Unlike Melissa Kean's prestigious private southern universities, UK, as a public institution, was forced under federal court order to open the Graduate School to blacks in 1949. It was also, like its counterpart universities in the South, an institution that, up until the 1930s, not challenged publicly on the issue of segregation and hence saw no need to end its racially restrictive admissions policy. UK trustees were quite clear on the issue that blacks not be allowed to study at the flagship university, and they were supported by the Day Law, that, after 1904, forbade the teaching of black and white students at the same campus.[9]

When UK did begin to admit black students in 1949, the probable factors in the school's peaceful initial desegregation were a governor who was not opposed to the admission of a small number of blacks to the UK Graduate School, Kentucky's low black population, a cautious university president who guided the process from behind the scenes, and a board of trustees who chose not to appeal the court-ordered desegregation ruling. The chief litigant, Louisville resident and public school history teacher Lyman Johnson, has been the subject of an oral history by historian Wade Hall. UK publicly acknowledged Johnson's efforts in desegregating the school first, with an honorary doctorate in 1979 during the administration of President Otis Singletary, and later in 1999,

[9] The Day Law, named for Representative Carl Day of Breathitt County, was a Kentucky law, upheld by the Supreme Court, which forbade racial mixing in the classrooms. It was aimed primarily at desegregated Berea College.

with the erection of a historical marker commemorating Johnson's lawsuit and fifty years of desegregation located near the Administration Building.[10]

It was during the presidency of Charles Wethington, that the University of Kentucky formally celebrated fifty years of the African-American legacy on campus. The culmination of what some might consider a "cleansing process" was a huge convocation held in Memorial Coliseum on 16 September 1999. The brochure from that event included the words "Remembrance, Reconciliation and Renewal" on the cover. There were songs including "What if God is Unhappy" by the UK choral group Black Voices, a convocation pledge by former Dunbar High School basketball coach S. T. Roach, and an historical statement by Dr. Gerald Smith, of UK's Department of History. Bishop Desmond Tutu, the famed South African anti-apartheid leader, gave the keynote address and, later, Lyman Johnson's son unveiled the aforementioned historical marker commemorating his father's desegregation lawsuit near the Administration Building.

What seemed to be absent from UK's public desegregation festivities in 1999 was any extended formal discussion of former President Donovan's role in the desegregation process, though a play that year did remind the public that the President and the Board of Trustees were very much involved in the Lyman Johnson suit.[11] A good part of the 1999 celebration appeared to focus on Johnson, the historical marker, and the legal case that broke the color barrier and allowed black graduate students to enter UK. The event was designed for the university community to celebrate African-Americans at UK, not to

[10] See Wade Hall, *The Rest of the Dream: The Black Odyssey of Lyman Johnson* (Lexington, Ky: University Press of Kentucky, 1988). For information on UK's celebration, see "50 Years of the African-American Legacy. A Presidential Convocation Commemorating 50 Years of the African-American Legacy at the University of Kentucky." Brochure. Author's personal copy.

[11] The play by Herman Daniel Farrell III was commissioned by Dr. Geraldine Maschio of UK's Department of Theater. http://finearts.uky.edu/faculty/theatre-arts-administration/geraldine-maschio.

focus on what some might have been seen as the failed leadership of the white administrators and trustees who attempted to keep blacks out. Healing and closure, not the opening of old wounds, were behind the plan in 1999, and the more difficult questions of President Donovan's involvement in thwarting the admission of blacks to UK appeared lost as the University hosted its distinguished guests. As a result of these activities, interested students and community members only partially understood the desegregation of UK, whose celebration might seem to imply that the 1949 admission of about thirty black graduate students was the end of the story. It was not. Desegregation was not, by a long shot, a done deal in 1949. In fact, at UK, the desegregation of this traditionally Southern non-black campus had only just begun.

Whereas Kean looked at the presidents of five elite southern schools, in this dissertation, I limit my focus to the presidents involved in desegregation at the University of Kentucky from 1949-1987. Mason County native Herman Lee Donovan, who served as president from 1941-1956, the period which witnessed the desegregation of UK's graduate and undergraduate offerings, will be treated first. Donovan, in turn, was followed by Frank Graves Dickey, who served UK from 1956-1963, and introduced for the first time the integration of the Southeastern Conference while being forced to deal with the public outcry against faculty members Abby Marlatt and William Reichert, who were more radical and proactive on racial issues than most Kentuckians. Launching a controversial new epoch in UK history from 1963-1968 was Dr. John Oswald, a California-trained plant pathologist and colleague of Clark Kerr, who worked with Governor Edward Breathitt to desegregate the university's football program. Following Oswald's departure and his failure to help Coach Adolf Rupp desegregate the basketball

program, there came interim president, historian, and Louisville native Albert Kirwan, 1968-1969, and Dr. Otis Singletary, a native Mississippian and expert on the Mexican American War who, during the years 1969-1987, advanced the process of desegregation by appointing Dr. John Smith to serve as vice president of UK's Office of Minority Affairs.[12] Each of these presidents was thus responsible, in some way, for either pushing along or stalling the process of desegregation at UK.

Method

Using a variety of primary and secondary sources, including oral histories and archived documents, I have written a qualitative dissertation in narrative form in which I illuminate the presidential roles in the desegregation of Kentucky's flagship university. Though I have limited my discussion to one institution—the University of Kentucky, and one group of administrators—UK presidents—I have been mindful of avoiding the charge of parochialism by following in the footsteps of historian Thomas Dyer and attempting to place the desegregation of UK in a national context while making comparisons to presidential involvement in desegregation at other public and private universities throughout the South.[13]

In addition to presidential papers located in UK's Archives and Special Collections, other important sources include oral histories from the Charles T. Wethington Jr. Alumni/Faculty Research Collection, newspaper reports from the

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[12] See Charles Gano Talbert: The University of Kentucky: the Maturing Years, For Wallenstein's thesis, see Afterward, pp 229-230 in *Higher Education and the Civil Rights Movement*.
[13] Thomas G. Dyer, *The University of Georgia: A Centennial History, 1785-1985* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1985), 303-334.

Lexington *Herald* and the *Leader*, Louisville's *Courier Journal,* UK's student newspaper the *Kentucky Kernel*, and Herman Lee Donovan's account of desegregation in his memoir *Keeping the University Free and Growing.*

Relevance

Aside from a pictorial history published in 1989 by Carl Cone of the UK History Department and individual university web pages, UK's history has not been formally updated since 1965, when historian Charles Gano Talbert wrote *The University of Kentucky: The Maturing Years* for the university's centennial. Talbert's brief account of UK's desegregation remains incomplete and only partially told.[14] What happened after 1965 has largely been unexplored. While there have since been excellent descriptive accounts of UK's desegregation by historians George Wright and John Hardin, these have focused less on the presidential role in desegregation and more on the sequence of events, the court cases, and the impact of the university's desegregation on Kentucky's African-American population in general.[15] Finally, President Donovan's own account of desegregation at UK in the memoir *Keeping the University Free and Growing* is misleading in that it downplays his own involvement in attempting to keep black students out of the university during the years 1941-1949.

The story of presidential involvement in desegregation is also especially relevant given the fact today's white southern university presidents are quite vocal in their call for diversity and inclusion. Familiar perhaps with what former Emory president James Laney called "the moral authority of the presidency," many of today's white presidents

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[14] Charles Gano Talbert, *The University of Kentucky: The Maturing Years*, (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1965).
[15] See John Hardin's *Fifty Years of Segregation in Kentuck*y (Lexington; University Press, 1999) and George Wrights' *History of Blacks in Kentucky* (Frankfort: Kentucky Historical Society, 1990).

use their office to argue for a more racially diverse campus.[16] For example, former University of Georgia president Michael Adams publicly stood by his school's affirmative action policies when they came under assault in 1999, saying "All of us have a responsibility to deal with the legacy of segregation as an issue in both academe and government.[17] Ten years later, before he left Ole Miss in 2009, President Robert Khayat reflected on the changes that had taken place on campus where, due to his efforts, black student enrollment increased by 79%. Khayat told his audience,

> "An honest look at us will say this is a university that came from 1962—where it took the United States military and the president to get one black person in school—to a very diverse community where people treat each other with respect and affection."[18]

Why do today's southern presidents speak up for Civil Rights and inclusion, when so many of their predecessors remained silent, at least publicly, on that issue in the 1930's-1960's? Were the presidents back then simply afraid that if they did speak up they would be fired from their posts by conservative trustees and governors? Or were they, like many of the trustees, merely guardians of the status quo eager to preserve the "Southern way of life?" I argue that it is far too simple to pin the current pro-diversity stance of most university presidents on the Civil Rights Act of 1964. White southern university presidents of today are facing something the white presidents of yesterday did not have to reckon with: stronger tenure for faculty members who criticize presidential inaction on race and diversity and a core of black educators, students and alumni,

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[16] James Laney, *Education from the Heart,* (Atlanta: Emory University Press, 1993).
[17] www.nytimes.com/1999/10/01/us/university-stands-firm-in.
[18] Robert Khayat, "Khayat retires as Ole Miss Chief." *The Natchez Democrat*, January 6 , 2009.

accrediting agencies, reporters eagerly looking for a good story, and government officials who are watching the university president's every move on issues of diversity and inclusion.

The differences between the UK of yesterday and today were nowhere more apparent than in 2008, when an effigy of presidential candidate Barack Obama was found hanging in a tree on campus. Former president Lee Todd immediately condemned the act saying, "I am outraged because we work very hard, every day, to build bridges across the divides…Diversity and inclusion are among our most precious core values."[19] In 1949, however, when crosses were burned on the UK campus after the Lyman Johnson admission, President Donovan simply dismissed the incident as a childish prank. Forgetting what had happened, Donovan then wrote in 1959, "From the first admission of Negroes to the University to the present time, there has been no incident that has embarrassed either them or the white students."[20] That legend has continued to this day.

This study suggests that yesterday's presidential inaction on the subject of racial inclusion, the bitter feelings it created among blacks and southern white liberals, and the embarrassment racial missteps can cause to an institution of higher education, has contributed, in part, to a pro-diversity stance on the part of white southern leaders of higher education. Today's college presidents are not only more mindful of their constituencies; they are also more cognizant of their place in campus history. They know, too, that today's donors are no longer exclusively conservative white men who give money to have a building named in their honor. Though today's white college

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[19] Jeffrey McMurray, "Obama Effigy Found at the University of Kentucky," *Houston Chronicle*. 29 October 2008.
[20] Herman Lee Donovan, *Keeping the University Free and Growing,* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1959), 100.

presidents may not be as outspoken defending diversity as Derek Bok, formerly of Harvard, and Lee Bollinger of Columbia, they certainly do not want to be labeled out-of-touch or insensitive to the needs of black alumni, students, and professors.[21]

Literature Review

Aside from George Wright's *History of Blacks in Kentucky* and John Hardin's text *Fifty Years of Desegregation: Black Higher Education in Kentucky, 1904-1954,* which include descriptions of the desegregation of UK, there are only a few texts that have shed light on the issue of UK's administrative involvement in the desegregation era. Donovan's previously mentioned memoir, *Keeping the University Free and Growing,* reveals his cautious, "go slow" approach to desegregation at UK and the guidelines he implemented to make what he referred to as the "experiment" a success.[22] Thomas Syvertson's dissertation on Earle Clements paints the picture of a governor who is more comfortable with the idea of racial change at UK than President Donovan and his trustees. Historian Thomas Clark discussed the desegregation of UK briefly in his autobiography published posthumously in 2006, calling Donovan overly cautious and fearful of violence at UK.[23] In Gerald Smith's biography of KSU's Rufus Atwood, readers learn that during the desegregation era President Donovan asked KSU President Atwood to send only the best blacks to UK that desegregation summer of 1949. President Frank Dickey comes off in a better light because he worked with Atwood to

[21] Bollinger and Bok have been particularly outspoken on issues of affirmative action. See *The Shape of the River: Long Term Consequences of Considering Race in College Admissions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).
[22] For the complete chapter on desegregation, see Donovan, *Keeping the University Free and Growing,* 95-101.
[23] Thomas Syvertson, *"The Administration of Governor Earle Clements*." University of Kentucky. PhD. diss, 1988.

make certain UK/KSU could offer joint courses for government employees in Frankfort.[24] A recent essay by Charles Martin entitled *Hold that Color Line: Black Exclusion and Southeastern Conference Football* is extremely useful for this study because it discusses Presidents Dickey and Oswald and their role in desegregating Southeastern Conference (SEC) football. While Martin fails to mention why Dickey wanted UK to be the first southern university to desegregate SEC football, the article does show that President Oswald and Governor Breathitt were a duo who worked together to sign black football player Nate Northington at UK. Finally, Sharon Child's recent dissertation on the experiences of the first black UK undergraduates and their experiences after 1954 deserves attention because she includes interviews from Frank Dickey on the subject of race at UK in which he asserts that President Donovan put his job on the line in arguing for the admission of black students after the court decision of 1949.[25]

When it comes to the presidents who desegregated their schools, the literature is more fertile, and several texts are helpful for a discussion of the presidents of southern schools and their role in the process of desegregation. Aside from the obvious recent university histories (Georgia) by Thomas Dyer, (Tulane) Clarence Mohr, (South Carolina) Henry Lesesne, and (Ole Miss) David Sansing, there are other sources. For a look at the desegregation of one land grant institution in the Deep South, Dean Colvard's previously text *Mixed Emotions* is an excellent departure point. Colvard, a North Carolina native and Berea College graduate, was one of the last presidents to desegregate

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[24] Gerald Smith, *A Black Educator in the Segregated South: Kentucky's Rufus B. Atwood* (Lexington: University Press, 1994).
[25] Charles Martin, *Hold That Color Line! Black Exclusion and Southeastern Conference Football*, in *Higher Education and the Civil Rights Movement: White Supremacy, Black Southerners and College Campus*, ed. Peter Wallenstein (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2008), 166-198.

a public southern university and, as he stated in his book, he wanted it known that he was not on a racial crusade, but rather he was determined to follow the letter of the law. Colvard relied heavily on his own diary entries to give details of the desegregation at Mississippi State, and his decision to allow the University to play in an integrated athletic contest against the wishes of Ross Barnett, who had recently embarrassed the state with his grandstanding at Ole Miss.

President Harvie Branscomb also penned an account of desegregation at Vanderbilt University, crafting the image of the omniscient narrator and busy administrator who, while attempting to bring Vanderbilt into the mainstream, is sidetracked by the issue of desegregation. Branscomb portrays himself as progressive on racial matters in contrast to his conservative trustees, and discusses how he was forced to deal with a politically active black theology student who was not about to hold his tongue on racial inequality in Nashville. A very different account of a less progressive Branscomb is found in Paul Conkin's *Gone with the Ivy* in the chapter "The Unwanted." Conkin's portrayal of Branscomb, shows a man who abhorred racial injustice but at the same time appeared to want only a very select few blacks at Vanderbilt who were expected to keep their mouths closed once they arrived. For example, Branscomb became furious when black student Richard Lawson came to campus eager to be an activist, thus causing much embarrassment to the school by pitting professors against the president.[26]

For a second-hand account of how a private Baptist university in the Deep South voluntarily desegregated, Will Campbell's *The Stem of Jesse* is an excellent starting

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[26] Paul Conkin, *Gone with the Ivy: A Biography of Vanderbilt University* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1985).

point. Campbell, who served as a chaplain at Ole Miss immediately before the James Meredith affair, pays special attention to the personality of President Rufus Harris under whose watch Mercer University in Macon, Georgia desegregated. Campbell makes clear that Harris, who had previously served as president of Tulane and was unsuccessful in prodding his trustees there to desegregate, was bound and determined to complete the initial phases of desegregation at his alma mater, Mercer University, a school intricately bound with the Southern Baptist Convention.[27]

Though not a southern university president, Hoosier Herman Wells, the legendary president of Indiana University, offers insight into some of the headaches he faced with pushing along the process of desegregation at a northern university ensconced in a community with a southern mentality. As he said in *Being Lucky*, "One of the most time consuming and important responsibilities relating to students …involved the effort to shake off our previous university practices that discriminated against black students."[28] Wells discusses the process of desegregating a school that had been *de facto* desegregated since the late nineteenth century. This process included his efforts to allow blacks to room on campus, swim in the university pool, and play basketball for the University. Additionally, Wells discusses how he fought to end restaurant discrimination in Bloomington and how he coaxed the white fraternities, in particular his own fraternity, Sigma Nu, to amend their restrictive membership clauses.

Finally, in the pamphlet *"Winning Through to Fame and Glory:" African Americans and MSU,* historian Donald Flatt, describes the desegregation of a regional Upper South university, Morehead State in Kentucky. There, it was the president who

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[27] Will D. Campbell, *The Stem of Jesse (*Macon: Mercer University Press, 1995).
[28] Herman Wells, *Being Lucky* (Bloomington: Indian University Press, 1999), 214-221.

prodded his trustees to vote for the admission of black students in 1956, two years after the Governor announced Kentucky would comply with *Brown* decision. Later, that same president, the charismatic preacher-legislator Dr. Adron Doran, called his student body together into a school assembly in 1957, shortly after the summer school desegregated, and said, "If you have any objections to the presence of African-American students who may be sitting beside you, you can find an institution of higher learning more to your liking farther South." Doran worked to integrate blacks into the Morehead social and athletic scene and was one of the few southern university presidents to publicly proclaim, "Integration is right, morally and legally, and there will be no John Kaspers at Morehead."[29] Ironically, Doran's good friend, Chester Coleman Travelstead, Dean of the College of Education at University of South Carolina and a fellow UK graduate, was discharged by the Board of Trustees in 1955 after he urged the Palmetto state's political elites to accept, and not resist, the *Brown* decision.[30]

Research Questions

Specifically, this dissertation addresses the following questions about the UK presidents and their role in desegregation. First, who were these college presidents and what opinions and assumptions about race, racial change, and the place of blacks in society did they seem to hold? Second, what did desegregation mean to Presidents Donovan, Dickey, Oswald, Kirwan, and Singletary? Did they view desegregation as a moral imperative or were they merely complying with the law? How did others,

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[29] Donald Flatt, *"Winning Through to Fame and Glory"; African Americans at MSU*. (Morehead, Ky: Office of Multicultural Affairs, 1999), 5-7. John Kasper was a white agitator known for a time for his opposition to campus desegregation.
[30] See Harry Lesesne, *History of the University of South Carolina* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press), 2001.

particularly black Kentuckians, view their record on race? Who influenced the actions of the UK presidents with regard to desegregation? To what extent did the political climate of the Commonwealth affect the way the presidents handled the desegregation of UK? Finally, and most important, what "hats" did these presidents wear during the desegregation process? In other words, what were the presidents doing in terms of policy and public relations to thwart, promote, or hide from public view the desegregation of the University of Kentucky. As was the case at most major southern non-black universities which peacefully desegregated, my hunch is that the early desegregation of the UK graduate school worked to its benefit, pointing the University in the socially accepted path of research, yet because there was so little publicity given to desegregation in the early years, most of the public believes there is not much of a story to tell, when indeed there was—as these pages will show.

My thinking on the college presidents has been influenced by many. First, there is historian E. Culpepper Clark who, in his study of desegregation at the University of Alabama, saved his harshest words for the university people, whom he felt could have done better.[31] Likewise, while on a research trip to Ole Miss in 1999, I discovered a letter from North Carolina activist Marian Wright, who chastised UK President Donovan's friend and fellow Kentuckian Chancellor J. D. Williams for his handling of the Meredith Affair. Wright pulled no punches when he condemned Williams for what he felt was

[31] E Culpepper Clark, *The Schoolhouse Door,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994) Clark writes, "My least charitable depictions….are reserved instead for people like myself—university people, faculty and administrators, who ought to have known better and should have done better. xxi.

failed leadership during the Meredith affair, "Surely the Chancellor of the University is not an average citizen. Surely he knew better. And surely one of the obligations of the educated is to lead."[32]

In this dissertation, different images of the UK presidents have developed. As a result of my research, I see Herman Lee Donovan and Frank Dickey looking backward in terms of race, whereas their successors, beginning with John Wieland Oswald, begin to look forward on the issue. By the time of John Oswald's presidency, black students had begun to mobilize and Oswald reached out to the newly-formed Black Student Union. When Otis Singletary took office in 1969, there was still much unfinished business at UK, but the new president responded to the demands of black students and faculty and created the Office of Minority Affairs while, at the same time, reaching out to members of the black community. I note in the epilogue that Singletary's successor, David Roselle, took on former Governor Albert "Happy" Chandler's callous racial remarks in a very public way, by publicly distancing himself from the former governor's comments and denouncing racism for the first time in the Minutes of the Board of Trustees.[33]

Chapter Breakdowns

To tell the story of how UK's presidents were involved in the process of desegregation, I have employed a chronological approach to this dissertation and divide this study into eight chapters. Because each president from Hermann Lee Donovan forward handled the process of desegregation differently, each chapter is devoted to coverage of a specific administration's response to it. Though I am keenly aware of the

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[32] M. A. Wright to J.D. Williams. March 20, 1963. Papers of J. D. Williams, Archives and Special Collections, University of Mississippi.

[33] For Roselle's denunciation of racism on the UK campus, see the Board of Trustees Minutes from March 4, 1989. Page 7. Roselle stated, "I abhor racial bigotry and as UK President remain committed to implementation of programs that … recruit and graduate black students…"

criticism that it is dangerous to write a university history by "boxing in" developments by presidential administration, my approach seems the most practical given the reality that historical conditions and legal cases forced each president to look at desegregation differently. For example, Herman Lee Donovan began the desegregation of UK before the *Brown* decision, and thus, he was more cautious and conservative in his approach to the integration of blacks on campus. By 1969, when Dr. Otis Singletary took over as head of UK, *de jure* desegregation had been a reality for fifteen years, but the federal government was placing pressure on institutions to comply with new diversity guidelines that made it necessary for UK to recruit actively black students or lose federal funding.

In Chapter Two, "Placing It All in Context: Setting the Scene for Desegregation at UK," I offer a backdrop for the desegregation of the University of Kentucky, including a brief history of higher education in Lexington with special attention to the factors of race and race relations. I then offer a sketch of the earlier UK presidents and their priorities beginning with James Kennedy Patterson, Henry Stites Barker, and the emergence of a modern university under Dr. Frank LeRonde McVey. Finally, I discuss racial issues in Lexington and in Kentucky overall, and the institutionalization of separate schools for blacks and whites following the *Berea* decision in 1904.

In Chapter Three, "Herman Lee Donovan and the Initial Stage of Desegregation at UK," I show how in 1941 newly appointed president Herman Lee Donovan first worked with his trustees to try and thwart black students in their quest to attend UK. Later, after the court ruling that ordered desegregation of the graduate school, Donovan was able to convince the trustees to allow token desegregation. He and his staff then attempted to control the way desegregation was reported in the media. By choosing to

ignore African-Americans and by never speaking publicly about their presence at UK until after he retired, Donovan opened the door for some unpleasant incidents on campus. I refute the assertion made by Frank Dickey in an oral interview with Sharon Childs that Donovan was a proponent of racial change. Donovan's self-congratulatory chapter on UK's desegregation in his memoir *Keeping the University Free and Growing* is riddled with errors of fact and arrives at some interesting conclusions, but above all Donovan chooses to use this chapter to minimize the role of his presidency in the early desegregation battles at UK.

Chapter Four is titled "Dr. Frank Graves Dickey, Color Blind Dormitories, the Idea of a Desegregated SEC, and Radical UK Faculty Members." Frank Dickey, former dean of the College of Education, assumed office in 1956. By this time, blacks were still a small minority at UK, although most on-campus racial restrictions had been removed, and they were free to choose UK for either undergraduate or graduate instruction. Though black students were still ignored by most white students, discriminated against in downtown Lexington stores, restaurants, and theaters, and forced to find their own social outlets, Dickey did desegregate the UK dormitories and begin a movement to desegregate UK athletics. Given the fact that UK had never been a hotbed of liberalism, Dickey was probably as shocked as he was embarrassed by the unfavorable publicity surrounding faculty members Abby Marlatt, William Reichert and other UK C.O.R.E. members who employed what were considered radical methods to end segregation in downtown Lexington.[34]

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[34] Details of the case against Abby Marlatt with supporting documents are available online from the UK faculty governance site. See web.as.uky /biology/faculty/djones/pdf/5/5.xiii/Marlatt_case.pdf.

Chapter Five is titled "John Oswald, the Desegregation of UK Athletics, Rap Sessions with Black Students, and a Proposed Merger with Kentucky State University." In this chapter, I discuss President John Oswald, a California-trained scientist, and his part in desegregation. I discuss how he attempted to create a rapport with black students and how he desegregated the football program. Respected by the few blacks on the UK campus and encouraged by a governor who made civil rights part of his platform, Oswald arrived at an institution that had already desegregated its colleges and dormitories. Spared the headaches that his contemporary, President J.D. Williams, a UK graduate and former faculty member, experienced at Ole Miss, Oswald finished what Frank Dickey started and helped Coach Charlie Bradshaw to desegregate UK's football team while working with Governor Ned Breathitt to sign black recruit Nate Northington. Unfortunately, the tragic death of another black UK football player, Greg Page, led to the withdrawal of Northington, but the color barrier had been broken on the SEC gridiron and UK had taken the lead. Though he pushed Coach Adolph Rupp on the desegregation issue, Oswald was not able to make any changes in desegregating the basketball program. Not to be overlooked is the fact that the Oswald years also witnessed the hiring of the first black faculty members and his plan, never acted on, of merging historically black KSU with historically non-black UK.[35]

Chapter Six is called "Maintaining a "Holding Pattern" at the University of Kentucky: The One Year Interim Presidency of Albert Dennis Kirwan." This brief chapter examines the one year interim presidency of UK insider Albert Dennis Kirwan.

[35] For details on John Oswald, see his oral interviews recorded with Terry Birdwhistell. John Oswald Interview. Charles T. Wethington/ Faculty/Oral History Project, 1988.

Described as a "caretaker president," Kirwan agreed to demands by the BSU for financial support.[36] This chapter also looks at A. D. Kirwan's views on race.

Chapter Seven is titled "Dr. Otis Singletary, the Office of Minority Affairs, and the Experiences of Black Professors and Students." By the time Otis Singletary arrived in 1969, the BSU was fast becoming an institutionalized part of the UK culture for the few blacks on campus. Complying with civil rights directives became a priority for the President, although black enrollment and the number of black faculty remained low. The election of arch-conservative Governor Louie B. Nunn, combined with several ugly racial incidents on campus, did not seem to offer blacks the promise of real racial change on campus. In spite of the creation of the Office of Minority Affairs in 1971, if the 1973 *Kentuckian* is any indication, some black students were extremely critical of Otis Singletary's efforts at making UK a more inclusive institution. Over time, black students repeated their call for a more desegregated campus[37]

Chapter Eight is titled "Epilogue and Conclusion—Specters of the Past amidst Social Change." The process of racial change begun at UK in 1949 has been ongoing. In spite of a president committed to racial change, setbacks occurred during the Roselle administration when trustee and former governor A. B. "Happy" Chandler made a racial slur at a board meeting in 1988. Though President Roselle and former student and current actress Ashley Judd condemned Chandler's remarks, the former governor remained on board as a trustee, supported by Governor Wallace Wilkinson, refusing calls

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[36] See Dr. Kirwan to BSU president. Papers of the A.D. Kirwan. Archives and Special Collections, University of Kentucky.
[37] See the *Kentuckian*, 1973.

to resign.[38] What was clear, however, is that the desegregation of UK was a process in which the presidents, though their action and inaction, influenced the racial climate of UK. Though the initial missteps resulted in low black enrollment until the present day, President Lee Todd attempted to atone for past mistakes by making black enrollment and the recruitment and retention of black faculty a priority.

[38] For Chandler's side of the story see Albert Chandler, *Heroes, Plain Folks and Skunks: The Life and Times of Happy Chandler* (Chicago, Bonus Books, 1989).

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Chapter Two

Placing it all in Context: Setting the Scene for Desegregation at the University of Kentucky

Understanding the actions of the University of Kentucky (UK) presidents and their role in facilitating racial change on campus from 1941 onward becomes easier after a brief sketch of the important events, leaders, and milestones in both UK's history, that of its home, Lexington, and that of the commonwealth before the desegregation era in higher education. Such a discussion provides the necessary context for a more complete understanding of the desegregation process at the UK that began in the summer of 1949 when some thirty black graduate students arrived on campus following the now-famous federal court order of Judge H. Church Ford.

The University of Kentucky and the city of Lexington are inseparable. Lexington has, like so many American cities, long had a tradition of supporting and fostering education since it was settled in 1779. Before UK's founding in 1865, Lexington gave birth to an institution of higher education that once held a national reputation: Transylvania College. Transylvania's history was different from that of UK, and it was Transylvania, founded in 1780, not UK, its successor, that was connected to the lost cause of the Confederacy, having been a partial training ground for Jefferson Davis, for whom a campus dormitory was later named, and other Confederate leaders including George W. Johnson, who served as Confederate governor of Kentucky in 1861-1862.[39]

It was due in no small part to Transylvania's excellent academic reputation that men and women who were given to hyperbole called Lexington—the Athens of the West.

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[39] See John D. Wright's *Lexington: Heart of the Bluegrass* (Lexington: Lexington-Fayette Historic Commission, 1983), 31-33. For information on Kentucky's governors, see Lowell Harrison's *Kentucky's Governors* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2004), 82-84.

But after the departure of the popular and innovative Unitarian president Horace Holley, who served from 1817-1827, that college's lights were partially dimmed, and the closing of its medical school in 1863, which had once drawn such distinguished physicians as Daniel Drake and Benjamin Dudley, seemed to portend that Transylvania would remain the college, while UK, its successor, which started as an agricultural and mechanical college, was destined to become the state's flagship university.[40]

Before the Civil War, as Transylvania blossomed, so too did the city of Lexington. But there were noticeable blemishes on the city's historical record. In the offices of slave traders William Pullum and Lewis C. Robards, human chattel was the commodity in the 1840's and 1850's, and the slave auctions on Cheapside held next to the Fayette County Courthouse proved that the peculiar institution was very much alive and well in this border state. In an ironic twist, the slave pens could be viewed from the windows of the home of Mary Todd Lincoln, whose husband, with a stroke of his pen, ended in 1863 involuntary servitude in the Confederacy, but not in border states like Kentucky, which had remained loyal to the Union. On Cheapside, in the city's downtown, men, women, and children of color were sold to the highest bidder and sent to markets further South that included the lower Mississippi Valley. Although Kentucky forbade the importation of slaves after 1833, no legislation stopped their export.[41]

Though Lexington was home to the great politician, senator, and Speaker of the House, Henry Clay, a Virginia transplant who later advocated the return of blacks to Africa, the great orator was perhaps as interested in holding on to his own slaves as he was in keeping the Union cemented during a period when sectionalism led to lack of trust

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[40] For more on Transylvania's history, see John D. Wright's *Transylvania: Tutor to the West.* (Lexington: University Press, 1975).
[41] John D. Wright, *Lexington: Heart of the Bluegrass,* 71-80.

in the motives of the North. Upon Clay's death in 1852, an impressive funeral was held for him in Lexington, and an equally imposing monument erected over his sepulcher in Lexington Cemetery. On the other hand, Lexington blacks were mostly interred in the city's African burial ground, although a few loyal slaves joined their masters after death in Lexington Cemetery. In life as in death, separation of the races in Lexington seemed, at times, absolute.[42]

Slavery and the role of blacks in society clearly caused as much division in Lexington as it did in other parts of the United States. Not all the Clays were slaveholders, and Cassius Clay, a distant cousin of Henry Clay, came under the spell of William Lloyd Garrison while at Yale, making a name for himself with his opposition to slavery and his abolitionist press. In 1866, an attempt was made at biracial education at Berea College, some thirty-five miles south of Lexington. The very idea of blacks learning with whites was bound to cause controversy, but the continued existence of Berea proved that the Commonwealth of Kentucky was indeed peculiar when it came to the education of blacks, for here they studied together with whites, not necessarily in perfect harmony, until a disgruntled politician from Breathitt County, Carl Day, was able to muster enough votes in the Kentucky legislature to halt biracial education even in private Kentucky schools after 1904.[43] But Berea was the exception and not the rule in this border state, and the school founded by John Fee did not represent the values of most white Kentuckians. Though Kentucky remained neutral during the Civil War, as John David Smith put it, "the right to own slaves, the superiority of the Caucasian over the

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[42] John Wright, *Lexington: Heart of the Bluegrass,* 75-77.
[43] For more on Berea College, see Elizabeth Peck, *Berea's First Century 1855-1955,* (Kentucky: University of Kentucky Press, 1955).

Negro, a belief in state sovereignty—most white Kentuckians adhered to these principles no less than citizens in neighboring states that joined the Confederacy."[44]

After the Civil War, Lexington rebounded with its bourbon distilleries, its tobacco market, and its thoroughbred industry, but higher education was in crisis. This was, of course, typical in many southern states where universities "were victims of war, poverty, or politics."[45] Transylvania College was but a fraction of what it used to be. In its heyday, the college had once attracted the attention of President Thomas Jefferson, but after the war it had been reduced to little more than a high school until John Bowman from Harrodsburg proposed a merger of the school he had chartered, Kentucky University, with Transylvania and the newly founded Agricultural and Mechanical College. UK was thus the heir of Kentucky University created in 1865, the vision of one John Bowman, funded under the provisions of the famed Justin Morrill Land Grant, and for a few years at least, under sectarian influence. UK was just one of many American colleges, including Clemson and Virginia Tech, to hold the title of a land grant institution.

As with any founder, Bowman wanted greatness for his new school. He is reported to have said, "Indeed, we want everything which will make this institution equal to any on the continent."[46] But Bowman's vision of greatness was undoubtedly a limited one, and he certainly saw no reason to include blacks in his venture. Blacks may have left the Civil War with their freedom, but few states in the South made provisions for their higher education, thus Lexington was no different from most southern cities in this

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[44] Lowell Harrison, editor, *Kentucky's Governors,* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky), 89.
[45] Frederick Rudolph, *The American College and University: A History* (Georgia: University of Athens Press, reprint 1990), 280.
[46] Carl Cone, *The University of Kentucky: A Pictorial History* (Lexington, University of Kentucky, 1989), 2.

regard. In Kentucky, where whites after the Civil War refused to ratify the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth amendments, opportunities for the freedmen were not numerous.

When blacks did gain admission to UK almost eighty years later, it could be argued the school's history combined with its location in a border state played a role in the relatively peaceful first phase of integration in 1949. As Thomas Clark noted in his discussion of the Civil War in the commonwealth, "Kentucky was not the victim of continuous and destructive military campaigns on her soil."[47] There were minor skirmishes in Kentucky, but the Bluegrass State had no Shiloh, no Bull Run, and no Manassas or Antietam. Likewise, UK's birth after the Civil War made it different from the antebellum state universities of South Carolina, Virginia, and Georgia. As a land-grant institution, UK was not associated with the Lost Cause as were many of the southern state universities. At Ole Miss, for example, the university all but shut down during the Civil War as students and faculty donned their grey uniforms and entered the rebellion. Later, its Greek revival Lyceum, today the symbol of the university, was used as a hospital to care for those wounded in battle and ultimately became the scene of violence when black student James Meredith won admission to the school in 1962.[48] By and large, the University of Kentucky lacked this tie to the Civil War, the planter elite, and secession, and the school was located in a state with a shrinking black population after 1865. Totaling 16% of the total population in 1870, the number of Kentucky blacks fell to about 7% in 1940. Added to this, Kentucky never formally left the Union and was thus spared the most radical reconstruction and the hard feelings it created in parts of the

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[47] Thomas Clark, *A History of Kentucky (*Lexington: Jesse Stuart Foundation, 1976), 335.

[48] See Nadine Cohodas, *The Band Played Dixie: Race and the Liberal Consciousness at Ole* Miss (New York: The Free Press, 1997), 8-11.

Deep South. For instance, at the University of South Carolina, radical reconstruction led to the admission of black students immediately after the Civil War. Their presence undoubtedly disturbed some in a defeated white population which linked emancipation with the Unionist cause. Finally, the University of Kentucky architecture was not designed in the classical style of the Old South, as was, say, Jefferson's University of Virginia, and when the UK campus shifted from the Woodlands Estate to South Limestone Street, new buildings had to be constructed, thus most of the oldest buildings date to the 1880s. None of these edifices had links to the Civil War. Ultimately, what did make UK southern was its location south of the Ohio River in a state whose adherence to separation of the races was absolute in the schools, both public and private, by 1904 and the fact that "Dixie" was played before athletic competitions. Perhaps because the law was so clear on this issue, from 1865 to 1941, no president of the University of Kentucky publicly entertained the idea that qualified blacks might join their white counterparts in the lecture halls of the university.

From the time of its founding, Lexington had been home to both whites and blacks, and though most blacks here were enslaved before the Civil War, blacks in antebellum Lexington were accorded certain rights not found in the Deep South. For example, in Kentucky, it had never been illegal to teach slaves to read and write. Mention is made in 1798 of a Sunday School "for the use of people of Color." and a petition was signed on March 18, 1816, for white ladies to instruct blacks in one of the rooms at Transylvania. Later, in 1830, about thirty black students in Lexington received training from a white man in Tennessee, but after the Civil War, the color line in public

education became clearly drawn. In 1866, for instance, Kentucky's legislature amended the state constitution so that public schools would be separated according to race.[49]

By the early twentieth century, Lexington was becoming home to a proud black middle class, and in 1907, as John Wright tells us, "there were eight black lawyers, three dentists, and four lawyers."[50] While blacks had public schools, they also erected an excellent private school, the Chandler Training School. Later came the high schools. In 1923, the famed Dunbar High School was built and run for many years under Professor W. H. Fouse. Finally, in 1926, the county erected Douglas High School for blacks on Price Road.

Though there were attempts by Kentucky whites to dissuade blacks from voting, black suffrage was not unusual in Kentucky after the Civil War where blacks first voted in 1870, but living conditions for the freedmen remained less than optimal due to a marked statewide increase in racial violence and because of forced segregation in residential neighborhoods. Although Kentucky slaves had secured their freedom with the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment, data painstakingly collected by historian George Wright details the rise of the brutal lynching of blacks in Kentucky after 1865. Not surprisingly, as a result of this violence, numerous black settlements sprang up in or near Lexington as freedmen felt it was perhaps safer to be close to urban areas with a perceived sense of adherence to the rule of law rather than remain in rural locales. Not all violence directed at blacks involved lynchings, however. In Corbin, some eighty miles south of Lexington, two hundred black workers were expelled from that community in 1919 and put on a train to Knoxville, Tennessee, by angry whites. A year

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[49] Frank McVey, *The Gates Open Slowly* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1949), 143.
[50] John D. Wright, *Lexington: Heart of the Bluegrass*, 154.

later, there was racial unrest in Lexington. In 1920, the Republican governor, Edwin Morrow, stood up to mob rule and put down the attempted lynching of a black man, Will Lockett, an accused child murderer, in front of the Fayette County Court House on Main Street. Only in 1936, though, with many gawkers in attendance, did the last public execution in the Commonwealth take place in Owensboro, Kentucky. It was of a black man, Rainey Bethea, accused of the rape and murder of an elderly white woman.[51]

In Lexington, there was, in the black community, a sense that justice came easier for whites than for blacks. Kolan Morlock notes that in 1915, a black man was sentenced to two years in prison for stealing a white woman's purse, but a few months later, when two white UK students robbed a black deliveryman at gunpoint on campus, they were only made to pay a fine of "$100 plus court costs."[52] In 1925, a prominent black woman, Mrs. Gertie Boulder, who had suffered a heart attack, was found unconscious on a city street and hauled to the city jail by Lexington police on the assumption that she was drunk. The police made no attempt to find out how seriously ill the woman was and they failed to summon a physician. As a result, Gertie Boulder died in jail.[53] Though public outrage over her death resulted in some reforms, the incident pointed out that being black was a liability in many facets of public life even in Lexington—a town which practiced, for the most part, what historian George Wright called a "polite racism."

Even those prominent whites who appeared sympathetic to black issues sent mixed messages about the equality of the races. Under the leadership of editor Desha Breckenridge, a member of one of Kentucky's most socially prominent families, the

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[51] See George Wright, *Racial Violence in Kentucky, 1865-1940,* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1990), For the Corbin incident, see George Wright, *History of Blacks in Kentucky,* 14.
[52] Kolan Morelock, *Taking the Tow: Collegiate and Community Culture in the Bluegrass, 1880-1917,* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2006), 161.
[53] John D. Wright, *Lexington: Heart of the Bluegrass*, 183.

Lexington *Herald* began to speak up for blacks and urged that they be treated fairly. But, though Breckenridge called himself a friend of the Negro race, he paradoxically called for an end to black voting, and he believed strongly in continued segregation of the races.[54] What extent did his views have on those at UK? Would it ever be conceivable that the two races might share a classroom together other than at Berea?

It has long been argued that Kentucky waited until after the Civil War to secede. The meaning, of course, is that Kentuckians sided with the southern way of life and the Lost Cause after the Civil War. In 1875, when the Supreme Court declared the Civil Rights Act of 1875 unconstitutional, Kentucky began in earnest curtailing the liberties of blacks. Kolan Morelock documents this new southern consciousness in Lexington in his text *Taking the Town* and notes not only the founding of three chapters of the Daughters of the Confederacy, but a rise in the oratory glorifying the Old South.

To the commonwealth's credit, in the years after the Civil War, no Kentucky politicians really distinguished themselves as race baiters. As historian Thomas Clark remarked about his arrival in Kentucky in 1928, "No clone of James K. Vardaman, Theodore Bilbo, or Lee M. Russell stirred a cauldron's brew of racial hatred in Kentucky," and later no governor would stand at the schoolhouse door like a Ross Barnett or a George Wallace when it came time to desegregate.[55] Race relations and the conflicts associated with them, were a salient part of Kentucky life, but most politicians did not try to fan the flames of racial hatred as they did in other parts of the South after the Civil War. The absence of this race baiting undoubtedly must have softened the

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[54] George Wright, *History of Blacks in Kentucky,* 52.
[55] Thomas D. Clark, *My Century in History* (Lexington: University Press, 2005), 245.

racial attitudes at the university. But even in 1928, the thought that blacks might sit next to whites in a UK lecture hall must have been inconceivable to most white Kentuckians.

Much of the history of the nascent University of Kentucky was dominated by the larger than life figure of Scotch-born James Kennedy Patterson, a man who threw his seemingly boundless energy into the presidency of what was then known as State College during the years 1869-1910. His bronze statue with its penetrating eyes and solemn facial expression in front of UK's Patterson Tower suggests a well-meaning despot used to having others follow, not question, his instructions. Over time, Patterson came to view the university as his own fiefdom and envisioned a school that was, despite its agricultural and mechanical origins, anchored by a classical curriculum in which morality and piety were more important than the preparation for a career. With a miniscule teaching staff and a small student population, Patterson oversaw much of the day-to-day affairs of UK on his own, and he vigilantly fought for sufficient funding from a parsimonious legislature in Frankfort.

With a skeletal staff, Patterson had unlimited duties to perform, and he probably was only too happy to do them by himself. As future President Donovan noted, "with his own hands, he prepared the annual catalog…he interviewed every student entering the university…with a clerk's assistance he recorded in his office all student grades….He handled every discipline problem…he presided over the daily chapel meeting, over convocations, and over all faculty meetings held on campus."[56] Patterson was thus the very incarnation of the old-time college president, but Eric Moyen argued that Patterson,

[56] Herman Lee Donovan, *Keeping the University Free and Growing*, 5.

with his iron fist, was at least partly responsible for the later problems UK faced. Without Patterson's advocacy, however, UK might never have survived its early years.[57]

In 1886, with three of the buildings on the UK Limestone Street campus less than five years old, prospective black Kentucky college students from Lexington had reason to celebrate a small victory. In that year, Kentucky Normal School for Colored Persons, later the Kentucky State College for Negroes, was founded in nearby Frankfort under the provisions of the second Morrill Land Grant. The new institution was about the same distance (thirty-five miles) as Lexington was from Berea, but though it offered the promise of higher education to blacks, Kentucky State remained chronically underfunded with limited course offerings. In 1929, for example, it received $211,058.84 from the Kentucky legislature while UK was awarded $1,535,877.88.[58]

Though blacks lived in the neighborhoods surrounding UK, there is scant evidence that suggests they or their concerns figured into university policy. Racist beliefs so gripped most white Americans during this time that these theories were reinforced by the separate accommodations rule of the Supreme Court of 1896, the infamous *Plessy* decision which institutionalized separate but equal. While Patterson reluctantly approved the admission of women in the 1880s, it goes without saying that his nineteenth century attitudes combined with the commonwealth's racial mores precluded any serious discussion of blacks at UK in anything but the role of a custodian, laborer, or housekeeper. Added to this equation was a conservative board of white trustees, and it became clear that Lexington blacks had little chance of enrolling at UK, the university closest to their home.

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[57] Erin Moyen, *Frank McVey and the University of Kentucky*, 60.
[58] George Wright, *History of Blacks in Kentucky,* 127.

According to the well-known thesis of historian Lawrence Veysey, the basic structure of the research university as we know it today had been molded by 1910, and all that was needed was a contractor to oversee the operations. Veysey overlooks the important detail of access and pays little attention to the fact that blacks were gaining admission to the universities of the North. Around the country, many northern universities were admitting blacks—not actively recruiting them, but admitting them when they possessed the necessary credentials. Harvard had done so since the 19th century, albeit in small numbers, along with states like Illinois that had no dual system of higher education. Of course, there were well known northern college presidents who would not sanction the thought of blacks in their schools, however. Notable was the president of Bryn Mawr, M. Carey Thomas, who refused to meet with black dignitaries on her campus and kept out black students during her tenure.[59] Likewise, another northern holdout was Antioch College, which refused to admit blacks well into the 1920s.[60] In the South, however, Jim Crow held sway, and most southern states had installed a separate institution of higher education for black students, never the equal of the white flagship, by the 1890s. Due to the law, admitting blacks to these schools was thus out of most southern university presidents' hands.

When President Patterson retired in 1910, the reigns were taken over by Henry Stites Barker, a UK trustee and judge on the Kentucky Circuit Court.[61] Though there had been a national shift in the purpose of the university, it seemed nobody told the UK's Board of Trustees who chose Barker to "popularize the college with the public and state-

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[59] Helen L. Horowitz. *M Carey Thomas: The Power and the Passion* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1999).

[60] John Thelin, *A History of American Higher Education*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 2002), 233.

[61] For a biographical sketch of Barker, see Ezra Gillis, *Henry Sites Barker* (Lexington: University Press, 1956), 1-24.

at-large, and particularly the legislature."[62] Though this was a period when the PhD was in its ascendency, and universities were focusing less on piety and a classical curriculum and more on research and an elective system, Barker, with his lack of a college degree, was perhaps unaware of the changes taking place in the state universities. To his credit, however, Barker did begin to emphasize agricultural research as a way of helping the state's farmers, thus holding UK to its agricultural roots.[63]

The shift in the nature and purpose of the university called for a new type of president—one with vision—but UK would need to wait for such a leader. Barker's failure to understand the shift in thinking of the purpose of the university, coupled with former president Patterson's ongoing presence as a voting trustee on campus, retarded serious growth, although, as former registrar Ezra Gillis noted, Barker's presidency was similar to "opening the window of a stuffy room to a fresh breeze."[64] That fresh breeze may have allowed more freedom for professors to do as they please and students to enjoy the extracurricular activities of UK, but it clearly excluded discussion of the idea of opening the university to blacks. The Day Law of 1904 simply precluded that.

More pressing for Barker was the fact that his predecessor, James Kennedy Patterson, who still occupied the president's house, began almost immediately to attack the new president with unsubstantiated charges that included the president oversaw a decline in the morality of students. Morality among students was clearly lacking under Patterson as well, who one day found a horse in the chapel and proceeded to hold

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[62] Helen Deiss Irvin, *Hail Kentucky,* (Lexington, University Press, 1965), 44.
[63] See Laurence R. Veysey's *The Emergence of the American College and University.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965.
[64] Eric Moyen, *Frank McVey and the University of Kentucky,* 61.

services as if nothing unusual had taken place.[65] But clearly there was no moving forward as long as Patterson was hurling public accusations at Barker. An independent investigation committee eventually exonerated Barker, but it called for his resignation and demanded immediate reform. Barker willingly agreed to leave UK, Patterson was told to hold his tongue or be removed as a trustee, and soon afterwards a Yale-educated economist selected by the trustees during a trip to Chicago was ready to usher in a new period of growth at the university. A new breed of president had finally arrived in the Bluegrass.

Frank LeRonde McVey, an Ohio native who served as president of the University of North Dakota for eight years and had been informed of the UK vacancy by former Kentuckian Abraham Flexner of the General Education Board, arrived in Lexington in 1918 and served until 1940, but the campus to which he arrived was beset by a host of problems. These included a lack of "financial stability, clear academic organization, an adequate physical plant, plans for growth, and sufficient faculty resources." Helen Deiss Irvin adds that "half of the men had left campus for the armed forces, farm work, or defense work."[66] Until the arrival of McVey, UK had shown few signs of growth that were characteristic of the nation's better state universities. Things were about to change.[67]

Much can and has been said of UK's fourth president, Frank McVey, the man who took a state college from its self-imposed infancy and transformed it into a state university by strengthening graduate education, by implementing the PhD, recruiting exceptional faculty members like famed historian Thomas Clark, and by defending

[65] Helen Deiss Irvin, *Hail, Kentucky!,* 18.
[66] Helen Deiss Irvin, *Hail Kentucky!*, 50.
[67] Eric Moyen, Frank *McVey and the University of Kentucky,* 60.

academic freedom at the university. McVey was not only a "captain of erudition", to use Thorsten Veblin's phrase, but he was also one of the new breed of managerial presidents as Clyde Barrow has observed.[68] Perhaps because of his cautious, managerial side, McVey chose not to confront publicly the controversial issue of racial inequities in the commonwealth. He had learned from his experiences at the University of North Dakota, where he was forced to dismiss a popular professor of law, Joseph Lewinson, whose progressive politics had alienated conservative governor Louis B. Hannah.[69] Given his behavior in North Dakota, it is not difficult to predict how McVey might have behaved if a professor like John Spencer Bassett of Trinity College in North Carolina had pressed for the inclusion of blacks at UK.[70]

For McVey, the question did not come up publicly, and success and recognition came quickly to him after he arrived in Lexington. Over time, McVey became president of the American Association of Land Grant Universities, he served as president of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, and in 1922 during a wave of "anti-evolution" sentiment, in an act for which he has been fondly remembered, he successfully defended academic freedom at UK as the legislature pondered a bill that would have forbidden the teaching of evolution. In 1926, McVey was able to install a chapter of the honorary society, Phi Beta Kappa, on campus. Finally, with his connections to other university presidents including Frank Porter Graham at North Carolina and Presidents Hadley and Angell at Yale, McVey brought a respectability and a cosmopolitanism to UK about which Barker and Patterson could only have dreamed.

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[68] Clyde Barrow, *Universities and the Capitalist State* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990).
[69] Ibid., 201.
[70] Bassett is mentioned only briefly in Frederick Rudolph's, *The American College and University,* 414.

For most historians, then, McVey is the founder of a modern UK, but where did the Ohioan stand on the complex issue of race? As Eric Moyen has written, "McVey was not a reactionary, but he did not challenge the status quo." Like many white Americans, he appeared committed to equality, but he was a man of his time, and equality meant different things when it came to African-Americans. If McVey was uncomfortable with segregation, he left behind little public record of his challenging it. Undoubtedly, he first realized in 1920 the incendiary nature of racial issues in Lexington during the Will Lockett trial. When the trial began, McVey told the UK Faculty Senate to do everything it could to keep University of Kentucky students away from the mob.[71] Though Republican governor Morrow put down the lynching of Lockett, it was clear from the bloodshed that mobs of angry whites were clearly eager to keep black men in their place, even in urbane Lexington.[72] After the Lockett trial, McVey certainly must have wondered how such a mob would have reacted to the presence of black students on UK's campus.

While McVey was known for being a racial moderate, others in his own family circle were not so open-minded. McVey's first wife, Mabel, suffered from a race prejudice that made her feel comfortable only when her husband found for her a white maid at Maxwell Place, the home of the UK president. Though the president was undoubtedly sympathetic to improved opportunities for black Kentuckians, (His later diary entries show that he believed in equality for blacks) McVey, as a manager, carried out the exclusionary tactics preferred by the trustees who had chosen him, men including

[71] Kolan Morelock, *Taking the Town,* 282.
[72] Eric Moyen, *Frank McVey and the University of Kentucky,* 181.

Richard Stoll (a fellow Yale graduate, Republican, and Presbyterian and one of the men who travelled to Chicago to select McVey).[73]

As early as 1926, E. B. Toles, a black man from Paris, Kentucky, wanted to enroll in correspondence courses offered through UK. Although McVey eventually presented a pro forma request to his trustees for admission of blacks to these courses in 1927, he most certainly knew what their answer would be. The Board refused to approve the application, and there is no evidence that McVey attempted to change the Trustees' thinking on the issue. As Moyen concluded, McVey "refused to challenge the Jim Crow system—even if this meant approving a correspondence course." Later, towards the end of his presidency, McVey was asked by Governor Albert "Happy" Chandler to chair a committee examining education for blacks in Kentucky. McVey's behavior, urging blacks to wait and allow evolutionary change, disturbed some black leaders including W. H. Fouse, the principal of Dunbar High School. Perhaps, over time, McVey's second wife Francis Jewell, a Kentucky native and a progressive in her time, helped McVey to view racial matters in a different light.[74]

Another factor that may have reduced any serious discussion of UK opening its doors to blacks was the opening in 1931 of the Louisville Municipal College. This college was maintained by the University of Louisville for the education of its black citizens. Yet, Lexington as a university town with a significant black population, many of whom had been prepared at the well-known Dunbar High School, still had no collegiate offerings for its black citizens. It was only a matter of time before blacks

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[73] Moyen, 126-127.

[74] Eric Moyen, *Frank McVey and the University of Kentucky,* 182. For more on the life of Francis Jewell McVey, see Terry Birdwhistell "An Educated Difference: Women at the University of Kentucky through the Second World War." PhD dissertation, University of Kentucky, 1994.

would press for admission to UK, because for many the commute to Kentucky State College in Frankfort was too long, and many of these students probably wanted to remain at home with their families to save on additional expenses like food and lodging.

Sadly, Frank McVey did not work to equalize offerings for black students, nor did he publicly discuss what he certainly knew were the disparities in education for black Kentuckians. In 1938, after the *Gaines* decision, he wrote Governor Chandler to make sure the latter would make funds available for blacks who sought graduate and professional training to study out of state. While in a private 1948 diary entry he seemed to show no sympathy for a makeshift plan set up by UK to provide graduate training for blacks, a year later, in 1949, he curiously wrote, "Equality, though not identical opportunity, in the field of education now prevails in elementary, secondary and college education…" Though McVey acknowledged that black students seeking graduate education had to study out of state, he did not acknowledge the financial hardship this caused them or their families, and most black leaders in Kentucky would have disagreed with his assessment that equality prevailed in the school system.[75] Only when black students gained admission to Kentucky's flagship university could McVey rightly assert that there was equality at all levels of education in Kentucky.

The challenge of full inclusion for blacks at UK would fall to McVey's successors, Presidents Donovan, Dickey, Oswald, Kirwan and Singletary, but the damage to UK's image in the black community created wounds that took many years to heal, and when litigation occurred to open UK to black students in spite of the Day Law, UK administrators were, in the beginning, *only too willing* to fight to keep the university non-

[75] See Moyen, 312, and Frank McVey, *The Gates Open Slowly*, (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1949).

black until the federal courts decided the manner once and for all. Just five years before his death, McVey published his aforementioned last book, *The Gates Open Slowly*, his broad history of education in Kentucky. If McVey's title suggested that the concept of education was slow to be embraced and valued by the (white) citizens of the Commonwealth, it also had implications for Kentucky blacks who demanded educational equality. And those Kentucky blacks, as it turned out, would need to pry open the gate by themselves. By the time Herman Lee Donovan became UK president 1941, blacks had the momentum, and the financial resources of the NAACP, to attempt to desegregate their state university.

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Chapter Three

Herman Lee Donovan and the Initial Stage of Desegregation at UK

> We thought it best not to roll out the red carpet for our new arrivals—Herman Lee Donovan, *Keeping the University Free and Growing*[76]

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People's (NAACP) well-known assault on segregated higher education began in the 1930s during the administration of Democrat Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Just as Roosevelt promised the American people a "New Deal" in government, so, too, did the NAACP intend to offer blacks a new deal regarding educational opportunities. Until the NAACP got involved, most southern blacks who sought advanced degrees attended graduate schools in the North because the historically white southern state universities simply refused to admit them, and, although Meharry Medical College in Nashville and Howard University in Washington, D.C. were notable exceptions, historically black colleges and universities in the South, with their meager budgets, seldom offered graduate and professional programs for their students.

Targets of the NAACP included the seventeen American states which maintained dual systems of education for blacks and whites. Although the NAACP started with an attack on the University of North Carolina in 1931, the suit was dropped when the black applicant, Thomas Raymond Hocutt, could not persuade his home university president to send his transcripts to Chapel Hill.[77] Afterwards, the NAACP had more success with an

[76] Herman Lee Donovan, *Keeping the University Free and Growing* (Lexington, University Press of Kentucky, 1959), 99.

[77] For an interesting look at the desegregation issues at the University of North Carolina, and President Frank Porter Graham's handling of them, see Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Defying Dixie: The Radical Roots of Civil Rights, 1919-1950* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2007), 255-273.

applicant who won his case against the University of Maryland. Any white public university president in the South must, therefore, have suspected that after the University of Maryland Law School was forced to admit Donald Murray as a result of the ruling in *Murray vs. Maryland (1935),* his institution would be in line for a legal showdown as it became clear that more blacks would apply to the historically white, and better funded, state universities of the South. Donald Murray's 1935 legal victory at the University of Maryland exposed institutionalized racism at its weakest point: higher education, and by offering evidence that public southern higher education was unequal or in many cases inadequate for blacks, the NAACP was able to prove that separate educational systems violated the provisions of the Fourteenth Amendment.[78] Three years later, the *Gaines* decision mandated that southern states could no longer direct black residents to study at out-of-state schools if they desired a graduate education unavailable at their home state's all-black college. The *Gaines* decision had serious implications for the southern states: they could either desegregate their public non-black graduate schools, or they had to open state–supported professional schools for blacks that were the equal of their white counterparts.

One of the southern states targeted by the NAACP was the Commonwealth of Kentucky. In Kentucky, separate public schools for blacks and whites had been mandated by law since 1866, and even private schools had to follow this plan after the *Berea* case of 1904. The flagship non-black university, University of Kentucky, founded in 1865, offered degrees and programs in the humanities, engineering, law, and the sciences that were not offered at Kentucky State College for Negroes in Frankfort,

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[78] The *Murray vs. Maryland* case is discussed briefly in the George Callcott's *A History of the University of Maryland.* (Baltimore: Maryland Historical Society, 1966), 306-307.

founded in 1889 primarily on the model of industrial education advocated by Booker T. Washington. Given the lack of choice in the commonwealth, some black Kentuckians began to ask legitimate questions about educational equity in higher education.

When Charles Anderson, a black state legislator from Louisville who had co-authored a bill to fund black students studying out-of-state, asked about the possibility of black Kentuckians attending UK, Governor Albert "Happy" Chandler, who later served a second term in the 1950's, rebuffed this query in 1939 and argued, "If you insist on going to the University of Kentucky now, you are making a big mistake because there are barriers which we did not make…to prevent you from going to the University of Kentucky."[79] The barrier to which Chandler alluded was the aforementioned Day Law, and though it had originally targeted desegregated Berea College, located south of Lexington, it was designed to prevent any college, school, or university from mixing the races in the classroom. In 1939, Chandler, as chairman of the UK Board of Trustees was unwilling to budge on opening the University of Kentucky to black students and so were the members of the University of Kentucky's board of trustees.

Governor Chandler's warning to Anderson overlooked the obvious fact that there were few choices for blacks who wanted to pursue a higher education in Kentucky. Blacks could attend college at Kentucky State College for Negroes or Louisville Municipal College, two of the state institutions open to black Kentuckians, or one of the few private black-only colleges like Simmons College in Louisville, but none offered graduate training in subjects that included, but were not limited to, law, history, or engineering. Though an institution like historically black Kentucky State College for

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[79] Governor Albert "Happy Chandler" is quoted in the *Lexington Herald*, Volume 3, Number 11, March 12, 1939.

Negroes had hardworking students, loyal alumni, and committed faculty and administrators, it was not equal in funding, facilities, or prestige to UK. The only practical choice for many blacks who wanted a graduate degree was to study out of state, using funds offered by the state government for blacks under the provisions of the Anderson Mayer Act, but this tuition-only grant overlooked the financial hardship it placed on black students who then had to find lodging in an unfamiliar state.[80]

While Kentucky historian Thomas D. Clark recalled that several blacks, including one who had attended a barber school, attempted to enroll at the University of Kentucky before the 1940s, the first NAACP-launched attack on segregated education at UK occurred in 1941 with the application of young David Lamont Eubanks, a black honors graduate of Central High School in Louisville. A few years earlier, Alfred Carroll had planned to file suit against the university but he chose instead to study out of state. Eubanks, backed by the NAACP, applied to study engineering, a subject not taught at Kentucky State College for Negroes (KSU) in Frankfort, and he declined an offer to be paid funds from the Anderson-Mayer Act to study at an out-of-state school. After the registrar, who cited the Day Law in his refusal to admit Eubanks, denied registration, the young applicant and his NAACP lawyers brought suit in federal court against the University. This lawsuit ultimately fell into the hands of newly-appointed president and Kentucky native, Herman Lee Donovan, who had been in office less than four months.[81]

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[80] For the background on the desegregation of Kentucky's colleges and universities, the best starting point remains George Wright's *History of Blacks in Kentucky*, Volume 11 and John Hardin's *Fifty Years of Segregation: Black Higher Education in Kentucky, 1904-1956* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1997).

[81] Thomas D. Clark, *My Century in History* (Lexington, University Press of Kentucky, 2006). Clark devotes chapter fifteen to a discussion of race relations in Mississippi, his home state, and Kentucky, where he served as a professor from 1932-1968. See pages 243-253.

Desegregation lawsuits like that of Charles Lamont Eubanks intimately involved the white presidents of the southern state schools, and how the presidents reacted when the first black applicants came knocking was important, for as Samuel Wiggins noted in *The Desegregation Era in Higher Education*, "To a large extent the chief executive of the institution sets the tone of its internal climate."[82] Setting the tone for the internal climate of a university was not easy when desegregation was involved, however. These white state university presidents, regardless of their personal views on desegregation, had to maintain a delicate balance and remember that both the Governor and the trustees ultimately had to be on their side if desegregation were to go forward. During the desegregation era, then, southern public college and university presidents walked a tightrope of sorts, trying to placate their trustees while obeying the law, acting as negotiators by corresponding with worried (white) constituents, and when the time to desegregate came, they were ultimately expected to be architects of a policy that safeguarded institutional reputation while at the same time complying with the state and federal law. It was probably a great relief to most southern state university presidents that the courts, not the presidents themselves, decided when to integrate, but the "how" of integration was trickier than it appeared, and the "how" of integration was often decided by the president and his staff.[83] One misstep, however, could damage an institution's reputation for years as seen in the cases of the Universities of Alabama, Mississippi, and Georgia.

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[82] Samuel Wiggins, *The Desegregation Era in Higher Education* (Berkeley: McCutcheon Press, 1966), 50.
[83] For a general overview of the desegregation era in higher education up to 1965, see the previously cited text *Desegregation Era in Higher Education* by Samuel Wiggins. There are several brief case studies showing how southern white presidents approached segregation.

The *how* of desegregation was one of the earliest items on the agenda for UK's new president. Herman Lee Donovan, born on a farm in Maysville County, Kentucky, near the Ohio River, in 1889, studied education at UK, Western Kentucky State Teachers College, Columbia, and George Peabody College for Teachers in Nashville and had risen from the ranks of teacher and school principal to college instructor and, finally, university president—first at Eastern State Teachers College before taking on the presidency of UK in what may have been a politically brokered arrangement to offer paybacks for supporters of Governor Keen Johnson, who hailed from Richmond, where Donovan had served as a college president. Maysville, the southern river town on the Ohio that had once been an important stop on the Underground Railroad, looked North when it came to trade but was southern in its views of blacks. For example, two well documented brutal lynchings of black men occurred in Maysville when Donovan was a youth and probably shaped his view that race relations could become volatile at a moment's notice .[84]

In many regards, Donovan, who often looked for guidance by studying the biographies and autobiographies of famous university presidents including David Starr Jordan of Stanford and William Rainey Harper of the University of Chicago, was not an altogether equal replacement for well-respected predecessor Frank LeRonde McVey, who held a doctorate from Yale and who was considered a distinguished academician in his own right as well as a popular administrator. Perhaps it would have been far easier for the poised Frank McVey to have dealt with the desegregation issue because of his experience handling his trustees, and McVey's diplomacy had been shown during the

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[84] See George Wright's *Racial Violence in Kentucky, 1865-1940: Lynchings, Mob Rule, and "Legal Lynchings."* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), 93-95, 114-115.

evolution battles. McVey was also connected to various university presidents nationally, including Frank Porter Graham of North Carolina, at whose inauguration McVey spoke.

Donovan, in spite of the administrative experience he gained at Eastern Kentucky University, must have found that bigger headaches awaited him at a flagship university as influential as UK. In time he would make a name for himself by defending academic freedom, by overseeing a building campaign to deal with the influx of veterans as a result of the G.I. Bill, and by steering the university through the worst basketball point shaving scandal in UK history. As a Kentuckian who had played with the descendants of the family slaves as a youth, Hermann Lee Donovan, a member of the Kentucky-born denomination known as the Disciples of Christ, was, by the standards of the day, a racial moderate. Yet, as former Governor Ned Breathitt noted, Donovan was timid about race relations and time and time again worried of race riots if the South were pushed too soon into integration. Donovan wrote as late as 1959, "It is my considered judgment that the people of the Deep South must be given plenty of time, if integration is to be attained without great bitterness, riots, and possible bloodshed."[85] Whether he was knowledgeable of the NAACP's campaign to desegregate schools while he served as president of Eastern is unclear, but once he assumed the presidency of UK, desegregation was an issue that could not be avoided.

As a new president, Herman Lee Donovan deferred to the wishes of the Board of Trustees, whose membership consisted mainly of men unwilling to budge on the matter of segregation or the admission of blacks to UK. After mulling over the ways to deal with blacks who were attempting to enter UK, he wrote to a fellow trustee, "As I study the situation, I am convinced that the University of North Carolina has found the proper

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[85] Herman Lee Donovan, *Keeping the University Free and Growing*, (Lexington: University Press, 1959), 101.

solution to it. They have made arrangements to send some of their professors to the colored institution…when there are sufficient numbers of students to justify the offerings of such courses." He also suggested that any black student wanting to study in a graduate school staffed by UK professors "pay similar fees to those charged University (of Kentucky) students. If this were done, I am of the opinion that very few, if any, would apply for the course."[86] Donovan's behavior, that of a collaborator with his trustees to keep blacks out of UK, is not surprising. Being the new man on campus, Donovan was not going to challenge the status quo by embarking on a racial crusade. Too, trustees had the final say over changes in admissions' policy, and as Melissa Keane shows, even private university presidents who understood the rationale for desegregation continued to struggle with their conservative boards over the admission of black students well into the 1960s.[87] These conservative business leaders had little idea of the changes being wrought in American society as a result of the two World Wars and, in the South, they often saw it as their job to keep the university campus white as for as long as possible.

Just how worried Donovan was regarding the first desegregation lawsuit at UK is open to speculation. We know that there must have been some level of concern on his part, for he and the dean of the UK Graduate School met with the Governor Johnson and Superintendent of Public Education John Brooker on 24 September 1941, to discuss the case. Donovan then made a brief record in his diary on 25 September 1941. "The negroes [*sic*] are attempting to force the University to permit them to enter. Eventually, I suspect they will win their point but just now I am afraid a negro would be in danger of

[86] H. L. Donovan to Richard Stoll, December 3, 1941, Trustee Correspondence, H. L. Donovan Papers, Archives and Special Collections, University of Kentucky.
[87] Melissa Keane, *Desegregating Private Higher Education in the South,* 25.

bodily harm if he were admitted."[88] Though Donovan understood that blacks would one day be admitted to UK, he did little to ease the way for them. In the beginning, at least, he appeared to exemplify the view that UK's top leadership fully subscribed to the maintenance of racial a caste system. One correspondent from Anchorage, Kentucky, wrote Donovan soon after the Eubanks' suit, "You are at liberty to throw the weight of your position onto an ever expanding concept of the American idea of freedom…I therefore urge you to…let it be known that…you nevertheless sympathize fully with the justifiable aspirations of Negro youth." To have made such a statement of expression support for Eubanks would have placed him at odds with his trustees. Donovan's terse response was therefore, "All I can say at this time is that our Kentucky law forbids white and colored people from attending the same school."[89] Donovan wrote much the same to Pastor T. S. Riddick of the Barnwell-Wickliffe Methodist Churches in Bardwell, Kentucky, who wrote and asked that Eubanks be admitted "in the normal way any other American citizen would be admitted." Donovan, in his response, quoted from the Day Law and then jotted on Riddick's original letter that Eubanks had an IQ of 86 although he was in the upper half of his graduating class.[90] In 1941, with the trustees united on the subject of "no" to desegregation, there was little for the new president to say but quote the law to those who desired a more open admissions policy.

As for politicians, the new president did not need to worry about Governor Keen Johnson, an acquaintance from nearby Richmond. In fact, unlike the later presidents of the Universities of Mississippi, Georgia, and Alabama, who were faced with vicious race

[88] Herman Lee Donovan Diary, September, 8, 1941, Papers of Herman Lee Donovan, Archives and Special Collections, University of Kentucky.
[89] E. G. Francis to H. L. Donovan, 14 September 1941, Box 16, Papers of Herman Lee Donovan, Special Collections and Archives, University of Kentucky.
[90] T. S. Riddick to H. L. Donovan, 9 September, 1941, Box 16, Papers of Human Lee Donovan, Special Collections and Archives, University of Kentucky.

baiting at the executive level, the governors of Kentucky never indulged in this type of behavior.[91] This may have been due in part because blacks were voters and partially because they numbered such a small part of the state population. University of Kentucky presidents would not have a public showdown with a governor over racial issues until Louie Nunn took office in 1967.

Instead, the well-documented opponents of desegregation at UK were trustees Richard Stoll, Robert Hobson, Robert Tway, and later Judge Edward O'Rear. Robert Hobson, a Louisville board member and lawyer, wrote to Donovan, "I am sorry to see that there has been another attempt made to get a negro [*sic*] into the University of Kentucky…I am sure that there will be no difficulty about this matter among the Board members, as we discussed the matter once before and concluded that under no circumstances would we admit a negro."[92] The correspondence between Donovan and Richard Stoll was particularly great throughout the former's tenure. Stoll, the Lexington native who played a role in choosing Frank McVey as president in 1917, was a local judge, and had served on the Board of Trustees for almost 45 years. The son of Lexington's first millionaire, Stoll's brother John controlled both Lexington newspapers. Richard Stoll had also made it clear to the new president, without citing the Day Law, that blacks were not welcome at UK, and there is no evidence Donovan actively sought to change Stoll's mind on the issue until the federal court ruling of 1949.[93] As Melissa Kean

[91] There was perhaps once exception: Governor Louis B. Nunn. For information on Nunn, who served as governor from 1968-1971, see Lowell Harrison, editor, *Kentucky's* Governors (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2004), 206-210.
[92] Robert P. Hobson to H.L Donovan, September 18, 1941. Trustee Correspondence, Papers of Herman Lee Donovan, Archives and Special Collections, University of Kentucky.
[93] For information on Trustee Richard Pindell Stoll, see the vertical file on him in Archives and Special Collections, University of Kentucky. Stoll served as a UK trustee from 1898-1949. His brother John Stoll controlled both Lexington newspapers in 1949.

explained, these trustees "fought to hold on to the world they had been born into."[94] That world, which relegated blacks to the lowest tier of American society, precluded blacks from studying next to whites. Stoll and his trustees were not about to give up easily, and as a new president, Donovan did not have the political clout to push the issue, instead allowing the trustees to take matters into their own hands when David Lamont Eubanks made application to UK in 1941. Donovan was thus forced by his trustees to be the man responsible for finding a way to keep blacks at Kentucky State in Frankfort.

As it turned out, the case of David Lamont Eubanks posed no serious threat to the university, although it did serve as a warning that Kentucky blacks were just as eager to desegregate their schools as in other areas of the South. Eubanks' lawyers had made procedural errors in the naming of the lawsuit. Eubanks himself later went through a divorce with his wife, and he began to lose the support of much of the black community. Finally, the case was dismissed for lack of prosecution just two years later in 1943. For the moment, it seemed that the University had some borrowed time, and Donovan, in an effort to placate the trustees, continued to learn about ways to keep blacks in Frankfort. But the *Gaines* decision put the writing on the wall. No longer would the courts allow southern schools to force blacks to go North with state monies. Separate had to be equal, and that meant that the historically black schools were expected to receive more funding to either expand graduate training for blacks or that historically white public universities admit black students.

By April of 1945, Franklin Delano Roosevelt was dead, and in the ensuing month the atrocities of the Holocaust forced the nation to change radically its view on race. As black GIs returned to a nation that won the war, in part, due to their service, they were

[94] Melissa Keane, *Desegregating the Private Universities of the South,* 1.

rightfully entitled to the same provisions of the G.I. Bill as their white counterparts. Many of the universities of the North, even the private ones, had begun removing racial and religious barriers to their applicants. Much of the South, on the other hand, remained the sole outpost for a peculiar educational system that demanded absolute segregation of the races. As a result of Truman's Commission on Higher Education, it was apparent that dual systems of higher education were problematic for the northerners even though they were defended by southerners. The sole dissenters on the Truman Commission were the southern university presidents on the committee. But there were glimpses of change. In 1949, the year that UK ultimately admitted blacks under court order, John Munro at Harvard called for the recruitment of "five to ten really excellent Negro leaders for each new freshman class."[95] During this time period, new court cases opened up the law schools of the Universities of Oklahoma and Missouri, where it was determined that blacks must be admitted to programs at flagship universities when their own segregated schools offered none. While *Plessy* was not yet gone, blacks were winning case after case with the help of the NAACP and its rising star, future Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall. Any forward-thinking white southern university president had to prepare for the inevitable.

Early in his presidency, as has been mentioned, Donovan learned that the University of North Carolina had adopted a plan to admit blacks students who wanted to enroll in educational programs not offered at their segregated schools. Instead of admitting black students to Chapel Hill directly, university authorities improvised a makeshift program under the guise of separate and equal. Black students were taught law, for example, on the campus of the local blacks-only school in Durham by white

[95] Marcia Synott, *The Half Opened Door,* 209.

professors who commuted from Chapel Hill.[96] A similar arrangement was then made in Kentucky, approved by Donovan with the Kentucky Department of Education, and an alliance formed with the black president of Kentucky State, Rufus B. Atwood, who saw this as an opportunity to funnel badly needed funds to his institution. This arrangement was brokered and in place by 1948, the year the Truman Commission's stinging report on segregation in American education was published.

Once news of the arrangement between Kentucky State and UK had been announced, Kentuckian John Wesley Hatch made application to the UK Law School in 1948. Donovan discussed the matter in his memoir, though he incorrectly stated that Hatch was the first black applicant to the university, and he neglected to mention his own role in the planning of the makeshift law school. For example, Donovan writes that when John Wesley Hatch applied to UK "we presented the request for admission to the trustees for their advice and were directed to obtain an opinion from the attorney general."[97] In fact, the trustees were well aware of the program that had been set up to handle just such an application. That ill-conceived program, which involved offering any course available at UK to any black student who desired it at Kentucky State College for Negroes resulted in the university's loss in court.

Donovan was supported by his new law school dean and former Rhodes Scholar, Elvis Stahr, who would later resign his position as president of Indiana University following student unrest there in 1968. Stahr did not anticipate the fact that the university law professors did not believe in the feasibility of the makeshift law school. They feared

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[96] For information on Donovan and the North Carolina plan, see the correspondence between Stoll and Donovan. Trustee Correspondence. H. L. Donovan Papers, Special Collections and Archives, University of Kentucky.
[97] Donovan, *Keeping the University Free and Growing,* 94.

such an arrangement could jeopardize the accreditation of the law school, and several of the professors who commuted to Frankfort to teach law to John Wesley Hatch resigned in protest shortly afterwards forcing the University to hire new lawyers in Frankfort.

Donovan never officially acknowledged that the situation was less than ideal for Hatch, who was tutored privately, had a change of teachers after the semester, had no communication with other white law students, and no access to the Lexington campus law activities including moot court. Hatch, who quickly withdrew from the program, discussed his experiences as part of an oral history. "It was not a good way to get a legal education, to say the very least. I would have a reading assignment and I would be asked to react to it…I don't know as anybody'd [*sic*] ever studied law that way…But to try to learn without the dynamic of an interactive process with other students?"[98] In his memoir, Donovan discusses only the fact that two lawyers taught Hatch and that he withdrew after a semester, but he does add that when Hatch left that was the end of the "problem." Hatch actually attended UK after the desegregation ruling in 1949, but failed to complete his law degree due to the continued isolation he experienced in Lexington. Even the most casual observer must agree that Hatch was offered, under Donovan's watch, a program of studies both separate and unequal.[99]

Throughout the desegregation travails, one of the most interesting jobs of a university president was the role of correspondent, and Donovan functioned as the university's public relations man explaining university policy, reassuring worried whites, and thanking those he felt needed to be thanked for supporting UK. Though the

[98] Catherine Fosl and Tracy D. K'Meyer, *Freedom on the Border: An Oral History of the Civil Rights Movement in Kentucky* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2009) 55.
[99] For John Wesley Hatch's view of his situation see his oral history in Fosl and K'Meyer, *Freedom on the Border*, 55-57.

conversations he had over the phone are lost to researchers, the letters he wrote are not. For example, in 1942, when blacks asked to use Stoll Field for an athletic event, Donovan wrote the state superintendent of public education, John W. Brooker, "I think the constitution of Kentucky is pretty clear on this question and the state has already provided a very good college for the negroes [*sic*], so my position will be to have them use their own facilities until the courts rule otherwise."[100]

When the author of a letter appeared to have a high level of social prominence, Donovan often dictated a lengthy response to his secretary who then sent out the letter. Dr. R. C. Kash, a member of the Class of 1925, seems to have been very disturbed about the prospect of blacks attending UK and intimated that the decision might force him to look to another school for his children to attend. In response Donovan assured Kash that UK "had no recourse but to admit them" and that the "negroes [*sic*] are segregated in the classrooms and laboratories, and when they must be fed they are segregated at the eating places. We do not attempt to house them and they are not permitted to attend social functions. They must find their own social life outside of the University."[101]

In other situations, his answers to constituents were simply short but polite. Mary Stewart of Paris, Kentucky, wrote after the desegregation verdict in 1949 that the "air blew a little sweeter over Kentucky, when the decision was made, tainted with a little less hypocrisy." Donovan, pleased by the letter, replied that "of course, we had no thought but to abide by the decision of the court."[102]

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[100] H. L. Donovan to John Brooker, February 11, 1942, Box 16, Herman Lee Donovan Papers, Special Collections and Archives, University of Kentucky.
[101] H.L. Donovan to Dr. R.C. Kash, June 23, 1949, Box 16, Herman Lee Donovan Papers, Special Collections and Archives, University of Kentucky.
[102] H. L. Donovan to Mary Stewart, April 8, 1949, Box 16, Herman Lee Donovan Papers, Special Collections and Archives, University of Kentucky.

To the fraternity members of Kappa Alpha fraternity at Georgetown College, he wrote a lengthy letter after they said that they and forty other Georgetown students would attend graduate school elsewhere if UK admitted blacks. Though Donovan told them he was disturbed by their letter, he proceeded to discuss, in two pages, the cordial relations between the surrounding colleges and the university and the expense of running a dual system of segregation, before making an appeal to their better judgment and their Christian upbringing. At one point, the president, who had worked with his trustees to thwart the admission of blacks wrote, "We now have on the campus people of many races from foreign lands, some of them quite dusky of hue. East Indians have attended Georgetown and just about all other colleges in America at one time or another. It does seem a bit illogical to deny entry to our own American citizens."[103] Donovan's lengthy response could have been motivated by many factors, but clearly, aside from the anonymous crank letters he received, letters like this afforded the President the opportunity to promote good public relations, reassure worried correspondents that the University would always have a low number of black students, and articulate what he deemed the appropriate response to each group.

In 1948, just as John Wesley Hatch was giving second thoughts to the segregated one-man law school he attended in Frankfort, the new head of the NAACP, Louisville schoolteacher Lyman T. Johnson, applied to UK to begin a doctorate in history. More seasoned, more aggressive, feistier that the young David Lamont Eubanks, Johnson was not interested in earning a degree, but he wanted to open the University to black students who desired a UK credential. Johnson refused even to consider taking a graduate history

[103] H. L. Donovan to Jack Lowery and Wilton Long, No date, Box 16, Herman Lee Donovan Papers. Archives and Special Collections, University of Kentucky.

class in isolation at KSU. His application thus presented a serious legal challenge both to Donovan and to black KSU president Rufus Atwood, who thought his school could gain financial support if he appeared to be support the white establishment in their efforts to preserve segregation. Of Johnson, Donovan wrote “Mr. Johnson met all the educational requirements for the PhD. The Day Law alone barred his entrance.”[104] Once again, Donovan told a half-truth, for it was not simply the Day Law that stood in the way, it was the trustees, and the president himself, who were bent on defending a vision of the South that was fast becoming obsolete. As Melissa Kean noted in her experience studying both desegregation and trustees at southern private universities, American trustees, who were, for the most part, wealthy white businessmen, had not changed their positions on race, and Donovan left little historical record of any attempt to warn his own governing board that this case could very well strike the death blow to UK’s policy of racial exclusion.[105]

When the case of Lyman Johnson finally came before the Judge H. Church Ford, Donovan was called to the stand to testify along with the law dean and future president of Indiana University, Elvis Stahr, and historian Thomas D. Clark. Much of the testimony centered on John Wesley Hatch’s law school experience.[106] While Stahr maintained that Hatch’s education and instruction at Frankfort were sound, even desirable giving the tutorial approach, Donovan’s testimony failed to convince the judge that the law education Hatch received was equal to that on the UK campus. H. Church Ford did not take long to judge the UK program a farce and that until the university came up with a better plan, blacks would need to be admitted to the university if the programs they

[104] Donovan, *Keeping the University Free and Growing*, 96.
[105] Melissa Keane, *Desegregating the Private Universities of the South,* 54.
[106] The author visited the Federal Courthouse in Lexington to obtain copies of Donovan’s testimony, but that the only transcripts that had been preserved recorded the testimony of Thomas Clark, John Wesley Hatch, Elvis Stahr, and the attorney general, who objected to every question presented by the defense team.

sought were unavailable at KSU. Though Ford did not invalidate the Day Law, blacks desiring graduate studies had the right to attend their state flagship university. In a strange ending, according to Lyman Johnson, Donovan came up to him after the trial and offered an apology saying he knew what had happened was wrong, but that he, as a state employee, could not buck the system.[107]

What Donovan failed to do after the ruling by Judge Ford was to canvas the views of his trustees before the next board meeting in order to see where they stood on Judge Ford's decision. Perhaps the busy president became sidelined with more pressing concerns. Perhaps he simply assumed that the trustees would go along with his suggestion to admit black students to the Graduate School. One concern that consumed his time involved Attorney General Holifield, who was not quite willing to concede defeat. For example, Donovan claimed that he was threatened by the attorney general if UK admitted a black student due to the provisions of the Day Law.[108] The verdict to admit blacks to UK happened to coincide with the increased enrollment resulting from the G.I Bill, when American veterans flocked to campus.

Whether he had become sidetracked with veterans' education, UK's recent NCAA basketball championship, or other matters, Donovan was clearly unprepared at the spring 1949 board meeting when an argument broke loose between Judge O'Rear and Governor Clements, who as Thomas Clark reported, was preparing for a Senate run and sensitive to "the black vote", and was, therefore, comfortable not challenging the verdict. Judge O'Rear, who was in his 80s and a staunch Republican, surprised both Donovan and the Governor by suggesting that Clements plan a new law school equal in every way to

[107] For information on the court testimony, see Thomas Clark, *My Century in History* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2006), 248-249.
[108] Donovan, *Keeping the University Free and Growing*, 96-97.

the white one. The two men almost got into a fistfight over the issue. On the first count, the proposal to admit black students was voted down ten to two. Donovan's proposal for admission had been defeated, but then Judge Stoll, who initially had been part of the opposition, urged a recount, according to Donovan, after reminding Trustees "because when the board listens to the president they seldom make a mistake."[109] The University of Kentucky thus avoided a publicity crisis, and the ruling was not appealed which prompted the New York *Herald Tribune* to write, "Kentucky's action shows a refreshing grasp on reality. Here is the proof that in a carefully delimited area, such as graduate and professional education, the barriers of prejudice can be fruitfully breached. And this is done simply by following the unassailable doctrine of equality for all."[110]

For any university president of a historically white school in the South, planning was key to the implementation of desegregation. In 1949, however, few presidents had a model to follow. As Donovan recalled, he met with his deans and decided that no publicity would be given to the arrival of the new students. This was not hard to arrange on the Lexington front due to the fact that Judge Stoll's brother owned both Lexington newspapers. There is nothing in the desegregation files of UK to suggest Donovan made written contact with the presidents of the University of Maryland and West Virginia, institutions that had previously desegregated, so we will never know how Donovan came up with what might best be called a policy of "silence" following the admission of black students. A single letter from the president of the University of Tennessee was the only evidence that Donovan wanted to see how other institutions were handling the issue and

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[109] Clark, *My Century in History,* 250-251, and Donovan, *Keeping the University Free and Growing,* 97-98.
[110] *New York Herald Tribune*, June 23, 1949. Copy in Donovan Papers, Box 16, Special Collections and Archives. University of Kentucky.

that letter dated back to 1941.[111] Donovan's strategy of silence undoubtedly was designed to avoid inflaming public opinion and causing angry crowds of whites to show up and possibly start trouble at the Limestone Street campus. Perhaps mindful both of the violence associated with the Will Lockett trial, which had taken place in downtown Lexington and the lynchings he had witnessed in his hometown of Maysville, Donovan's primary goal was to avoid a potentially embarrassing incident for the University of Kentucky.

The second part of Donovan's desegregation strategy was not to make public what the university's plans were. Donovan, a self-avowed gradualist, clearly wanted to control the number of black students that came to study at UK that summer. To this end, he hoped to enlist the aid of his fellow president, Rufus Atwood of Kentucky State College in Frankfort. President Atwood reported that Donovan wanted only a small number of black students to be sent from Kentucky State, but Atwood felt no reason to oblige, understanding well that an integrated UK placed KSU in danger of closing. As Atwood recalled, "To relieve his fears, I told him that I would do what I could. I did nothing, absolutely nothing."[112]

Another part of the unannounced plans for the admission of black students involved the deans of students. The new black graduate students were required to meet with deans of students and were instructed to find their own social life, which explains why the first group did not live on campus in 1949. Though black students were not allowed to use the swimming pool, the Student Union was open to them although clearly

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[111] James Hoskins to H.L. Donovan, December 12, 1942, Papers of Herman Lee Donovan, Box 16, Archives and Special Collections, University of Kentucky.
[112] Gerald Smith, *Rufus Atwood: Mr. Kentucky* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1998), 124.

marked signs showed which tables were reserved for them.[113] Donovan made certain that memos were sent to the university staff keeping them aware of the changes, although one member simply tossed Donovan's memo in the trash. As historian Thomas Clark writes, "Donovan fearing internal and external reaction, sent a memorandum to department heads, cafeteria managers, and other service individuals requesting them to practice a form of segregation in classrooms, in cafeteria seating, and perhaps in the assignment of dormitory rooms…"[114] Whether this memo was sent in 1949 or in 1954 is unknown. Donovan seems not to have involved law enforcement until a cross burning at UK that summer when Lyman Johnson was one of some twenty-nine graduate students who walked into history that summer finally sitting with white students in the lecture halls of the university that had fought to exclude them.

Six years later, as a result of the landmark *Brown* decision of 17 May 1954, "separate but equal" was not yet dead, but it was now terminally ill, in all parts of the South. While the Deep South geared up for massive resistance and some of its governors made it clear they would not tolerate the judiciary meddling in state affairs, many white Kentuckians, mindful of the state's minimal black population, accepted the decision by and large. Almost immediately, the state's colleges, both public and private, began admitting blacks who applied, though the University of Louisville and some of the state's private colleges desegregated in 1950. Shortly after *Brown,* so did the public primary, middle, and high schools begin desegregation. Lafayette High School, for example, quietly desegregated in 1956. There were setbacks in the Western Kentucky communities of Sturgis and Clay where a local mob attempted to prevent

[113] See Donovan*, Keeping the University Free and Growing,* 143.
[114] Thomas Clark, *My Century in History,* 250-251.

black students from entering previously all-white schools, but Governor Chandler, the same governor who told blacks that the time was not right for their entrance to UK in 1939, set the tone by calling in the National Guard amidst cries for resistance to desegregation rulings. In housing patterns, however, things remained the same. Those who championed blacks living in white residential neighborhoods awaited a fate similar to that encountered by Anne and Carl Braden of Louisville.[115]

In 1954, following the *Brown* decision, Herman Lee Donovan's role in desegregation of the undergraduate colleges at UK became less complex, less risky, and less documented. The experiences of the first black undergraduates have received attention from Sharon Childs.[116] The *Brown* case was accepted calmly by most of Kentucky's political leadership, and then Governor Wetherby matter-of-factly stated Kentucky would "do whatever it takes" to follow the letter of the law. Historian Thomas D. Clark went beyond Wetherby's statement of compliance and said, "The decision will have a wholesome effect on the rest of the world….The decision comes at a good time."[117] More quietly than in 1949, the University simply accepted qualified black applicants to the undergraduate programs. Probably, by 1954, Donovan had enough capital simply to make the suggestion that the Board open the university's doors to all who applied. No public notice was made of the change in admissions policy in the newspaper, and no mention was made in the minutes of the Board of Trustees. Undocumented though it was, Donovan had certainly made the decision to order his subordinates to stop investigating the race of applicants to UK and admit all qualified

[115] For the Sturgis and Clay incidents see Wright, *A History of Blacks in Kentucky*, 202-203.
[116] Sharon Child's dissertation *"Black Undergraduates at the University of Kentucky*" PhD. dissertation. Lexington, Kentucky, 2000.
[117] Thomas Clark, *My Century in History*, 247.

applicants. As in 1949, Donovan remained silent after *Brown*, refusing "to call attention to the new guests" on campus. His silence was consistent with his policy of "no announced rules upon which the press could seize."[118]

Of course, Donovan's failure to publicize the rules regarding desegregation meant that once blacks were on campus, there was only one faculty memo sent out. The students received no advice on how to proceed, and they were not warned that any behavior demeaning to blacks would not be tolerated. Donovan explained that while some university professors approached the "coming of the new order with zeal," others had been schooled in the ways of the Old South. White students at the University probably ignored most of the black students, some because of their racist beliefs, some simply because they had their own concerns. Other white students could not put the idea of black students on campus aside and behaved in a cruel matter. Although Donovan wrote, "From the first admission of Negroes to the University to the present time, there has been no incident that has embarrassed either them or the white students," there were several ugly incidents there, and not all black students felt they had been treated fairly during the early years of desegregation.[119] Many more black students probably endured such slights and provocations and never reported them.

One of the black students whose first experience at UK was not pleasant was former student George Logan. "My experiences that first day were quite humiliating," he reported. As the World War II veteran explained, he walked in to his history class only to realize that the white UK students would not sit next to him. Instead, they remained standing, an act that clearly showed their disapproval with Logan's presence. When

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[118] Herman Lee Donovan, *Keeping the University Free and Growing*, 28.
[119] Ibid., 100.

Thomas D. Clark arrived to teach the class, he bluntly told the white students they could sit down or leave. While the students remained for the first class, the next day, when Logan returned, he found the same students had labeled a chair "For Colored Only." While Clark gave a stern talk to the white students in his classroom after the second incident, other white students never seemed to grasp the idea that blacks were equal to whites.[120] Donovan had failed to provide any idea of his expectations for the behavior of University of Kentucky white students relative to the admission of black students. This stood in stark contrast to other presidents in the Commonwealth. For example, as noted in the introduction to this study, former president Adron Doran of Morehead State University discussed the admission of black students in the 1950s at a convocation and plainly told any students who had a problem with the new arrivals they were welcome to find an institution more to their liking down South. Donovan made no such effort to articulate such a policy of fairness to the white students at UK.

Just where did Donovan stand on the admission of blacks to UK? Though he feared violence if blacks were to enroll, we will probably never know the truth of his views on the admission of blacks because he told different people different things. In his memoir, he avoids giving his opinion on the morality of desegregation, other than saying integration must be gradual and not forced. Lyman Johnson, in an oral interview, claims that after the trial that had opened UK to blacks, Donovan came to him and said, "Mr. Johnson, did you know that all throughout that case I knew better…I knew what the Constitution of the United States said, but they were not paying my salary. The Kentucky state legislature…the people of Kentucky were paying my

[120] Fosl and K'Meyer, 57-58.

salary."[121] This seems to be supported by historian Thomas Clark who wrote that Donovan was a "segregationist not so much from the standpoint of race as from a fear of the rage of public opinion."[122] Former Governor Ned Breathitt referred to Donovan as "cautious" and "never one to get too far ahead."[123] In 1950, in a response to a critical letter by Robert Tway, a wealthy trustee and businessman in Louisville who had voted against the desegregation order and who felt Donovan could have done more to keep black students at Kentucky State, Donovan wrote, "I did not want them here, but I knew so well the attitude of the Supreme Court that I realized that we were only fighting a delayed action to Judge Ford's decision."[124]

Others felt Donovan was not only progressive on desegregation, but that he was willing to risk his job to get it done. Frank Dickey, Donovan's successor as UK president and Dean of the College of Education, said, "He was very much in favor of opening the University to African-American students because…in fact, he almost put his job on the line with the Board of Trustees in 1949 because the Board voted…not to admit them."[125] Of course, there is no compelling evidence that Donovan ever was in danger of losing his position in 1949, especially since Governor Clements, who supported Donovan on the issue of admitting blacks was head of the Board of Trustees, and any attempt to dismiss the president over that matter would have brought negative publicity to a state that was perceived as moderate on racial issues.

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[121] Lyman Johnson Interview, University of Kentucky Oral History Project, 1998, UK Archives and Special Collections, University of Kentucky.
[122] Clark, *My Century in History,* 248.
[123] Ned Breathitt, February 24, 2000, Oral History Interview, Kentucky Historical Society. Web.
[124] Robert Tway to H. L. Donovan May 27, 1950, Herman Lee Donovan papers, Trustee Correspondence, Archives and Special Collections, University of Kentucky.
[125] Sharon Childs, *The Integration of the First African American Undergraduates at the University of Kentucky*, PhD dissertation, 2000, 47.

The 2 May 1956, issue of *People* featured a debate on the issue of integration between Thurgood Marshall and Thomas R. Waring of the Charleston *News and Courier*. The staunch segregationist Waring remarked, "Whatever the wishes of southern Negroes…the southern White people don't want integration."[126] Whether white Kentuckians wanted it or not, the issue had, for the most part, been decided by the courts, and the first stage of "integration" had already taken place at the University of Kentucky and in many of the Commonwealth's public schools. As for Herman Lee Donovan, who retired that year, he most likely considered his role in the university's desegregation process a job well done. By all accounts, it appeared to be. The university had gone from a non-black institution in 1941 to a university with token desegregation of its undergraduate and graduate divisions in 1956. Of the 7,200 students enrolled at UK that year, 83 were black.[127] There had been no reported violence following the desegregation of UK and little negative publicity when the first black graduate students arrived in the summer of 1949.[128] Too, the admission of undergraduates in 1954 was accomplished so quietly and calmly that the Board of Trustees made no notice of the change in admission in its official records. Desegregation at the university had been achieved partially by luck and partially by a program of minimal media coverage.

While some UK alumni were certainly unhappy that the university admitted black students to its graduate divisions in 1949, and its undergraduate divisions in 1954, enrollments continued to rise, and the basic power set up of white control of the campus remained unchanged and, for the time, at least, unchallenged. At UK, white sororities

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[126] *People* Magazine, May 2, 1956, 49.
[127] George Wright, *A History of Blacks in Kentucky,* 193.
[128] The cross burnings on campus were reported in the Lexington newspapers, but they were dismissed by President Donovan as a 4th of July prank. Clippings in the vertical file on desegregation from July 5, and 6, 1949, Box 16, Herman Lee Donovan Papers.

and fraternities did not recruit blacks, the curriculum reflected the interests of white America, and the athletic teams and dormitories remained non-black. The university had not been forced to make dramatic structural changes as the result of the new admissions' policies. That would have to wait.

Because Donovan had urged his trustees to accept the desegregation ruling of 1949 and not appeal to the Supreme Court, he was viewed by some in the public as a racial progressive, although most Kentuckians were unaware that Donovan had actively worked *with* his trustees to bar blacks from UK until Judge Ford's federal court federal decision. One correspondent, Myron Taggart Hopper, of the College of the Bible in Lexington, offered his congratulations and predicted desegregation would be one of the highpoints of Donovan's career. About Donovan's handling "of the admission of Negro students into the graduate schools of the University" Hopper wrote, "You have proven yourself to be the fine Christian gentleman I have always known you to be."[129] He was seconded by Raymond Walters, president of the University of Cincinnati, who wrote to Donovan, "Please accept my cordial congratulations upon the action which the University of Kentucky has taken in this tremendously important problem. I predict it will rank as one of the outstanding events in your administration as president."[130]

Just three years after his retirement, Herman Lee Donovan began crafting the legend of UK's "integration" in his memoir *Keeping the University Free and Growing*. In that account, one of the first of its kind written by a white university president faced with a desegregation order, Donovan gave his readers a glimpse of the different roles he

[129] Myron Taggart Hopper to H. L. Donovan, June 22, 1949. Herman Lee Donovan Papers, Box 16. Archives and Special Collections, University of Kentucky.
[130] Raymond Walters to H. L. Donovan, June 29, 1946, Box 16, Herman Lee Donovan Papers, Archives and Special Collections, University of Kentucky.

assumed in the desegregation era. Donovan describes himself as litigant, a compromiser after the court order, a correspondent and public relations man for those who wrote to him, pro and con, on the subject of desegregation, and the ultimate architect of institutional policies implemented to ensure the smooth transition from a historically white campus to a desegregated campus. But the job was not complete at his retirement, and Donovan's successors at UK would need to oversee the equally important tasks of opening university athletic programs to blacks, hiring the first black administrators, making the campus a safe place for the minority of blacks there, and becoming proactive in the recruiting and retention of black students. Desegregation, as Peter Wallenstein has forcefully argued, was indeed a process, and in so many ways this one had only just begun in Lexington, Kentucky, in 1956.[131] While the doors to graduate and undergraduate training at UK had been opened, many more remained closed. In time, however, succeeding UK presidents would allow the door to access to open wider.

[131] Peter Wallenstein, editor, *Higher Education and the Civil Rights Movement: White Supremacy. Black Southerners, and College Campuses.* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2008) 17-59.

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Chapter Four

Frank Graves Dickey: Colorblind Dormitories, the Idea of a Desegregated SEC, and Radical Faculty Members

> Frank was as nice a human as you would ever want to meet... He was well-motivated; he had a sense of fairness and a strong sense of decency.[132]—Thomas D. Clark

A cursory look at *Life* magazine's 8 October 1956, issue suggests that African-Americans in the United States were, for the most part, still an invisible element in American society. Articles in that volume featured Dwight and Mamie Eisenhower at their Gettysburg farm, the wedding of Joseph Arpad of Hapsburg, and the rituals of the Scottish Rite Masons. Not surprisingly, *Life's* advertisements show only white families enjoying Green Giant® vegetables or glowing over the therapeutic effects of Chapstick®. At first glance, there seems to be nothing about black Americans. That is, at first glance. But on closer inspection, one finds an article about a black Syracuse University football player named Jim Brown, and, near the end of *Life's* editorial page, in an op-ed piece titled "Why Independents Should Vote Republican," the authors argued that "America's most scandalous denial of equal opportunity has been, and still is, the denial of equal schooling and jobs to Negroes."[133] That sustained denial of equal opportunity was to receive front page coverage in the nation's newspapers in the years ahead.

In November, Republican war hero Dwight D. Eisenhower easily won re-election against the more erudite Adlai Stevenson, but the autumn of 1956 was, for the United States, the calm before the storm of massive resistance to desegregation efforts in the South. Almost two years after the *Brown* decision, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was

[132] Thomas Clark interview with Terry Birdwhistell, January 16, 1987. Special Collections and Archives, University of Kentucky.
[133] *Life Magazine*, October 8, 1956, 36.

beginning to make a name for himself in the modern civil rights movement with boycotts and other forms of civil disobedience. Yet, four years into the Eisenhower presidency, it was not yet clear how the moderate Republican would react to white southern opposition unleashed by the *Brown* decision. Less than one year later, at the start of the school year, on 24 September 1957, a plea from the mayor of Little Rock, Arkansas, forced Eisenhower to exercise his executive powers and enforce the desegregation of Central High School. As the tragic events in Little Rock suggested, a good number of white southerners were as frightened of civil rights gains for blacks as they were of communism, and in the Deep South, at least, more than a few southern politicians fanned the flames of white fear and threatened to uphold school segregation as a key tenant of the southern way of life.

Almost six hundred miles from Little Rock, at the University of Kentucky in Lexington, President Frank Graves Dickey had taken charge of a campus spared the racial turmoil and unrest that soon enveloped the university presidents who struggled with segregationist governors for control of Ole Miss, Georgia, and Alabama. In a touch of irony, the speaker at Frank Dickey's inauguration was former UK professor J. D. Williams—now the chancellor of Ole Miss—a Kentucky native and friend of retiring president Herman Lee Donovan. Williams soon became embroiled in one of the most high profile and violent desegregation cases in southern higher education after James Meredith sued for admission to the non-black University of Mississippi. In 1956, however, Williams' board of trustees had made little progress regarding the admission of

blacks to the University of Mississippi. That lack of preparation would later prove costly. At UK, on the other hand, the initial phases of desegregation had involved minimal difficulty, but much work needed to be completed.[134]

To understand Frank Dickey's presidency, it is helpful to take note of happenings first at the University of Kentucky, and also in Lexington and in the commonwealth. The new president necessarily was preoccupied with the completion of the University of Kentucky Medical Center and its medical, nursing, and dental schools, and the creation of a community college system. The new medical center promised to enhance (and prolong) the lives of all Kentuckians in large part due to the political acumen and tenacity of Governor Albert "Happy" Chandler. Lexington itself was growing in size thanks to an influx of Northerners who began to transform the overgrown college town and county with a population of 100,000 into a more sizeable cosmopolitan area after IBM opened a branch bringing new people, new jobs, and new attitudes about race. Finally, Sputnik's 1957 launch reminded post-war Kentuckians that a communist country could easily catch up to a nation once known as the leader in technology.

Dickey's presidency witnessed both continuity and change. Interference in university affairs by Frankfort politicians continued, the public appeared more interested in winning sports teams than a sound academic program, and the UK president continued to fight for proper financial support from the General Assembly. A financial scandal late in Dickey's presidency led to the retirement of Frank Peterson, the school's

[134] For information on the desegregation of the University of Mississippi, see David Sansing, *The University of Mississippi: A Sesquicentennial History* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1999). See also Nadine Cohodas, *The Band Played Dixie: Race and the Liberal Consciousness at Ole Miss* (New York: The Free Press, 1997).

comptroller.[135] Statewide, during the first part of Dickey's tenure, the aforementioned Governor Albert "Happy" Chandler—the same man who earlier objected to the desegregation of UK in 1939 and pointedly told blacks the time was not right for them to attend the University of Kentucky—now called in the National Guard in September of 1956 to stop angry whites from preventing black students from enrolling in public schools in the western Kentucky communities of Sturgis and Clay.[136] The astute Chandler may have realized he had little choice but to take action. After all, he followed in the steps of Governor Lawrence Wetherby, who assured Washington that Kentucky would do whatever it took to comply with the *Brown* decision. Though Kentucky was southern by virtue of its location below the Ohio River and its status as a former slave owning state, most of the commonwealth's political leaders did not urge defiance of federal laws after the *Brown* decision. This fact made the approach to desegregation considerably less Herculean than in the Deep South.[137]

The fact that Governor Chandler refused to tolerate racial unrest or resistance to court ordered desegregation in Western Kentucky must have reassured Frank Dickey as he considered the next steps in the desegregation process at UK. Too, this fact no doubt helped the program of voluntary desegregation in Louisville's public schools begun in 1957 under superintendent Dr. Omer Carmichael.[138] Three years later, in 1960, progressive Governor Bert Combs, who publicly disavowed the race-baiting activities of

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[135] John Ed Pearce, *Divide and Dissent: Kentucky Politics 1930-1963* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1987), 210-212. See also Thomas Clark, *My Century in History* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2004), 219-220.
[136] For information about the Sturgis and Clay incidents, see Pearce, *Divide and Dissent,* 69 and George Wright, *A History of Blacks in Kentucky,* Volume 2, (Frankfort: Kentucky Historical Society, 1992), 202-203.
[137] For more information on the governors of Kentucky, see Lowell Harrison, editor, *Kentucky's Governors* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2004).
[138] For Omer Carmichael's account of the desegregation of the Louisville Public Schools, see *The Louisville Story* (New York: Simon And Schuster: 1957).

Mississippi governor Ross Barnett, won election, and, towards the end of his term, began to enact civil rights measures designed to make Kentucky a more equitable place for black citizens. One of Combs' most notable measures was an executive order that prohibited the state from doing business with firms that discriminated against blacks.[139]

By all outward appearances, then, racial attitudes in Kentucky were slowly changing—at least at the executive level of government—and the University of Kentucky appeared poised to set an example by promoting peaceful racial change on the southern state university campus. A sad exception to the positive changes was the high profile case of Carl and Anne Braden, left-leaning journalists who bought a home for a black family in the white Louisville suburb of Shively in 1954 and who were later tried for sedition. Their case proved that while Kentucky whites might support some level of school desegregation, desegregated housing was another matter entirely. Even the liberal Bingham-run *Courier Journal* refused to justify the Bradens' actions.[140]

Chosen from a list of fifty-six candidates on 22 June 1956, at 38 Frank Graves Dickey was the second youngest president in the University of Kentucky's history.[141] As historian Thomas Clark told it, the decision to choose Dickey was ironed out over a clandestine breakfast at Maxwell Place, the president's residence. "I've been told, on good authority, that Frank Peterson (UK's comptroller), Donovan, Frank Dickey and (Governor) Happy Chandler met at breakfast… and there's where the decision was made

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[139] John Ed Pearce, *Divide and Dissent: Kentucky Politics 1930-1963,* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1963).

[140] See Catherine Fosl, *Subversive Southerner: Ann Braden and the Struggle for Racial Justice in the Cold War South* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002), 194-195.

[141] Frank Dickey's administration merits a brief three page entry in Charles Gano Talbert's *The University of Kentucky: The Maturing Years,* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1965). The best starting point for the Dickey presidency is the presidential/bio file. Frank Dickey Papers. Archives and Special Collections, University of Kentucky. See also Carl B. Cone, *The University of Kentucky: A Pictorial History* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1989), 141-147.

to appoint Dickey…"[142] Dickey, like his predecessor, Herman Lee Donovan, was a UK insider who studied first at Lexington's Transylvania College earning a degree in English, and later at UK, where he earned an M.A. in English before completing his PhD. in education in 1948. Dickey was probably one of the first university presidents to benefit directly from the G.I. Bill.

Born in Wagoner, Oklahoma, on 1 December 1917, Frank Dickey moved to Lexington in 1929, at the age of eleven. He served as a battalion sergeant-major during World War II, later working as a teacher and dean of the UK College of Education. He was not a prolific scholar by any means, but rather the author of two textbooks on student teaching and supervision. Judging from his swift ascent to dean and later to UK president, Dickey was perceived to have both the acumen and tenacity for university administration. A religious man like outgoing President Herman Lee Donovan, Dickey was a member of the Disciples of Christ, a Kentucky-born denomination founded during the Cane Ridge Revival in the nineteenth century. With a family of four, Dickey was not only a busy father and husband to the former Betty Drymon, but also a busy university president. Of Dickey, UK historian Thomas D. Clark wrote, "He was an honest and decent man who perhaps should never have been president. However that may be, he faced all but impossible challenges."[143] Dickey served UK only seven years before leaving for Atlanta to head the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools in 1963. After this position, he worked for several independent agencies and later served as a

[142] Thomas D. Clark, interview with Terry L Birdwhistell. 1987. Special Collections and Archives, University of Kentucky.
[143] Thomas D. Clark, *My Century in History*, 219.

provost at the University of North Carolina-Charlotte before returning to Lexington. Frank Dickey maintained a lifelong connection to the University of Kentucky. He died on 7 August 2009, and was buried in Lexington Cemetery.[144]

What was it like for the black students who attended UK when Frank Dickey became president? Had the university changed its attitudes toward their small numbers in the eight years since it began desegregation of the Graduate School? Sharon Barrow Childs observed that many of the first UK black undergraduates, admitted in the autumn of 1954, never completed their degrees. Indeed, the difficulty of completing a degree must have been compounded by the fact that throughout the Dickey presidency there were no black teachers, no black administrators, and no conscious attempts to include black students in the university's social programs. Largely ignored by the white students, some of these black students lacked support networks (outside of their families), a sense of campus solidarity, and in some cases, the preparation that many of their fellow white students possessed. Childs pointedly asserts that then UK "did not serve as an advocate for civil rights," and adds that UK "endorsed segregation and racist behavior in the Lexington community in the 1950s."[145] What definitely seems to have been true during the Dickey years is that while some white UK professors helped and mentored black students, others told racist jokes, refused to help black students, or simply snubbed the new arrivals. While many whites ignored black students, there were some who made overtures toward the new arrivals. Although black student concerns did not seem to be a high priority of administrators in the years 1956-1963, there was still progress for black students—a sense of marching forward at the University of Kentucky.

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[144] Frank Dickey Obituary, by Dan Adkins, UK College of Education Website, August 13, 2009. Web.
[145] Sharon Barrow Childs, *The Integration of the First Black Undergraduates at the University of Kentucky,* PhD. Dissertation, University of Kentucky, 2000, 2-3.

Historians have had their say on the experiences of black students at historically white institutions during this time period. John Thelin wrote in his history of American higher education, "Black students who opted to be pioneers between 1948 and 1968 often endured isolation, shunning and sabotage along with exclusion from "real college life" and the opportunity to participate in sports teams, dramatic productions, residence hall life, and dining commons."[146] Amy McCandless argued that "social life was often non-existent for black women at white colleges in the late fifties and early sixties."[147] I suggest that social life was not really non-existent, but rather it is perhaps better to say that, until recently, it was undocumented. At UK, McCandless' claim was not entirely applicable. Photographs compiled by historian Gerald Smith show that black females slowly found their niche on UK's campus after they were admitted unconditionally in 1954. For example, a 1959 photo shows smiling black female members of the UKettes dressed up for what appears to be a dance. That aforementioned social organization was founded by Doris Wilkinson, a Dunbar High School graduate, who later earned a PhD in sociology at Case Western and became the first black female professor at UK in 1967.[148]

Though many southern university histories treat desegregation as an event that was completed with the admission of the first black students, by revisiting Peter Wallenstein's thesis that desegregation was not a single event in an institution's history but rather a process, one can see that Frank Dickey had several items of unfinished

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[146] John Thelin, *A History of American Education* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 304.
[147] Amy McCandless, *The Past in the Present: Women's Higher Education in the Twentieth Century American South* (Tuscaloosa and London: University of Alabama Press 1999), 227.
[148] Doris Wilkinson interview with Renee Shaw KET, Feb 13, 2009. Web. See also Gerald L. Smith, *Black America Series: Lexington, Kentucky* (Charleston, Acadia Publishing, 2002), 64.

business to consider in the next phase of desegregation at the University of Kentucky.[149] Some of these items no doubt fell into his lap by accident; others he may have deliberately tackled—perhaps sensing their resolution was in the university's best interest. But because UK desegregated in stages, first the Graduate School before *Brown*, then the undergraduate programs after *Brown*, the process of desegregation was more protracted. This resulted in more gradual changes than in the Deep South where desegregation occurred under court order in the 1960s.

With desegregated undergraduate and graduate programs, UK was thus quite advanced in its program of desegregation in 1956, especially when compared to other southern state universities. In the Deep South, where tension ran higher due to politicians who preyed on the fears of worried whites, local newspapers and white citizen councils also manipulated the desegregation of public higher education. While desegregation had begun without violence and major institutional embarrassment at the state universities of Maryland, Virginia, West Virginia, and Arkansas, the court-ordered February 1956 admission of Autherine Lucy to the University of Alabama became a public relations nightmare that resulted not only in Lucy's subsequent expulsion after she and her lawyers criticized the trustees and school leadership for their failure to prevent mob activity, but also in the premature departure of the president.[150] As Dickey contemplated the next steps in the process, he was no doubt pleased UK had been spared

[149] Peter Wallenstein, *Higher Education and the Civil Rights Movement: White Supremacy, Black Southerners, and College Campuses,* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2008), 228-229.
[150] For the story of Autherine Lucy, see E. Culpepper Clark, *The Schoolhouse Door: Segregation's Last Stand at the University of Georgia* (New York: Oxford University Press).

the negative behavior then being seen in some parts of the Deep South, but at the same time he was mindful that just one administrative misstep might result in painful repercussions.

One of the rituals most associated with the American undergraduate experience is life in a college residence hall. Yet often the first black students at historically white colleges and universities, even those who attended the northern schools, were deprived of this option and told to find living quarters off-campus, relegated to all-black rooming houses, or forced to live with black families near the campus. Even at venerable Harvard—the school from which W. E. B. DuBois earned a PhD. in history in 1895—a request for a place in a residence hall for the son of Roscoe Bruce, a member of America's black elite and himself a Harvard alumnus, was not approved by President Lowell in 1922.[151] In the Midwest, at the University of Illinois, which admitted black student Jonathan Rogan in 1887, it was not until 1945 that black women won the right to live in school dormitories.[152] When, in the 1950s, the first black undergraduates came to Virginia Tech, a southern land grant like UK, they were admitted as "day students" only and roomed in an all-black rooming house near campus. Finally, in 1959, Virginia Tech student James L. Whitehurst demanded a room on campus after his sophomore year, but he had to secure legal help to nudge Virginia Tech's President Newman to approve this change.[153] Likewise, when Lyman Johnson, who successfully won the right to attend UK in 1949, studied at the University of Michigan, he too was denied access to the dorms

[151] Marcia Graham Synnott, *The Half Opened Door: Discrimination and Admissions at Harvard, Yale, and Princeton, 1900-1970* (Westport: Connecticut Greenwood Press, 1979), 49-50.
[152] "Joy Ann Williamson, *Black Power on Campus: The University of Illinois, 1965-1975* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 17.
[153] Peter Wallenstein*, Virginia Tech Land-Grant University 1872-1999: History of a School, a State, a Nation* (Blacksburg: Pocahontas Press 1997), 189-190.

as was Jesse Owens at Ohio State University. For the southern state universities that desegregated after *Brown* amidst continued legal wrangling, black students often won admission to the dormitories at the same time they were admitted to the schools themselves. Sometimes these black pioneers lived alone, as was the case of James Meredith at Ole Miss, or they roomed with another black student. So contentious was the idea of black and white students sharing a room that the University of Texas considered race in assigning dormitory space until 1964.[154]

There were to be no administrative missteps in the desegregation of UK's dormitories. Black students at UK—admitted freely as undergraduates since the fall of 1954—secured entrance to the dormitories in 1957—a move Frank Dickey eventually supported. His outlook on the issue was different from his predecessor. Former president Herman Lee Donovan told readers in his account of "integration" at UK that black students were not allowed to live on campus during the early years of desegregation. "We told them to find their own living quarters and to work out their own social life with their own people," Donovan recalled.[155] Perhaps UK's administrators rationalized the decision not to open the dorms to black graduate students in 1949 because the segregationist *Day Law* had not been struck down in the courts. Judge Ford's decision had merely stated that blacks were entitled to attend UK if the programs they desired were not available at Kentucky State College for Negroes in Frankfort. After *Brown*, however, the University of Kentucky no longer had a legal excuse to bar black students from the dormitories.

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[154] Duren and Iscoe, *Overcoming: A History of Black Integration at the University of Texas at Austin,* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1979), 14.
[155] Herman Lee Donovan, *Keeping the University Free and Growing,* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1959), 100.

Somewhat blurred are the details of this critical change in UK's housing policies, but in a letter of 13 February 1957, a reply to Dr. Lewis Smythe, a fellow member of the president's church, Woodland Christian, who was later involved with the Council on Racial Equality, Dickey sketched out a portion of the story: "Last year we had one application, and it was decided that it would probably be wise to wait awhile to admit any Negro student to the dormitories. Again this year we had an application by a Negro boy to be admitted to the men's residence halls. I felt that we had a strong obligation to accept this request, and he has been admitted and is living in the men's dormitories."[156]

What caused that "strong obligation" to honor the application? One factor may have been that by 1957, Frank Dickey knew that he and his trustees could not legally bar black students from university housing and that a lawsuit over this issue would be picked up by the media—if not in Lexington, then certainly in Louisville by the more progressive *Courier Journal*., and embarrass the university. Another factor could have been Dickey's own belief that black students had every right to live in the UK dormitories, but he wanted it done at the right time. In 1956, when the first dormitory request from a black student arrived, the University of Alabama was experiencing racial unrest after the admission of Autherine Lucy. Whatever the reason for Dickey's decision to open residence halls to black students, by the late summer of 1957, Dickey was becoming known in some circles for a progressive attitude toward towards race. For

[156] Frank Graves Dickey to Louis H. Smythe, February 13, 1957, Box 20, Frank Dickey Papers, Special Collections and Archives, University of Kentucky.

example, a telegram from Katherine Still Taylor of Louisville received on 17 September of that year thanked Dickey for the fine attitude he "exhibited towards people regardless of race or color…"[157]

Why did black UK students wait until two years after *Brown* to request on-campus housing? The most likely answer is rooted in the simple fact that many of the first black UK students were Lexington natives who wanted to live at home and save on expenses. As has been said, Dickey may not have admitted the first black student who applied for dormitory space due to the tense atmosphere at the University of Alabama following the admission of Autherine Lucy, who was eventually expelled for criticizing the administration. In any case, Dickey explained his cautious stance on the issue at the end of the letter to Louis H. Smythe:

> "I feel as you do, that we wish to take advantage of every opportunity that presents itself to further the program in integration: however, when such a step might well produce feelings that would possibly undo all that has been done so well during the past nine years, we feel that it is necessary for us to move a bit more slowly and with some caution."[158]

In hindsight, UK's admission of black students to dormitories was probably devoid of problems because of the lack of publicity given to it. For example, no mention of the change is listed in the minutes of the Board of Trustees. At other state universities in the Deep South, the first admission of blacks was much more of a problem due to protracted litigation, media coverage, the activity of groups like the White Citizen Councils, and lack of planning by the administration and that resulted in extra measures to ensure the safety of blacks living in dormitories once they arrived. At Ole Miss, for

[157] Katherine Still Taylor to Frank Dickey, September 17, 1957, Box 20, Frank Graves Dickey Papers, Special Collections and Archives, University of Kentucky.
[158] Frank Graves Dickey to Louis H. Smythe, February 15, 1957, Box 20, Frank Graves Dickey Papers, Special Collections and Archives, University of Kentucky.

example, James Meredith was isolated in his dormitory in 1962 and a guard placed outside of his door for his safety. At the University of Georgia, Charlayne Hunter Gault was forced to live alone because presumably no white student would have been asked to room with her. Finally, at Mercer University, where desegregation issues caused a split within the Baptist trustees in Macon, Georgia, the first black student, James Oni, was paired with a white student hand selected for that purpose by the dean and a director of admissions.[159]

Another issue which involved Frank Dickey was the awarding of fellowships and scholarships to black out-of-state students. This is peculiar because at most institutions, it can be assumed, the awarding of fellowships and scholarships was not something determined by the university president but by individual departments. Clearly, because race entered into an application, a request for financial aid for a black student was forwarded to Dickey for him to make the decision. In this area, Dickey left behind evidence of a more cautious approach to race. So delicate did Dickey consider the issue in 1957 that when a dean from Xavier University in New Orleans wrote UK's Director of the Placement Bureau, Katherine Kemper, about the possibility of a scholarship for a biracial student named Jacqueline Love who was interested in pursuing a Ph.D. in sociology, Dickey answered the letter personally. The applicant, described by the Xavier dean as "one of the Creole types, so often found in this part of the country," was declined an offer of financial support by Dickey who, in his response, cited university policy. "We admit all Negro students from Kentucky to both the graduate and undergraduate

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[159] Will E Campbell: *The Stem of Jesse: The Costs of Community at a 1960s Southern School* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1995), 88-89.

levels; however our feeling has been that we have a first obligation to these people and, therefore, cannot begin at this point admitting Negro students who are non-residents."[160]

The policy Frank Dickey cited to the Xavier dean appears at best inconsistent and, at worst, suspect. Out-of-state blacks had long been admitted to Kentucky State University in Frankfort. Why, therefore, could Ms. Love not gain admission to UK? Was she being discriminated against because of her Louisiana residency or because she was black and from out-of-state? Did the university fear admitting out-of-state black students? White out-of-state students had been admitted for years to UK, as yearbooks show. For example, Thomas Clark—Kentucky's most famous historian—came to graduate school at UK as an out-of-state student from Mississippi.

One possible interpretation of Dickey's response to the Xavier dean is that university authorities wanted to control the number of black students being admitted, perhaps fearing that the admission of one black out-of-state student might open the floodgates for numerous other blacks from the Deep South and cause problems with the UK's white student majority. Whatever the interpretation, one must wonder whether Dickey cited a non-existent policy in an attempt to discourage out-of-state black students from applying to UK after the *Brown* decision.

If the UK campus was reasonably open to in-state blacks during the Dickey administration, much of the city of Lexington was not. Segregation was the rule in housing, shopping, and accommodations until late in the Dickey presidency. Dickey was cautious about getting involved in organizations that championed racial equality after he became president of UK, and he declined an offer in 1957 to serve within his own church

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[160] Frank Graves Dickey to Dean M. C. D'Argonne, February 13, 1957, Frank Graves Dickey Papers, Box 20, Special Collections and Archives, University of Kentucky.

on a committee looking into race relations. Though he called the committee an "excellent idea," he complained of "having practically every night between now and May" blocked off for meetings.[161] In 1960, the white pastor of the socially prominent Second Presbyterian Church, James Angell, asked about adding Dickey's name to a list of people interested in creating a Mayor's Commission on Human Relations.[162] By this time, it can be assumed that Frank Dickey was in accord with his name being added to the list, although no formal answer to the pastor's request was found. Clearly, by the time of the Greensboro lunch sit-ins, Dickey saw that there was a need for such a committee.

Segregation remained the rule in Lexington until black students and citizens advocated racial change on their own. Following the Greensboro, North Carolina, lunch counter sit-ins in 1960, Lexington began experiencing similar unrest. A particularly embarrassing incident took place when five black Boston Celtic players were refused service at the Phoenix Hotel Coffee Shop on 18 October 1961. Black UK students themselves had few places to eat when the campus grill was closed, and they could not try on clothing in most department stores. To make changes, a branch of the Congress for Racial Equality (C.O.R.E) was formed in Lexington in the late 1950s bringing together a coalition of justice-minded whites and blacks who were willing to do what needed to be done within the confines of the law to make the changes.

Dickey's management of racial issues was quite different from his colleague at Kentucky's Morehead State University (MSU), Dr. Adron Doran. Doran, who had

[161] Frank Graves Dickey to Dr. Lewis H. Smythe, College of the Bible, February 26, 1957, Box 20, Frank Graves Dickey Papers, Special Collections and Archives, University of Kentucky.
[162] Rev. James Angell to Richard Colbert, April 4, 1960, Box 20, Copy in the Frank Graves Dickey Papers, Special Collections and Archives, University of Kentucky.

recently desegregated his institution—not Dickey—took the lead in recruiting black athletes to his school. Doran was rather upfront about desegregation at MSU and told white students who might have disagreed with the change at Morehead to find a college more to their liking in the Deep South. Of course, Morehead's black students often encountered problems off-campus. When a black MSU athlete travelling with his team was refused service in a Frankfort restaurant, Coach Ed Lucke told the manager he would hear from the President. As Donald Flatt tells the story, "The Morehead State team exited, and the manager did hear from Doran the next day." On a different occasion, Dr. Doran was told a black MSU wrestler, Allie Leftenant of New York, would not be allowed to participate in a match in Atlanta. Doran told the organizers, "If we can't bring Leftenant, we won't bring our team because we don't think he's a second class citizen." But even Doran, who was awarded the Lincoln Memorial award for service to blacks, was not above making bigoted comments as he did when he called Howard Murphy, a member of the 1960 MSU football team a "tar baby." Doran admitted to making the remark, but said he "did it good naturedly."[163]

After MSU began recruiting blacks to its athletic teams, Dickey began to discuss the role of black students in UK athletics. A noticeable difference between a private northern institution like Syracuse University in 1956, where Jim Brown played football and received coverage in *Life* magazine, and the flagship southern, historically white public universities like UK that had achieved token desegregation was a simple one: in 1956, most black athletes simply did not play for the southern non-black schools, and in many cases, as a condition for a southern school to play a northern counterpart, the latter

[163] Donald Flatt, *"Winning through to Fame and Glory": African Americans and MSU."* (Morehead State University: Office of Multicultural Affairs, February 1999), 18-19.

had to agree to bench any black player on their team for that particular game. Since UK was a member of the all-white Southeastern Conference (SEC), any move toward desegregation of its athletic programs would, necessarily, affect the member schools. Athletics on the college campus had long been part of the extracurriculum, as historian Frederick Rudolf noted in his seminal text *The American College and University*: *A History*, but member institutions of the Southeastern Conference (SEC) excluded blacks from play, and only when Frank Dickey came to UK did a president publicly entertain the idea of a policy change.[164]

Five years into his presidency, in 1961, Dickey signaled that it was simply a matter of time before blacks would be involved in college athletics, and he further argued that UK could be "one of the leaders in bringing this about."[165] He had chosen a good time to make the statement. Although former Governor Albert Chandler took credit for recruiting blacks to professional baseball, Frank Dickey now stood witness to the progressive administration of Governor Bert Combs. On 15 December 1961, the Lexington *Herald Leader* ran an article titled "UK president expresses interest in recruiting Negroes for sports." At a meeting with UK journalism students Dickey said "It's just a matter of time" before black players participate in the SEC. Dickey received strong support from the *Kentucky Kernel* followed by a declaration of support from the faculty of the College of Arts and Sciences and the UK Trustees. But just what did Dickey mean? Was the UK president really an advocate for the desegregation of the

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[164] Frederick Rudolph, *The American College and University: A History* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1990), 373-393.
[165] See Charles Martin's essay, *Hold That (Color) Line: Black Exclusion and Southeastern Conference Football* in Peter Wallenstein's *Higher Education and the Civil Rights Movement,* 171.

SEC, or was he simply signaling that change was around the corner? And did Dickey, who knew Doran personally from the latter's days as a UK doctoral student, take a cue from the Morehead practice of recruiting black athletes?

There was not, surprisingly, much correspondence on the subject of the desegregation of college athletics after Dickey's statement, but as was the case with predecessor Herman Lee Donovan, Dickey's role in the desegregation of athletics required him to be the man who articulated the university's position on the topic. Although President Donovan remained publicly silent on desegregation at UK while he was president, and received several pieces of mail on the subject which he placed in the "segregation file," there are not as many letters on the subject in the Dickey files. Some of those letters were from people who wrote praising Dickey for his statement about integrating college athletics; others wrote opposing him. Former UK graduate and Mississippi resident Robin Dinwiddies of Moorhead, Mississippi, was not at all pleased with Dickey's statements about desegregating college athletics in 1962. He wrote, "Your opinion on this matter it seems is not in accord with that of many with whom I talked while on a recent visit to Kentucky." Dickey replied by saying that one must abide by the recent decisions of the Supreme Court before adding "There is a great difference between my saying that the situation is "inevitable" and that of openly advocating such a movement. The former is the position I have taken.[166] Was Dickey simply trying to allay the fears of a UK alumnus opposed to racial mixing or was he being honest? If he spoke the truth, Dickey's response seems to place a new angle on the research of Charles Martin, who considered Dickey to be pro-integration in college athletics. Nevertheless,

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[166] Robert Dinwiddies to Frank Graves Dickey, January 3, 1962, Box 25, Frank Graves Dickey Papers, Special Collections and Archives, University of Kentucky.

Dickey's statement pleased historian Dr. Thomas Clark, who wrote the president and said, "I am sure that the intent of everybody was that we set a due date and that on that date we actively begin integrating our teams."[167] Clark's hopes would have to wait until the administration of Dr. John Oswald, who arrived in 1963.

A certain amount of caution must be used, though, in interpreting Dickey's comment about desegregating UK athletics. For starters, it is highly improbable that he was advocating racial change on the UK basketball court, where Coach Adolf Rupp had been in charge since the 1930s. Rupp's program was far too successful to be tampered with by a new president, and Dickey, as an insider, clearly understood this. While the UK (white) faithful have had trouble assessing and accepting Rupp's views on race, those in the black community who knew him, held mixed views. Luminta Locke, a black student, who worked in the UK Student Center in 1954 recalled "He would take his boys through the line, treat me very polite—the basketball team and also Coach Rupp."[168] On the other hand, Charles Livisay's memories were not as favorable. In an oral interview, he recalled, "I knew Adolf Rupp. I went to coaching school every summer under Rupp. It would slip out every now and then—he'd come with 'Nigger' [*sic*] talking to the rest of the coaches, talking about the players."[169] As president, as a UK insider and former college dean, Dickey must have been aware of Rupp's views of race and was probably unwilling to challenge him on that issue. Charles Martin, in his essay on the SEC, notes that desegregation may have interested UK administrators because of the school's poor performance on the football field, where success was elusive after Coach Bear Bryant left

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[167] Thomas D. Clark to Frank Graves Dickey May 7, 1963. Box 34, Frank Graves Dickey Papers, UK Special Collections and Digital Programs.
[168] Sharon Barrow Childs, p. 85.
[169] Ibid., p.3.

for Alabama.[170] By the 1960s, the administration understood well that the presence of black athletes on UK teams might annoy some older white Kentuckians, but any criticism would have been drowned out had UK produced a winning football season. Finally, Dickey was certainly aware that If MSU could desegregate its football program without any difficulty, so, too, could the University of Kentucky.

In the history of southern higher education, white professors who publicly advocated racial equality before the Civil Rights Act of 1964 did not fare well at the institutions at which they taught. In the early twentieth century, John Spencer Bassett almost lost his position as a history professor at Trinity College in North Carolina after he urged the white South to accept blacks and argued that Booker T. Washington was equally as important in southern history as Jefferson Davis. At the University of South Carolina, Chester Travelstead, one of Frank Dickey's former doctoral students in the College of Education, lost his job in 1955 as dean of the USC College of Education after he publicly urged the South Carolina power structure to accept the *Brown* decision.[171] Until the Civil Rights Act of 1964, most white southern professors probably knew that getting too far ahead of public opinion on racial matters could be lethal to their careers.

Towards the end of Dickey's career, the presence of activist professors pushing for racial change in Lexington became what might best be considered a small headache for the president. Two of the most prominent were Dr. Abby Marlatt, Dean of the College of Home Economics, who hailed from an abolitionist family from Kansas and

[170] See Charles Martin's essay *Hold That (Color) Line* in Wallenstein, *Higher Education and the Civil Rights Movement*, 166-177.
[171] The Travelstead Case is discussed in Henry Lesesne's, *A History of the University of South Carolina, 1940-2000* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2000), 123-124. Thomas D. Clark, who received his PhD. at Duke, the successor to Trinity College, discusses the Bassett incident in *My Century in History*, 143.

arrived at UK in 1956, and Dr. William Reichert, a professor of political science and Lexington native who, as an undergraduate, resigned from Kappa Alpha fraternity at Transylvania University when its members refused to budge on the admission of blacks and Jews. Both Marlatt and Reichert were members of C.O.R.E., the Congress of Racial Equality, founded in Chicago in 1942, and Reichert had been a founding member of the Lexington branch. Marlatt and Reichert joined in sit-ins downtown and protested segregated lunch counters in Lexington. Since such activism among professors was unusual for a campus like that of UK, the power structure at the local and state levels did not respond positively to these rogue professors and the unwelcome publicity they brought to the UK. Reichert, in a letter to historian George Wright, details how he felt he needed to get involved when a UK black student approached him saying that he had nowhere to eat on Sundays when the student cafeterias were closed.[172] When word surfaced that UK professors were pushing for racial change, many Lexington residents probably felt that the city was moving just fast enough on the matter and that it did not need help from UK professors.

One onlooker was Lexington newspaper editor Fred Wachs, who did not approve of C.O.R.E. or its actions and who gave the president his opinion on the subject.[173] So obsessed were the local newspapers with not giving publicity to civil rights that for many years, most Lexington citizens were unaware of the social activism of black citizens. Instead, the local newspapers confined coverage of non-political events and doings in the black community to the "Colored Notes" section in the newspaper. After several donors,

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[172] See George Wright, *History of Blacks in Kentucky,* 213-216.

[173] The Lexington *Herald Leader* editors, in a well-publicized mea culpa apologized, not mentioning Wachs's name, for their omission of coverage of civil rights during the 50's and 60's events in 2004. See *A Newspaper's Mea Culpa: Decades Late, NBC News.* July 4, 2004. Web. Accessed February 22, 2013.

probably working in concert with Wachs, threatened to withhold money to the university, Dickey called Reichert into the office to notify him that he had "enemies." Though Reichert had been a rising star in the political science department, and though he explicitly stated that Dickey was not hostile to his activities, he chose not to remain at UK, perhaps sensing that tenure might be hard to achieve now that his political actions had attracted the attention of the state's political elite.

Marlatt, on the other hand, was the larger problem for President Dickey.[174] Not only was she involved in sit-ins and downtown boycotts, Marlatt was also fiercely anti-war. Her activities protesting segregated establishments landed her in jail, but when she passed out leaflets one warm August Sunday in 1962 encouraging protesters not to sign up for the draft, the editors of the local newspaper and Governor Combs called for her dismissal. Though she was tenured, Dickey wrote to Attorney General Robert Kennedy about the legality of her activities and eventually removed Marlatt from her position as department chair. Initially, Dickey had wanted her to be dismissed, but after a protracted investigation in which it was clear there was pressure put on Dickey by both the AAUP to respect Marlatt's academic freedom, and by some of the trustees who wanted her fired, Dickey removed Marlatt as dean, citing her leadership failure in doing so and not the fact she engaged in political activities repugnant to the Board of Trustees.[175]

In one of the final acts related to race at UK, Dickey helped the university to desegregate an award that had long been given only to whites. The Sullivan Medal, named after Algernon Sydney Sullivan, a white southerner who had been successful in

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[174] Abby Marlatt, *Living the Story: the Civil Rights Movement in Kentucky*, Kentucky Educational Television, Web. Accessed February 22, 2013.

[175] See also Robert Treadway's Internet post, "Abby Marlatt, protester, ignited a firestorm that changed the university," February 24, 2012. Kentucky Forward: Our Kentucky Homepage. Web. Accessed February 14, 2013.

business in New York had since 1927, been given to Kentuckians who show "a spirit of helpfulness and an awareness of the beauty and value of the tangible elements of life." On 27 April 1962, Dickey let Rufus Atwood, president of the traditionally black Kentucky State University in Frankfort, know that he had been chosen for the award, and then he congratulated him personally by letter. For perhaps the first time, the university formally recognized black educators at other institutions. Under Dickey, UK worked with Rufus Atwood at Kentucky State to offer a series of night courses for state employees working in Frankfort. Of course, the fact the Sullivan Award went to the outgoing president of the HBCU also had a touch of irony, for Rufus B. Atwood would have preferred that blacks had not attempted to try to gain entrance to UK in 1941. Bent on protecting his own institution, Atwood understood that desegregation of UK had the potential to mean lost funding and fewer students at Kentucky State University.[176]

By the early 1960s, Frank Dickey's frustration with the demands of the UK presidency was apparent, and in 1962 he accepted a position as director of the Southern Association for Colleges and School, agreeing to stay on at UK until 1 July 1963. Dickey was ready to assume a new voice at a regional level, and the president who had pushed along desegregation at UK said, on 8 November 1962, that the desegregation crisis at the University of Mississippi was "an absurd spectacle, symptomatic of a diehard sentimentality and a desire to forget the 20th century."[177] Leaving UK, while not an easy decision for the young president, was nevertheless a smart choice for a worn out

[176] Frank Graves Dickey to Rufus B. Atwood April 27, 1962, Box 25, Dickey Papers, UK Special Collections and Archives. University of Kentucky. Other recipients of the Sullivan Award included the aforementioned Abby Marlatt, who was awarded this honor in 1985. See also Gerald Smith's, *A Black Educator in the Segregated South: Kentucky's Rufus B. Atwood* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1994), 6, 148, 173.

[177] "Dickey Cites School Need," *Lexington Herald*, November 8, 1962. Dickey box 2-A, File 13, Frank Graves Dickey Papers, Special Collections and Archives, University of Kentucky.

administrator. As he told interviewer Sharon Childs years later, "I can be perfectly honest and say that the politics that are involved in the presidency was something I did not enjoy. I did not like going to Frankfort to beg and plead for support. Nor did I like the interference from time to time that came from various sectors of the political arena."[178]

Though his had been a difficult tenure due primarily to the meddling of Frankfurt politicians and trustees who seemed to have misplaced priorities and the exhausting work related to the building of the UK Medical Center, Dickey had made progress in continuing the desegregation of UK.[179] Dickey brought the subject of blacks in the SEC to the table for the first time, and he decided on the timing of, and oversaw, the desegregation of the University of Kentucky dormitories. Less favorable, perhaps, was his inability to deal with the controversial head of the Department of Home Economics, Abby Marlatt, and retain William Reichert in the political science department or make an argument for academic freedom outside the classroom. His rejection of the application of a highly recommended out-of-state black student from Louisiana seemed inconsistent with university policy given the fact that whites from out of state were routinely accepted at UK, but in the letter he wrote to the Xavier dean in charge of overseeing the application, he mentioned that his first priority had to be admitting black Kentucky students.

Due to the continued lack of publicity given to UK's program of desegregation, by 1963 most white Kentuckians were probably unaware, and probably could have cared

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[178] Sharon Childs Interview with Frank Graves Dickey, June 20, 1997, Louie Nunn Center for Oral History, Archives and Special Collections, University of Kentucky.
[179] For more on Dickey's last years at University of Kentucky, see Thomas Clark, *My Century in History,* 220.

even less, that some black students now lived in the dormitories, and those that followed Dickey's statements about the inevitability of the desegregation of the SEC probably thought such a move would be a long way off. Frank Dickey left the university in 1963 after expanding, ever so quietly, the desegregation of the formerly non-black institution. In an editorial printed after he had announced his resignation, the editors of the Lexington *Herald* said simply, "We wish him well in his new position, and trust the board will find as competent and loyal a successor as Dr. Dickey proved to be in his somewhat brief tenure as president." [180]

By 1963, however, competence and loyalty were not the only qualities being sought by search committees involved in choosing a university president. A president needed a thick skin, too, and above all the ability to deal with both a changing student population and new federal mandates dealing with race. He, for most presidents then were still male, needed to be a ring leader, a man who could deal with the foundations as well as the legislature, and he needed to be good at bringing in the money.

In the University of Kentucky's case, a successor was found who could both modernize and elevate the status of the state's flagship university, particularly in graduate education, removing dead weight where it existed. Dickey's replacement, a Minnesota native and California transplant named John Oswald, of the University of California system, held the UK presidency for only five years before ultimately leaving to head Penn State University, but one of his goals—and he had many—became continuing the process of desegregation at the University of Kentucky—of making a historically white southern land grant institution in the heart of the Bluegrass more accessible in its

[180] *Lexington Leader*, September 20, 1963, Clipping in Presidential Biographical File, Frank Dickey Papers, Archives and Special Collections, University of Kentucky.

offerings to black students. Oswald, not Dickey, became the president who ultimately presided over the desegregation of the UK football team, and it was he who reached out to the minority of black students who called UK home. But, Oswald was also aware that the Civil Rights Act of 1964 added not only moral legitimacy to his actions, but bore the legal imprint of the federal government as well. Oswald, who probably viewed UK as the sleeping giant on whom he, the builder, could bestow the modern university structure, was unaware that his forceful demeanor and quest to modernize a sleepy state university would place him at odds with the commonwealth's power structure including an openly hostile Republican governor and regional university presidents unwilling to play second fiddle in an orchestra directed by an outsider president.

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Chapter Five

John Wieland Oswald, the Desegregation of UK Athletics, Rap Sessions with Black Students, and a Proposed Merger with Kentucky State University

> It behooves us to consider in what other spheres we can make unique contributions.—John Oswald Inaugural Speech, 1963. [181]

Historian Alan Brinkley has argued that the "nation's most important domestic initiative in the 1960s was the effort to provide justice and equality to African-Americans."[182] By 1963, if not before, most whites in the United States could hardly ignore that quest for justice or the powerful momentum of the civil rights movement. A high point of that era took place on 28 August, in front of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington D.C., when the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. reminded 200,000 gathered spectators, the entire country—indeed much of the world—of his dream for the United States which included, among other things, racial parity in a nation that for years had claimed to embrace the principles of equality but had, in fact, failed to deliver on that promise to the majority of its black citizens.

King's words did not stop opposition to black progress, which was still rampant in many parts of the United States in the 1960s, especially in areas of the Deep South with a large black population. In addition to the murder of civil rights activist Medgar Evans in 1962, later, during "Freedom Summer" of 1964, there were the killings of college students James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner, who had gone to Mississippi to register black voters. Just a year before King's speech, John F. Kennedy, reluctantly, sent federal troops to the University of Mississippi at Oxford to uphold the

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[181] John Oswald Inaugural Speech, April 28, 1964. Copy in the John Oswald Presidential/Bio File, John Oswald Papers, Special Collections and Archives, University of Kentucky.
[182] Alan Brinkley, *The Unfinished Nation*: *A Concise History of the American People* (New York: McGraw Hill, 2000), 922.

federal desegregation order there, which in turn diminished the power of Governor Ross Barnett and ensured the safety of James Meredith, the school's first black student. Finally, the televised beating of a group of civil rights marchers on the Edmund Pettus bridge in Selma, Alabama, on 7 March 1965, sickened not only the nation but surely convinced even the most conservative whites there was no stopping the call for justice and equality.

In southern higher education, the prognosis for blacks was more optimistic. In the 1960s, for example, the last non-black state universities of the South capitulated to the national trend of desegregation and admitted, some under court order, black applicants. Though, in 1962, on the campus of the University of Mississippi, two men died following riots, and federal marshals had to remain on hand to protect black student James Meredith, at other schools racial change came easier. After the Ole Miss debacle, many schools were eager to remain out of the limelight and not repeat the mistakes of the Magnolia State. After much litigation, Clemson and the University of South Carolina finally admitted black students in 1963—reluctantly and with much litigation, but without violence and grandstanding politicians. In South Carolina, business leaders worked with both political elites and the university presidents to ensure no negative press at a time when the state was luring foreign investment. No George Wallace stood before the schoolhouse door in the Palmetto State.[183]

Desegregation had thus become, for many of the previously non-black state universities of the South, a *fait accompli*. The last of the non-black southern land grant institutions to admit black students quietly and without national press coverage was

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[183] Clemson University has been especially proud of the way it handled the admission of its first black student, Harvey Gantt. See Skip Eisiminger,editor, *Integration with Dignity* (Clemson University: Digital Press), 2003.

Mississippi State in Starkville in 1965, where President Dean Colvard, who believed in the racially inclusive motto of his alma mater, Berea College, took months preparing for a day he hoped would be as uneventful as it would be historic. One of the final colleges of the former Confederacy to desegregate, publicly supported Virginia Military Institute, enrolled its first black cadet in 1968.[184]

The last few private, previously non-black colleges and universities of the South were also desegregating. In Kentucky, most of the private colleges began desegregating in 1950, well before *Brown,* when the General Assembly amended the segregationist Day Law which prohibited schools in Kentucky from teaching blacks and whites together. A holdout had been Centre College in Danville, but before Thomas Spragens accepted the presidency of the Presbyterian school in 1957, he made it clear that there should be no racially exclusive policy in admissions. Centre finally admitted its first black student, from Ghana, in 1961.[185]

Elsewhere in the South, private traditionally white colleges began admitting blacks, too. Melissa Kean studied the elite private southern colleges of Emory, Rice, Vanderbilt, and Duke and argued that coercion and risk of censure from the foundations, along with faculties that voted with their feet, not litigation, forced many previously non-black colleges to admit the first black students. Sometimes the presidents of these private institutions were adamant that their institution be desegregated after *Brown,* but they had to reckon with their conservative boards of trustees. Such was the case of Rufus Harris who, when as president he could not desegregate Tulane University, accepted the presidency of his alma mater, Southern Baptist-controlled Mercer College in Macon,

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[184] Dean Colvard, *Mixed Emotions*: *As Racial Barriers Fell—A University President Remembers* (Danville, Illinois: Interstate Printers) 1985.
[185] "Desegregation of Centre College," *Centre Cyclopedia.* Web. October 15, 2012.

Georgia, and began planning the first phase of desegregation there which he accomplished in the autumn of 1963, when a black student from Ghana, Sam Oni, was able to attend that school after months of planning on the part of Harris and his advisors.[186] At the small liberal arts Berry College in Georgia, the president there executed the desegregation of his school in 1964, telling students, " It is better to face change and to get on with the job at hand than to be caught in the web of floundering resistance."[187]

In Lexington, Kentucky, two months after George Wallace's infamous stand at the school house door in Alabama, and three days after the aforementioned King speech, President Frank Dickey's successor, John Wieland Oswald, moved into his office in the historic Administration Building overlooking Limestone Street on 1 September 1963, where, fourteen years earlier, a cross had been burned on the front campus following the admission of the first black graduate students, including Louisville schoolteacher Lyman T. Johnson. John Oswald would bring new perspectives on the complex subject of race. While the university's structural foundations did not collapse when the first black students arrived in the summer of 1949, the arrival of John Oswald was about to produce seismic activity unheard of on the normally staid campus. No longer would there be business as usual at an institution some jokingly referred to as the "Country Club of the South."

The first outsider to lead UK since President Frank McVey arrived in 1917, John Oswald intended to modernize and elevate the status of Kentucky's flagship university. Although historian William Ellis points out that Oswald's selection marked the first time

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[186] Will D. Campbell, *The Stem of Jesse: The Costs of Community at a 1960's Southern School* (Macon: Mercer University Press), 1995.
[187] Samuel P. Wiggins, *The Desegregation Era in Higher Education* (Berkeley: McCutchan, 1966), 51.

a UK president was chosen without political interference from Frankfort, Kentucky, politicians, Governor Bert Combs, who sat on the Board of Trustees, did indeed play a role in Oswald's selection and admitted to it later.[188] The former governor recalled, "I took some heat from some of my friends for recommending Oswald. But UK needed a fresh face, and a man of Oswald's caliber."[189]

The committee in charge of the selection of Frank Dickey's successor moved fast on the appointment of a new president. It was too fast for some. UK professor and committee member, historian Thomas D. Clark, concerned the search committee made a hasty decision with its choice, spoke with Oswald in California before the latter began his job as university president and reported that the president-elect "was bubbling over with plans for remaking the University of Kentucky. I got the impression he wanted to clone a new institution from the loins of the University of California."[190] Oswald might not have wanted to create a carbon copy of Berkeley, but he was interested in change on a massive scale.

By the time Oswald arrived at UK in 1963, the essentials for a great university were certainly in place, especially now that the university had its own hospital and medical school, a system of community colleges sending students to UK, and now that it had a nine year established tradition of admitting all qualified students irrespective of color. Most importantly, funding from the normally parsimonious Kentucky legislature had also increased by the time Oswald came to Lexington. This important fact did not escape University of California chancellor Clark Kerr, who reminded the audience at

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[188] William Ellis, *History of Education in Kentucky* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2011), 375.
[189] John Ed Pearce, *Divide and Dissent* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1987), 212.
[190] For an interesting account of the Oswald years by one who experienced it firsthand, see Thomas Clark *My Century in History* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2006), 223.

Oswald's inauguration in 1964, "…during the fiscal period from 1961 to 1963 Kentucky ranked second highest in the nation in the percentage increase in state tax support for higher education."[191]

Though the trustees had given the new president carte blanche to make the needed changes at UK, Lexington, the university's home, had not resolved all of its racial inequities. What, if anything, John Oswald knew about the city's lingering racial issues is unknown, but certainly he understood the effects of segregation from his experience as a serviceman in Mobile, Alabama, during World War II. Too, his wife Rose, who grew up in Birmingham, Alabama, knew the South's racial caste system in her youth. The Lexington to which the Oswald family arrived in 1963 was growing in size, but it was far from an open community. Because of this, as in other parts of the South, blacks had begun to become more vocal in their demand for rights in this Upper South city.

While Lexington had achieved the token desegregation of its public schools, just a few years earlier, it had been no different from any southern city with restaurants that would not serve blacks, neighborhoods that were off-limits, and stores which did not permit blacks to try on clothing. There had been little violence, however, and by late 1963, a citizens' advisory board formed to improve race relations and the city had elected its first black city councilman. Slowly, most businesses were opening to black customers, but just a month before Oswald took office, black citizens protested employment discrimination at the local Sears retailer on 2 August, and on 30 August, two days before he started work at UK, 250 political activists protested the continued

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[191] Clark Kerr, *Greetings*, A copy of the speech given at the inauguration of John Wieland Oswald is in the John Oswald Presidential Biographical File, Special Collections and Archives, John Oswald Papers, University of Kentucky.

publication of "Colored Notes," the section of the local newspaper, the *Herald,* which dealt with black issues and one the black city leaders had long asked the editors to retire.[192]

Born in 1917 in Minneapolis, the son of a University of Minnesota professor of agriculture who later edited a seed magazine, John Oswald attended the public schools of LaGrange, Illinois, in suburban Chicago, studied at both DePauw College in Greencastle, Indiana, where he was a member of Phi Kappa Psi fraternity and played football, and at the University of California, where he later received his Ph.D. in botany in 1942. A member of Phi Beta Kappa, who had been the recipient of a Fulbright grant, Oswald, after serving in the Navy during World War II, returned to the laboratory and discovered, in 1951, the Barley Yellow Dwarf, a pest responsible for disease in cereals.[193]

By 1958, John Oswald the scientist and plant pathologist had become John Oswald the administrator, rising to a top position as vice president of administration at the University of California–Berkeley, where he was heavily influenced by the ideas of his boss, Chancellor Clark Kerr, the author of the widely read volume, *The Multiversity,* who, as mentioned, spoke at Oswald's UK inauguration in 1964. After coming to Lexington in 1963 with his wife and three children, Oswald developed a plan for the university, according to Ellis "in which UK would be the centerpiece, controlling research as well as the community colleges, with the regional colleges mainly offering undergraduate work."[194]

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[192] Gerald Smith, *Black America Series: Lexington, Kentucky* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2002), 250.

[193] For biographical information John Oswald, see the John Oswald Presidential/Bio Files, John Oswald Papers, Special Collections and Archives, University of Kentucky.

[194] Ellis, *History of Education in Kentucky*, 375.

Over the next five years, Oswald's unfamiliarity with Kentucky ways and his tampering with UK's institutional structures ruffled more than a few feathers as the new president pushed quickly to modernize the university. It seemed that every move, from his building proposals to his emphasis on scholarly productivity was watched by the public. And the public did not always like what it saw. Among the various changes, Oswald instituted a system of rotating chairs in the various university departments that had been discussed in the Dickey administration. He removed the powerful dean of the College of Education, Lyman Ginger. He closed the University Training School, and he sought to build on the system of community colleges established under Frank Dickey which he hoped would send their (best) graduates to the state's flagship institution. Some of these changes caused Oswald to butt heads with the presidents of Kentucky's regional universities and professors and department heads who felt threatened by his emphasis on research, expansion, or who considered their departments personal "fiefdoms."

One who had his department head title taken from him was none other than historian Thomas D. Clark, who, years earlier, had been called in to testify during UK's first desegregation lawsuit and, after the University lost its case, sat down with black Ph.D. student Lyman T. Johnson to explain what would be expected of him as a doctoral student in history. Clark was also the same professor who berated his white students for their treatment of black student George Logan after they refused to be seated in a classroom with a black student. After he lost his position as department head, Clark became a visiting professor at Indiana University, where he taught classes and later completed the university's multi-volume institutional history at the personal invitation of Elvis Stahr, the Kentucky native, UK alumnus, and former dean of the UK Law School,

who was forced to testify during the Lyman Johnson trial about the University of Kentucky's makeshift law school. Later, Oswald was said to have acknowledged making a big mistake in removing Clark as head of the history department.[195] Thomas Clark was probably one of many who found it difficult to forgive Oswald for the way he got things done.[196]

In the 1960s, most university presidents at predominantly white colleges and institutions in the South could not have overlooked the national turning point in race relations even if they wanted to. Their reactions were varied, however.[197] Some presidents of schools where token desegregation had occurred appeared blind to the growing dissatisfaction of black students, others ignored their presence, and others allowed segregationist governors to delay desegregation and tamper with university affairs, risking the censure of the accrediting agencies. At Ole Miss, for example, former president Frank Dickey's colleague from the College of Education, UK alumnus J. D. Williams, was criticized by some for his handling of the admission of James Meredith, the school's first black student. In fact, one of Williams' correspondents berated him in 1963 after he gave a speech in which the president compared himself to a "sparrow caught in a badminton court," reminding him that a university president was no average citizen and that "one of the obligations of the educated is to lead." The correspondent further scolded Williams by saying "History will judge you by your inaction, your abdication of the heroic role of the educational leader."[198]

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[195] John Kleber, editor. *Thomas D Clark of Kentucky: An Uncommon Life in the Commonwealth* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2003), John Ed Pearce, *Divide and Dissent*, 101.
[196] Clark, *My Century in History*, 221-224, 240-242.
[197] See Sam Wiggins; *The Desegregation Era in Higher Education* for more information on the racial changes at southern schools and how presidents reacted to them in the 1960s.
[198] M. A. Wright to J. D. Williams, March 20, 1963. J. D. Williams Papers, Archives and Special Collections, University of Mississippi.

For his part, John Wieland Oswald was not the kind of president about to abdicate the "heroic role of educational leader." Before taking the job at UK, Oswald most likely inquired about, or was told, how advanced the university was in its program of desegregation, and he was no doubt pleased he entered a desegregated institution where opposition to the presence of black students had been minimal. Oswald undoubtedly was also aware that Governor Bert Combs had issued an historic executive order on 26 June 1963, banning discrimination in public accommodations in businesses used by the state. By Mississippi standards, at least, Kentucky was quite advanced in its program of desegregation, and Oswald was eager to engineer its next phase.

The new president seemed to have developed, early on, a plan to reach out to blacks at the UK—something his predecessors were not known to have done. As the former president told his interviewer, Terry Birdwhistell, in 1987, "Well, I felt the University should certainly make some kind of major effort with respect to minorities."[199] Oswald may have been unaware of the opposition Governor Combs faced from his foes including former governor Albert "Happy" Chandler, who called the executive order an "illegal act," and from future governor Louie B. Nunn, who as Tracy Campbell tells it, appeared on television surrounded by the Bible and the American flag declaring that his first order of business, if he were to be elected governor, would be to rescind that order.[200] But, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 certainly gave university presidents the green light for proactive measures with regard to the inclusion and recruitment of black students.

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[199] John Oswald, interview with Terry Birdwhistell, August 11, 1987 Faculty/Staff Oral History UK Special Collections and Digital Programs, University of Kentucky.
[200] Tracy Campbell, *Short of Glory: The Fall and Redemption of Ed Prichard Jr* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1998), 222-223.

With the traffic light now on a government imposed "green," the time had come for action, although because UK was still relatively far advanced in its program of desegregation when compared to other universities in the South, there was little external pressure put on it to change. But change was about to happen on a wide scale in this border state. For example, in 1966, two years after Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. led a march on Frankfort, the state capital, and concurrent with Oswald's presidency, Governor Ned Breathitt garnered the support he needed to pass one of the most comprehensive civil rights bills in the South. For those with their eyes open, it was apparent both the governor and the university's president were on the same page when it came to racial progress.

Though Oswald never recalled speaking publicly on the subject of desegregation, his administration was characterized by several firsts in that area: the hiring of the first black faculty, the recruitment of the first black football players, the first presidential discussion of a merger between the historically black Kentucky State College and the historically white UK, the first documented meeting of a white UK president with a group of concerned black students, and the first serious attempt by a UK president to convince legendary basketball coach Adolf Rupp that the time had come to change policy and recruit black basketball players. Of all these initiatives, Oswald's desire to desegregate the school's athletic programs took center stage.

At his inauguration on 28 April 1964, John Oswald gave a speech called "Bridging Two Centuries" in which he acknowledged that "man" [*sic*] faced several problems including freeing "himself of the prejudices that have survived in the American scene to this point." Sitting in the audience were his predecessors, the first two men to

deal with the admission of black students, Frank Graves Dickey and Herman Lee Donovan. They certainly must have asked themselves if Oswald may have been making a veiled reference to UK's past practice of racial exclusion when he mentioned the prejudices that man had failed to eradicate. Towards the end of his speech, after Oswald mentioned Kentucky's status as a border state, he told the assembled guests that "It behooves us to consider in what other spheres we can make unique contributions."[201] Peter Wallenstein argued that by 1964, with regard to desegregation, "the major hurdles had been leveled," but "other obstacles continued to loom."[202] At Kentucky's flagship university, one of the remaining obstacles was its athletic program, which remained non-black in 1964, the year the Civil Rights Act became law.

Thus began John Wieland Oswald's quest to oversee the integration of UK-Southeastern Conference (SEC) football. Interestingly, while the popular press seems to understand that Kentucky was the first SEC state to integrate its football program, in the more recent scholarly literature, Oswald's role in the desegregation of UK's football program has been overlooked. For example, Lane Demas' recent text *Integrating the Gridiron* makes no mention of the first black recruits to Kentucky or Oswald's role in bring these athletes to campus, and he gives the University of Kentucky a mere two citations. In one, Demas incorrectly writes that "As late as 1966, no African-American

[201] Helen Deiss Irvin, *A Pictorial History of the University of Kentucky* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1965), 101.
[202] Peter Wallenstein editor, *Higher Education and the Civil Rights Movement: White Supremacy, Black Southerners, and College Campuses* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2008), 229.

student participated on any sport team in the Southeastern Conference."[203] What Dumas failed to note was that by 1966 the University of Kentucky, an SEC conference team, had two black football players on its freshman team.

What exactly had been the hold up? Why should there have been an issue with blacks and whites playing against each other on the gridiron in the first place? If administrators at predominantly white schools had done everything in their power to keep blacks at segregated schools, opposition to the desegregation of athletic teams should come as no surprise. As Charles Martin theorized, "For whites to compete against an African American, even for a few hours on the football field, would constitute racial equality and thus violate the natural order of white supremacy and black subjugation."[204]

Of Oswald, basketball coach Adolf Rupp remarked, "Now, he was more interested in integration here, than in anything else."[205] True or not, it was Oswald who turned former president Dickey's words about the inevitability of the desegregation of the Southeastern Conference (SEC) into an imperative, and having a governor who supported his plan certainly helped. During the Oswald presidency in 1965, the UK football program witnessed the signing of the first black recruits. By the time Oswald arrived, it was clear that Kentucky fans wanted, in addition to their outstanding basketball program, a good football team, and though his constituents bucked him on many other programs, the desegregation of college football at UK took place with minimal controversy and little criticism.

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[203] Lane Demas, *Integrating the Gridiron: Black Civil Rights and American College Football* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2010), 3.
[204] Charles Martin, *Hold that (Color) Line: Black Exclusion and the Southeastern Conference Football* in Peter Wallenstein's, *Higher Education and the Civil Rights Movement,* 166-167.
[205] Adolf Rupp, interview with Russell Rice, October 28, 1971. Web. Accessed October 15, 2012.

This recruitment of black football players was a joint effort between the new governor, Ned Breathitt, a racial progressive and a UK graduate himself, Oswald, and Coach Charlie Bradshaw. In an interview, Russell Rice claims that John Oswald offered Bradshaw a job for life if he found a black player.[206] Finally, two black players, both Kentuckians, Nathaniel "Nat" Northington of Louisville and Greg Page of Middlesboro, were recruited to play football at UK in 1965 for the upcoming season, thus breaking the color barrier in the SEC and sending a message to other institutions the time for change was at hand. During Northington's signing, at which Oswald was present along with Governor Breathitt, the president remarked that this was "a great and historic day for Kentucky, its athletic program, and for the Southeastern Conference."[207] Interestingly, in 2012, Northington gave an interview and discussed his days at UK, and though he mentions Governor Breathitt, he made no mention of President Oswald, suggesting that Northington's coming was more the doing of Governor Breathitt. Still, if Rupp was correct that Oswald cared about integration above all else, the signing of Northington surely must have been a highpoint of his UK presidency.

Unfortunately, tragedy soon overshadowed the significance of the signing of UK's first black football players. During one of Coach Bradshaw's brutal game practices on a hot August day in 1967, sophomore black player and defense lineman Greg Page, just nineteen years old, was severely injured after a pile-up.[208] After he was given mouth-to-mouth resuscitation, Page was rushed to the UK Medical Center, where a tracheotomy

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[206] David Wharton, *The Great Barrier,* Los Angeles Times, September 3, 2004. Web. October 15, 2012.
[207] Charles Martin, *Hold that Color Line: Southeastern Conference Football,* Peter Wallenstein, editor, 174.
[208] Ibid., 166-198.

was performed to facilitate breathing. At the hospital, doctors determined Page was paralyzed from the shoulders down. The prognosis seemed bleak, and rumors circulated that Page may have been intentionally hurt.

As president, Oswald must have felt a deep sense of guilt over Page's injury, for just three years earlier, in 1964, he had absolved Coach Charlie Bradshaw of "unduly rough practice" after several players were hurt in a practice session. At the time, the President also added that he was "taking all the steps necessary to see that set of events" did not repeat itself."[209] While in the hospital, Page, who was conscious and able to listen to both radio and television, was visited by both Oswald and Charlie Bradshaw. On 21 September, Oswald wrote Page a letter in which he said, "When things look dark and I grow discouraged over the many problems which seem to be with me continually, I have only to stop and think of your courage and optimism and I can get things in their proper perspective."[210] Just eight days later, Greg Page died of his injuries.

At Page's funeral in his native Middlesboro, Kentucky, both Oswald and Governor Breathitt served as pallbearers, and in a memorial service held on 1 October, Oswald told those assembled. "We deplore the freak accident that happened; we are crushed that the injury was final…The University of Kentucky is grateful for the time Greg Page was here."[211] Any sense of gain Oswald had felt at the recruitment of black

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[209] Oswald Absolves Bradshaw of Unduly Rough Practice" *Courier Journal* 10-30-64 Copy in Presidential Biographical files, University of Kentucky, Special Collections and Archives.

[210] John Oswald to Greg Page, September 21, 1967, Box 7, John Oswald Papers, Athletics, Folder 242, UK Special Collections and Archives, University of Kentucky.

[211] Oswald Papers, Box 7, Athletic Files, John Oswald Papers, UK Special Collections and Archives, University of Kentucky.

players was undoubtedly diminished by the young athlete's death. On the one hand, the president had pushed the boundaries of desegregation to UK athletics, but the death of Greg Page cast its shadow over the entire football program.

As Charles Martin notes, 30 September 1967 was not a day that most Kentucky fans cared to remember. Not only did UK lose the football game to rival Ole Miss 26-13, but it was also the day after Greg Page died from the injuries received in practice more than a month earlier. Nevertheless, the day was also an historic one for the university and one of the team's players. Though black football player Nat Northington played only briefly due to a shoulder injury, he "became the first African-American ever to compete in a varsity football game in the Southeastern Conference."[212] Oswald's vision for a desegregated conference had become reality. The president and the governor had carefully scripted social change in the previously all-white SEC, and UK proved to be the leader other SEC schools would be compelled to follow. Oswald had completed another phase of the desegregation process at UK.

Though the SEC was now desegregated, things went from bad to worse after Nat Northington, who had suffered repeated shoulder injuries, left the team shortly after Page's death. "I've got to leave, but ya'll need to carry on" he told the two other black players on the squad, Houston Hogg and Wilbur Hackett. While fully aware of the history he and teammate Greg Page had made on the football field, Northington also recalled in 2012 his sense of isolation after Page's injury, saying "for the next 38 days, it was like I was all alone."[213] Whether John Oswald checked in on the distraught athlete is unknown, but in spite of Northington's decision to leave UK (he later transferred to

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[212] Charles Martin, page 173 in Wallenstein *Higher Education and the Civil Rights Movement.*
[213] Interview with Nat Northington. YouTube, Commonwealth Network Web. October 15, 2012.

Western Kentucky University), blacks remained on the UK football team and new recruits followed. Kentuckians, for the most part, took racial change on the gridiron in stride at a time when at the University of Georgia, outgoing University of Georgia President O. C. Aderhold, who years earlier had worked to thwart the admission of black applicants Charlayne Hunter Gault and Hamilton Holmes, lectured the Georgia Athletic Association on why Georgia sports could not be kept all white.[214]

If Oswald was able to desegregate football at UK, the basketball program would have to wait until 1969 to see its first black recruit. Strangely enough, even northern schools like Indiana University in Bloomington, which for years had black players on its football teams, long practiced discrimination when it came to basketball. Legendary Indiana president Herman Wells, who assumed office in 1933, discussed in his memoir that "there was some kind of mumbo jumbo about the fact that the sport included too much bodily contact to mix the races." But only when Wells was approached by some black friends of his from Indianapolis did the university and Coach Branch McCracken agree to take a black basketball player in 1948 which allowed Indiana to become the first of the Big 10 schools to desegregate its basketball team.[215]

Years later, Oswald recalled the problematic relationship he had with UK basketball coach Adolf Rupp, whom he described as sounding like a "bigot" after Oswald approached him about recruiting blacks to play basketball at UK.[216] At the beginning of the Oswald presidency both Rupp and assistant coach Harry Lancaster were concerned

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[214] Thomas Dyer *The University of Georgia: A Bicentennial History 1785-198 (*Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1985), 334.
[215] Herman B. Wells, *Being Lucky* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 217.
[216] John Oswald, interview with Terry Birdwhistell, 1995, Special Collections and Digital Programs University of Kentucky. For an altogether different take on Adolf Rupp's attitude towards race that contradicts both Oswald and Lancaster, see Dick Gabriel's *Adolf Rupp: Myth Legend and Fact*, 2005. Web. October 15, 2012.

about what the new president's arrival meant for the university and their basketball program. In his book *Adolf Rupp as I Knew Him,* Lancaster wrote "…We were both concerned he (Oswald) was going to turn the university into a graduate school…We thought we would have the players for about two years then they would be in graduate school." According to Lancaster, Rupp was getting heat from Oswald to recruit blacks and the despondent coach told him "Harry, that son of a bitch is asking me to get some niggers [*sic*] in here. What am I gonna do? He's the boss."[217] Rupp also claimed that Oswald wanted black basketball players who also could meet UK's tougher entrance standards, but that Rupp was worried that if he did not recruit the best black players, he would be criticized if they were not allowed to get play time. When Rupp did not produce a black recruit as Oswald desired, he claims that president said, "Well, I'm going to tell you what I'm going to do. I'm going to demand that you get some colored [*sic*] boys. … You're keeping us from getting the federal help, which amounts to some eleven million dollars."[218]

In fairness, Rupp, who took a beating for his all-white basketball team by 1966, did make several attempts to recruit black basketball players. For example, in a letter to athletic director Bernie Shively, Adolf Rupp discussed the recruitment of black basketball player Felix Thruston, whom Rupp and Coach Lancaster visited in Thruston's hometown of Owensboro, Kentucky, on 11 July 1967. Rupp described Thruston as an athlete who was "modest" and added "I am sure will be an asset to our basketball program." Later, Thruston changed his mind about attending UK, deciding instead to attend Trinity

[217] Harry Lancaster, *Adolf Rupp as I Knew Him* (Lexington: Host Publications, 1979), 88.
[218] Adolf Rupp, interview with Russell Rice, October 28, 1971, Charles Wethington/University of Kentucky Oral History Collection, Web, October 15, 2012.

University in Texas before being signing with the Milwaukee Bucks in 1971.[219] One thing that Rupp could not promise his recruits or their families was that the first black basketball player on the UK team would not face harassment at away games in the Deep South.

Ultimately, Oswald entered the recruiting process himself, as he did with the football program, and approached Wes Unseld to play basketball at UK. The president travelled with Harry Lancaster to Louisville, but the meeting ended with Unseld deciding to stay in Louisville. Oswald admitted that during the course of their conversations about UK, Unseld did not make any comments about Rupp, who once said he only wanted the very best black players on the team lest they get bench time. Oswald also claimed that because of his efforts to bring in blacks to UK he was called "a nigger [*sic*] lover" by Rupp. By the 1967 academic year, however, it was clear Oswald had bigger problems and the already unpopular president, now being condemned by the newspapers, realized that he had other, more important battles. For a southern school that had desegregated its graduate school in 1949, the desegregation of its basketball team came at almost the same time as did in the schools of the Deep South. Finally, Tom Payne desegregated the basketball team in 1969, the same year that the University of South Carolina, which desegregated in 1963, added black player Casey Manning.[220] Even the most conservative of the Southern schools, Ole Miss, recruited a black player just one year after Kentucky, when Coolidge Ball arrived in 1970.[221]

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[219] Adolf Rupp to Bernie Shively, July 14, 1967, Copy in John Oswald Papers, Box 247, UK Special Collections and Archives, University of Kentucky.
[220] Lesesne, Harry, *A History of the University of South Carolina 1940-2000* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2000), 150.
[221] David Sansing, *The University of Mississippi: A Sesquicentennial History* (Oxford: University Press of Mississippi, 2002), 324.

Aside from his success in desegregating the UK football team, another John Oswald first involved attending rap sessions with black students and listening to their concerns. Helen Horowitz observed, "As calls within the black community shifted from integration to Black Power, the concerns of black undergraduates came on campus."[222] What was happening at UK was part of a new national consciousness on the part of black students, and they were ready to lay claim to the campus that had banned them from admission until 1949. As a president who had come from the University of California at Berkeley, Oswald knew not to wait until the pot of discontent boiled over.

Ignored for the most part by Donovan and Dickey, UK's black students had become more aware of the dangers of isolation and began holding meetings among themselves. UK students of all social backgrounds began holding the so-called "Bitch-Ins," pictures of which can be found in the 1968 *Kentuckian*, to express their frustration on a number of social issues. If Oswald was going to push for the recruitment of black athletes, he could not, with a clear conscience, overlook the concerns of the black students whose sole reason for being on campus was strictly academic.

By 1967, UK's small number of black students had formed their own social group called *Orgena*.[223] The group's unusual name was actually "A Negro" spelled backwards, and formed as successor group to the campus human rights committee. *Orgena* began to discuss off-campus housing discrimination, the possibility of opening a chapter of black fraternities and sororities, and the recruitment of more black students. In 1968, the president, realizing that the group might have legitimate concerns, decided to meet with

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[222] Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, *Campus Life: Undergraduate Cultures from the End of the Eighteenth Century to the Present* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 241.
[223] For more information on *Orgena*, see Fosl and K'Meyer. *Freedom on the Border: An Oral History of the Civil Rights Movement* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2009), 198-201.

the black students. *Orgena* changed its name to the Black Student Union shortly after the death of Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr.

Oswald wanted to be prepared for his meeting with the members of *Orgena* and consulted with his vice-president of student affairs, Robert Johnson, who sent the president a detailed memorandum on the subject on 15 February 1968. Johnson advised Oswald not to "let the students indulge in generalities" and added "They love to commiserate among themselves, and heaven knows they have a right to do so, but their commiseration frequently has flights of fancy. When and if they make allegations, I would suggest you ask if they have filed any specific complaints." Johnson also advised Oswald to be able to discuss "the paucity of qualified Negroes on the staff and among the faculty."[224]

Although no transcripts exist from these sessions, Oswald must have prepared well for them. These meetings were recalled years later by former students, including Chester Grundy, who served as director of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Cultural Center until he was laid off in a cost saving plan in 2012. Grundy said that President Oswald attended meetings of *Orgena,* later called the BSU, and that he listened to the concerns of black students. Grundy recalled, "You know he (Oswald) knew what we were facing and it was never unusual for him like to appear at a Black Student Union meeting…And he, in his own way, opened doors for us…"[225]

Unaware, perhaps, of the praise he received from some of the former leaders of the BSU, Oswald felt no need to embellish his record with black students and in 1987

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[224] Robert Johnson to John Oswald, February 15, 1968, Copy in Civil Rights Files, Box 2, 1967-1968, John Oswald Papers, Special Collections and Archives, University of Kentucky.
[225] Chester Grundy, interview with Betsy Brinson, June 23, 1999, Civil Rights in Kentucky, Oral History Project. Web. Accessed October 15, 2012.

admitted, "But I'd be wrong if I said I had a specific program designed to attract more black students (to UK)." He admitted that in that era most people thought along the line that the university is now open to all who wish to attend, so why go out and recruit? The Black Student Union later worked on its own to attract black students and to offer academic help to the students already on campus and, after the assassination of Dr. King, established scholarships in King's name. In May of 1968, Oswald reflected on his work with the *Orgena*, then called the BSU. "I have enjoyed working with the BSU and I hope we have made some progress." Oswald reassured the group that there was no "opposition within the institution in matters of race relations."[226] Of course, the inability to land a black basketball player did not dispel the fact that many black students felt the athletic department was guilty of perpetuating racism. What progress had been made was largely due to the mobilization of the black students themselves who applied pressure to an administration willing to listen to their concerns.

One of the more unusual of Oswald's ideas involved his plans for Kentucky State University, the commonwealth's publicly supported historically black college. At one point, Oswald, in his zealousness to build an academic empire and consolidate, proposed a merger of the traditionally black school in Frankfort and UK. He felt that UK would have benefitted from the exchange of faculty and discussed the matter with Dr. Carl Hill, the school's president. This happened at the time when there was also discussion of the University of Louisville merging with UK.

Once word of Oswald's ideas got out, the suggestion of a merger did not resonate with the black community or KSU alumni and was quickly tabled. Oswald held meetings

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[226] "BSU Phone-In Raises Questions" Liz Ward, *Kentucky Kernel*, May 1, 1968. Presidential/Bio File, John Oswald Papers, Special Collections and Archives, University of Kentucky.

with members of the black community in Frankfort and Lexington, "and I was told to keep my hands off of Kentucky State, that they did not want to lose their black identity, that Kentucky State would soon pass out of existence if U.K. took over."[227] Undoubtedly, Dr. Carl Hill, for whom Oswald had much respect, understood well that his powers would have been usurped and one of the state's remaining schools for blacks would have been lost, had KSU been swallowed up in a merger with UK. The black community undoubtedly had unpleasant memories associated with the closing of Louisville Municipal College, which shut its doors after the University of Louisville desegregated in 1950, and black leaders were not eager to see Kentucky State swallowed up by the University of Kentucky.

Though Oswald had no control over it, it was during his administration that the first black faculty members came. The first was sociologist Dr. Joseph Scott, who arrived in 1965. Shortly thereafter came Doris Wilkinson, also a sociologist, who was a native of Lexington and one of the first black undergraduates. Another black professor, Dr. George Hill worked in the Department of Biochemistry and contacted both dean of student affairs Dr. Robert Johnson and Oswald about some of his concerns regarding housing and the recruitment of minorities in 1968. Hill complained that his letters had not been answered and urged a meeting. If that meeting ever occurred, there was no record of in the civil rights files Oswald kept.

Oswald said he did not recall specifically being approached to recruit black faculty, and that he often got that era confused with his last fifteen years at Penn State. In fact, Oswald had to be reminded by interviewer Terry Birdwhistell that the first black

[227] John Oswald, interview with Terry Birdwhistell, UK Special Collections and Digital Programs, University of Kentucky, 1987.

faculty members were hired in 1965. Clearly, the choice to recruit Scott and Wilkinson was a departmental one, with the president's office playing no role. For many institutions, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 probably served as an impetus for hiring black faculty, but the President by then had long relinquished the role of hiring faculty. In hiring black faculty, the formerly non-black universities were proving that a more diverse professoriate was needed in light of the changing composition of the American college campus.

As his career at UK neared its end, John Oswald chaired a committee to obtain funding for a Lexington branch of the national Urban League, which at that time was headed by Kentucky native Whitney Young, a graduate of Kentucky State who was one of many promising black men who had been denied access to UK because of their skin color. Though Lexington had a branch of the NAACP, the Urban League lacked presence in the Bluegrass. To acquire funding for an office and a field representative, Dr. Oswald used the weight of his office and teamed up with Shelby Kinkead, the former mayor, and black city commissioner Harry Sykes. Oswald considered the center's start date of Lincoln's birthday particularly appropriate. The president's participation was most likely a mixture of genuine interest and a desire to foster good relations with the Lexington black community. Just ten years earlier, such a well-publicized move by a white UK president might have been thought politically risky.[228]

In April of 1968, just days before Dr. King's death, John Oswald announced his decision to leave UK. According to former history professor Tom Clark, Oswald is reported to have told future president and historian A. D. Kirwan he did not have a friend

[228] "Urban League Fund Drive Gets Underway Monday." *Lexington Herald-Leader,* February 11, 1968. Copy in John Oswald Presidential/Biographical File, John Oswald Papers, UK Special Collections and Archives, University of Kentucky.

left in Kentucky. The resignation came during a time of national social upheaval that confused many Americans, and with Richard Nixon soon to be President, it was clear a more conservative political leadership had begun to appeal to a majority of white Americans. Clearly, Oswald wondered what was ahead for the commonwealth after the election of Republican governor Louie B. Nunn, who ran against the ideas of Lyndon Johnson and had promised to crack down on unrest at the university. Governor Louie B. Nunn, in overestimating his powers, had even said that he was uncertain whether or not he would keep Oswald as head of the University, but in an interview with Dr. Rick Smoot, Oswald said the primary reason for leaving UK had to nothing do with Nunn but with the serious health issues experienced by his wife Rose, and that he needed to remove her from the "front line."[229]

Though John Oswald's career at UK was brief, spanning just five years, the president began a dialog between black students and the President's office. Different from his predecessors, Herman Lee Donovan and Frank Dickey, Oswald did not ignore the presence of black students; he acknowledged this constituency and listened to their concerns. Social change had become tangible at UK during the Oswald presidency. Gone forever were the days when a white university president instructed his staff to tell black students to "keep away from social programs" and "work out their own social life with their own people." No longer would a white university president refer to desegregation as an "experiment." Less than twenty years earlier, Herman Lee Donovan had also instructed his deans of students to meet with each incoming black student to

[229] John Oswald, interview with Rick Smoot, November 1985, UK Faculty/Staff Interviews, UK Special Collections and Archives, University of Kentucky. Web. October 15, 2015.

discuss with them "problems of living and conduct that might call for adjustment."[230] Now it was a white UK president who told his athletic coaches to modify their behavior and recruit black athletes. By 1968 black students, partially with the help of a sympathetic president, had carved out a niche, albeit a small one, on the same campus where, two decades earlier, President Herman Lee Donovan and his Board of Trustees had done all they could to stall their enrollment.

If we return to Alan Brinkley's contention that in the 1960s the most compelling issue was bringing equality and justice to black Americans, we see that Oswald attempted to do just that. Particularly in athletics, he used the power of his office to do what needed to be done: he ensured blacks had the right to play competitive athletics at UK: namely by opening up UK and the SEC to talented black players in football, while at the same time putting pressure on legendary Coach Adolf Rupp to recruit black players as well. Although that historic change on the football field was marred by the death of black player and native Kentuckian Greg Page, the doors had been propped open for future black athletes.

Missteps were certainly a part of the process of expanding desegregation at UK. Few would dispute that Oswald made a huge mistake by suggesting a merger of UK with the historically black college Kentucky State in Frankfort. Oswald's consolidation plan, which he assumed made bigger better, though well intentioned, would have erased the history and legacy of the first state funded school for blacks. Founded in 1889, at a time when black students were prohibited by law from attending UK, Kentucky State's closing would have robbed the black community of a sense of history, eroded black leadership in

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[230] Herman Lee Donovan, *Keeping the University Free and Growing* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1959), 99-100.

the Kentucky state university system, and erased the name of Kentucky's first public black college founded under the terms of the Second Morrill Land Grant. Finally, John Oswald could have done more to recruit blacks to UK, where the number of black students remained painfully low during his tenure. The lack of black students at UK would pose trouble in the years ahead.

Some involved with UK were no doubt relieved that the president had decided to return to California, while others regarded Oswald's departure as a loss. Never an Oswald fan, Adolf Rupp explained, "There were some who felt he was doing a great job from an academic standpoint. There were others, and a great majority of them, that absolutely despised him."[231] Former Governor Ned Breathitt said, "He ventilated the institution." although he admitted "a lot of it didn't go over very well."[232] The *Courier Journal*, always a supporter, opined, "He created a spirit of excitement and challenge, opened new opportunities for vigorous minds…"[233] Whatever the UK community felt about the former president soon became irrelevant, for within two years Oswald, who at first returned to the University of California as vice president, was recruited to lead the larger Penn State University in State College, where he secured that school's entry into the Big Ten and set it on a course to become a major research institution. Oswald, who later returned to Lexington to be honored with a building in his name and an honorary degree, finished his career at Penn State, and died in 1995 of heart failure at his home in Philadelphia's Chestnut Hill.

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[231] Adolf Rupp, interview with Russell Rice 28 October 1971. Web. Accessed October 15, 2012.
[232] Clipping from Louisville *Courier Journal* 2/3/1995, John Oswald Presidential Biographical File, UK Special Collections and Archives, University of Kentucky.
[233] "We lose more than one man with the departure of Oswald." *Courier Journal*, Editorial, April 4, 1968, Copy in John Oswald Presidential/Biographical File, John Oswald Papers, Special Collections and Archives, University of Kentucky.

Only five years before his death, John Oswald joked in a letter to his former colleague at UK, Douglas Schwartz, then President of the School of American Research in New Mexico, about his UK presidency, "I am certain we were a bit brash in those days, but we got things done, didn't we?"[234] Oswald did, in fact, get things done, and part of his overlooked legacy included not simply the desegregation of UK's football team, but presidential support for a more inclusive climate for black students. Transylvania University historian John Wright argued that "Oswald's policies were designed to bring the University of Kentucky into the forefront of southern universities."[235] When it came to racial progress, the "brash" president did not fail in this area.

To ensure no further dramatic changes at the University of Kentucky, the trustees appointed an interim president with deep roots at UK. In what has been termed the "caretaker presidency," UK historian A. D. Kirwan became acting president of the school he once served as coach, dean of men, professor of history, and dean of the graduate school. Now it was Kirwan who would have to deal with the more radical students, their demands, and their concerns, while at the same time overseeing the daily functions of UK and maintaining the law and order style platform demanded by the new Republican governor, Louie B. Nunn. One thing was clear, however: the desegregation of the University of Kentucky was not to be stopped.

[234] John Oswald to Douglas Schwartz, October 26, 1990. Copy in Presidential/Bio File. John Oswald Papers, Special Collections and Archives, University of Kentucky.
[235] John Wright, *Lexington: The Heart of the Bluegrass* (Lexington: Lexington: Fayette County Historic Commission, 1983), 201.

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Chapter Six

Maintaining a "Holding Pattern" at the University of Kentucky: The One Year Interim Presidency of Albert Dennis Kirwan

> I'll do everything I can to hold the fort and keep the ship on a steady course.[236]—A. D. Kirwan

While in the late 1960s, black Americans certainly understood that racism remained a lingering problem, there were indicators the racial climate was changing. In 1967, the film *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner,* starring Sidney Poitier, Katharine Hepburn, and Spencer Tracy, tackled the controversial theme of an interracial romance.[237] The film's positive reception stood in sharp contrast to what transpired in Georgia less than six years earlier when an interracial marriage between the first black female undergraduate at the University of Georgia, Charlayne Hunter, and white UGA student, Walter Stovall, brought snide remarks from Georgia's governor and the attorney general after it became public.[238] The same year as the release of the aforementioned film, the Supreme Court struck down state miscegenation laws in *Loving vs. Virginia.*[239] Finally, in 1968, television departed from the usual stereotypes of black Americans with the sitcom *Julia,* in which Diahann Carroll portrayed a widowed nurse raising a son alone. Across the nation, legislation was striking down not simply miscegenation laws

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[236] *Kentucky Kernel*, November 30, 1971. Copy in the Presidential/Bio File, A. D. Kirwan Papers, University of Kentucky.
[237] *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner,* Columbia Pictures, Stanley Kramer, director, 1967.
[238] For the scholarly account of desegregation at the University of Georgia, see Thomas Dyer, *The University of Georgia: A Bicentennial History, 1785-1985* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1985), 303-334. See also James Britton, "Charlayne's Secret Marriage to a White Man." *Jet, September 19, 1963,* pp 18-25.
[239] See Peter Wallenstein's *Tell the Court I Love My Wife: Race, Marriage, and Law—An American History* (New York: Palgrave- MacMillan, 2004).

but also restrictive covenants while at the same mandating that public schools move beyond token desegregation through the use of bussing. Southern states, with their conservative legislatures, could not stop these changes.

By 1968, if not before, racial change was also palpable in the Commonwealth of Kentucky. Mark Twain is reported to have once said he wanted to be in Kentucky when the world ended because it was always twenty years behind. But Twain would have been astounded by the progress Kentucky had made in the almost twenty years since blacks won the right to enter UK. The previous year, Georgia Davis Powers became the first black woman elected to the Kentucky Senate, and in the small town of Glasgow, Luska Twyman became the first elected black mayor in Kentucky. Finally, in 1968, the legislature adopted the Kentucky Fair Housing Act, which made it easier for black citizens to find housing in the neighborhoods of their choice. All of these positive changes took place in the same year as the death of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.[240]

The spring of 1968 also witnessed a change in leadership at the University of Kentucky. Though rumors had been circulating about his resignation for months, most UK students and faculty were surprised by the exit of Dr. John Oswald, UK's sixth president. His administration had witnessed a whirlwind five years of change that included recruitment of new faculty members, personnel reassignments that now included rotating chairs in the various departments, a new calendar, and more rigorous requirements for faculty tenure—all designed to bring UK into the modern age of the university. Oswald had attempted to bring UK into line with other research universities.

[240] For a timeline of black history in the Commonwealth of Kentucky, See Myer and D.Fossl's oral history. *Freedom on the Border: An Oral History of the Civil Rights Movement in Kentucky (Lexington*: University Press of Kentucky, 2009), xi-xv.

But Oswald, with his "foreign" ideas from California, had made countless enemies both in Lexington and in Frankfort, and more than a few UK alumni felt that change had come too fast.[241]

Now the first of two historians—both southerners—gripped the helm at UK. The first was Albert Dennis Kirwan, a man well-known on campus since his days as a student in the 1920s. The son of a lumber mill owner, Kirwan was born into a comfortable middle class home in Louisville on 22 December 1904, and attended both the parochial and public schools there. Kirwan received his B.A. from the University of Kentucky in 1922 and his L L.B. from the Jefferson School of Law in 1929. While an undergraduate at UK, Kirwan pledged Sigma Nu fraternity and served as captain of the football team.[242]

Although he graduated from UK with only a C plus average, Kirwan was destined to leave his mark on the university. After serving as a high school football coach at Louisville's Manual High School, he was recruited in 1938 to be UK's football coach. He held the job for roughly six years before asking UK President Herman Lee Donovan in 1944 for leave to earn a Ph.D. in history from Duke University. At Duke, Kirwan studied with well-known historian Charles Sydnor, was inducted into Phi Beta Kappa, and completed his doctorate in 1947. Kirwan was married to the former Betty Heil of Louisville and together they raised two sons, one of whom became president of both the University of Maryland and The Ohio State University before finishing his career as chancellor of the University of Maryland. His experience in collegiate athletics helped

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[241] None became more outspoken than Thomas Clark of the History Department. His comments about Oswald are preserved in recorded in *My Century in History* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2006), 221-224, 240-242, 347.

[242] The starting point for examining the life of Albert Dennis Kirwan remains Frank Furlong Mathias. See *Albert Dennis Kirwan* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1975). See also the Presidential/Biographical file on Kirwan in Special Collections and Archives, University of Kentucky.

A. D. Kirwan when he later became a member of the NCAA infractions committee. After completing his doctorate, Kirwan returned to UK first as dean of men, and later as dean of students, where he participated in the desegregation of both the graduate and undergraduate programs, and from 1954 onward, served as a well-regarded history professor at UK. An active scholar whose magnum opus was a work on the life of antebellum Kentucky politician John Crittenden, Kirwan later co-authored with history colleague Thomas Clark *The South Since Appomattox.* In 1967, his colleagues selected Kirwan to be Hallam Professor of History at UK, and a year later he was named Distinguished Professor in the College of Arts and Sciences.

In July of 1968, Kirwan became president—remaining until August of 1969—when his successor Otis Singletary arrived from Texas. Historian and friend Thomas Clark wrote Kirwan shortly after his appointment as president, "I take it the board of trustees acted courageously in instituting a holding operation until the special committee decides on a successor."[243] After a year of service to his alma mater, Kirwan, much like the Roman consul Cincinnatus, returned to the field—in this case the history department and teaching.

Time was not on Kirwan's side, however. On 30 November 1971, two years after stepping down from the presidency, Kirwan, who had a history of cardiac problems, died of a heart attack in Lexington. He had recently been honored with the naming of a dormitory on campus, Kirwan Tower, and after serving his one year tenure as interim president was, upon a motion from trustee and former governor Albert "Happy" Chandler, retroactively named the seventh president of the University of Kentucky.

[243] Thomas D. Clark to Albert Kirwan, July 22, 1968. See the *Register of the Kentucky Historical Society* Volume 103, Numbers 1 and 2, Winter- Spring, 2005. Page 386-388.

Kirwan's simple memorial in Lexington Cemetery makes no mention of his UK presidency; instead a brief inscription states that he was "Truly, a man for all seasons."

1968, the year A. D. Kirwan began his interim presidency, was not a promising time to be a college administrator. The nation was in the height of protest over the Vietnam War and shaken by the deaths of Dr. King and Robert Kennedy. President Elvis Stahr of Indiana University, who had been dean of the Law School at UK and testified during the Lyman Johnson trial, resigned citing "fatigue" amid protest at his institution.[244] Students everywhere were restless—even at UK—but as historian Carl Cone said of his colleague. "Widely known and respected, Kirwan was the ideal man to do what needed to be done—improve relations with the public, with the alumni, and with Frankfort while maintaining the good will of both students and faculty."[245] Kirwan is primarily remembered as the president who saved Maxwell Place, the president's home, from the wrecker's ball, but like every president since the initial desegregation of UK in 1949, he was involved by default in its continuance.

Upon his retirement from the interim presidency, the official minutes of the trustees reported that A. D. Kirwan had "brought to the campus a feeling of serenity and peace, renewed confidence, and strengthened morale." In one sentence, the trustees had taken a slap at former president Oswald and ensured for posterity a positive evaluation of

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[244] For information on student protest at Indiana University, see Shaw, Mahauganee D., "The Influence of Student Protest on Student Conduct Policies: The Case of Indian University Bloomington.http://www.indiana.edu/~iuspa/journal/editions/2012/The%20Influence%20of%20Campus%20Protest%20on%20Student%20Conduct%20Policies%20The%20Case%20of%20Indiana%20University%20Bloomington.pdf. Web.

[245] Carl Cone, *The University of Kentucky: A Pictorial History*, (Lexington: University Press, 1989), 158.

Dr. Kirwan. One year was not a long time to accomplish much, and furthering desegregation was probably not on the president's list of priorities, but black students were pushing for change, and Kirwan was willing to listen.

Kirwan was unlike his predecessors in that he had a well-documented record of speaking and writing on racial matters. As early as 1955, just one year after *Brown*, he wrote a paper for a seminar on integration held at UK titled "The History of the Negro in America." Although Kirwan was too sick to present the lecture himself, his wife spoke on his behalf. Kirwan's remarks stated the obvious: in 1955, blacks were "lagging in income and housing" and their "jobs were less secure." The seminar was held to "find ways to help school administrators solve problems growing out of the Supreme Court's directive that states end racial segregation in public schools."[246]

Much of what is known about Kirwan's liberal attitudes on race in general can be gleaned from his scholarship. In *The South Since Appomattox,* he and Thomas Clark wrote, "By individual achievement in almost every phase of American life, the Negro has demonstrated the falsity of the charge that members of the race are incapable of intellectual and artistic excellence." Kirwan and Clark neither romanticized nor attempted to legitimize the racial caste system of the South. For example, regarding the *Plessy* case which standardized "separate and equal," they wrote that accommodations for blacks "were inferior and markedly so," and they cited the Secretary of Agriculture who said that even after the New Deal, some blacks in the South still faced discrimination by the Department of Agriculture.[247] While Clark and Kirwan mentioned a high crime rate

[246] "Negro Still Lagging in Income and Housing" by Joe Reister, *Courier Journal,* June 15, 1955. Copy in A. D. Kirwan Pres/Bio file, Box 4, A. D. Kirwan Papers, Special Collections and Archives, University of Kentucky.

[247] Clark and Kirwan, *The South Since Appomattox,* Oxford University Press, 141.

among the black population, they said "statistics on crime.…are even less trustworthy with regard to Negroes [*sic*]" and they argued that "police brutality and exclusion of Negroes from juries were manifestations of the total denial of political rights to the Negro…"[248]

Kirwan's wife Betty, in a 1977 interview, discussed the desegregation of the University of Kentucky and recounted her husband's role in it. While she stated that her husband believed in the desegregation of the university in 1949, he felt that the process would have gone better had a more solid student than litigant Lyman Johnson applied to study for the Ph.D. in history.[249] Mrs. Kirwan remembered problems in the UK cafeteria with segregated seating and how the students solved the issue themselves. She also recalled an issue that a black student encountered related to his being initiated into an engineering fraternity and how he withdrew his nomination because he thought that his presence at a dance might be a distraction.[250] On the issue of desegregation, Betty Kirwan felt that anyone who was familiar her husband's writings knew that he—both as a person and as an administrator—was for the inclusion of blacks on campus. She further added that Kirwan neither would have discriminated against black players on any athletic team, nor would he have had an issue with an integrated team.[251]

Though desegregation began under former President Donovan, the fourth president had no documented interaction with UK's first black students. That job fell to Kirwan. As dean of men, he was the one who interviewed the first black male students in

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[248] Ibid., 141, 142, 153.

[249] Lyman Johnson did not complete his PhD at the University of Kentucky, and his academic work concerned Thomas Clark. See *Clark and the Lyman Johnson Case*, page 419. *The Register of the Kentucky Historical Society: Thomas D. Clark Memorial Issue.* Winter/Spring 2005. Volume 103, Nos 1 and 2.

[250] Though she does not remember the student, he may very well have been Holloway Fields, UK's first black undergraduate who studied engineering.

[251] Betty Kirwan Interview, Terry Birdwhistell, September 22, 1977. Louie Nunn Center for Oral History. University of Kentucky.

the summer of 1949 after they arrived on campus, and it was he who was responsible for expressing the administration's belief that UK wanted "integration" to proceed peacefully.[252] After Lyman Johnson was admitted to the Graduate School that summer and had enrolled in one of his history seminars, Kirwan expressed his shame when a cross was burned in front of the Administration Building, and, according to Johnson, told the class after the incident, "But I will say that Mr. Johnson has more courage than anybody I know."[253]

By all accounts, then, desegregation was a process Kirwan wanted to continue, but through his background as dean he was unaccustomed to dealing with dissent when he meted out punishment to problem students. According to Stuart Forth, former dean of students, the aging Kirwan still viewed the University of Kentucky's relationship to students as one of in loco parentis. As president, Kirwan was not flexible with disruptive students—black or white—who undoubtedly were disappointed that Kirwan was unwilling to negotiate with them. For example, in April of 1969, he expelled four students for alleged drug infractions, going against the advice of his deans.[254] That being said, Kirwan realized the changing nature of the campus and was more than willing to acknowledge the place of black students within the university.[255]

Up to this point, the burden of this dissertation has been to argue that the role of the white university presidents in desegregation has remained unexplored, although they were involved in every step of that extended process. In no way is the argument diminished by showing that in the late 1960s it was black students fighting for change

[252] Herman Lee Donovan *Keeping the University Free and Growing* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1959).
[253] Wade Hall, *The Rest of the Dream,* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1988), 155.
[254] Cone, *The University of Kentucky*, 160.
[255] Interview with Stuart Forth, 1977. UK Special Collections and Archives. Lexington, Kentucky.

who began to sway the behavior of the white university presidents. In the end, though, the president had the final say over what programs would be implemented and what changes would be made on the university campus, and his behavior—for most presidents were men—toward black students resulted in either protest or cooperation. Perhaps due in part to the path laid by John Oswald, confrontations with black students at UK were not hostile as they were at other universities.

By 1968, one of the major agencies for change on historically white campuses was the formation of Black Student Unions (BSUs) all across the nation. Founded on the campus of San Francisco State University in 1966, they quickly spread to historically white campuses across the nation. According to Ibram Rogers, the Black Student Unions had several goals. These organizations "requested and demanded more black students, faculty, coaches, programs and departments; an end to on campus racism … and black cultural centers, dorms, and lounges…."[256] Rogers adds that when administrators "rejected or were slow in instituting these reforms black students protested by seizing campus buildings, boycotting classes, and emerging in walk-outs, mass marches and meetings."[257] Essentially, then, the Black Student Unions at historically white institutions began to use their increasing political power to put pressure on white university presidents to further desegregate the university campus. Over time, however, and certainly due in large part due to the BSUs—not to mention the death of Martin Luther King, Jr. and the resulting urban unrest—white university presidents realized that they had to listen to black demands for a more racially diverse and inclusive campus. Any failure to do so would suggest they were trying to halt black gains which, in turn,

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[256] See "The Black Campus Movement: an Interview with Ibram Rogers." *Kentucky Historical Society Chronicle*, Winter, 2010, 11.
[257] Ibid.

could then lead to protest, unwelcome publicity, and the threat of violence.

Black UK students had fared well under President John Oswald, Kirwan's predecessor. With the backing of Governor Ned Breathitt, he assisted in the desegregation of the UK football team, he put pressure on Coach Rupp to desegregate the basketball program, he met regularly with black students in informal rap sessions, and he helped launch a fundraiser to help the Urban League open an office in Lexington. After Oswald's exit, and with conservative governor Louis Nunn calling the shots in Frankfort, black students at UK felt the need to mobilize—and mobilize they did across Kentucky.

At UK, the BSU, founded in 1968, was a more political successor to *Orgena*, the black social group whose name meant "A Negro" spelled backwards as mentioned in the previous chapter. The BSU received official recognition in the Minutes of the Board of Trustees in July of 1968. The minutes noted the organization's purpose was to "make getting an education easier for Negroes who attend the University."[258] The first president of the newly formed BSU was Theodore Berry, whose family had a long history of being connected with civil rights in Lexington.[259] Berry, who later became a lawyer, said that he and members of the BSU had many aims—one of which included putting pressure on Coach Rupp to find a black recruit to the basketball program. Dr. George Hill, a black faculty member in the College of Medicine, advised Berry and the fellow BSU members.[260]

With the genesis of the BSU, the white university president began to wear a new hat. No longer was the president exercising absolute control over issues relating to black

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[258] Minutes of the University of Kentucky Board of Trustees, July 19, 1968. Web.

[259] Berry is distant cousin to noted civil rights activist Ron Berry, who led the Lexington Micro City Government for many years and was involved in sit-ins in the 1960s.

[260] Theodore Berry Interview, 1983, Gerald Smith, UK Special Collections and Archives, University of Kentucky, Phone conversation with the author April 14, 2014.

students. Rather than being proactive, many presidents during this era were forced to react to the demands of black students through the BSU. Previous UK presidents Donovan and Dickey did not deal with large numbers of black students putting pressure on the administration to implement reforms, but by the end of the Oswald presidency things had begun to change. Now, black students and their supporters pressed for greater reforms. There is, thus, a shift in the involvement of the administration: white presidents continued to be involved in desegregation, but pressure to increase its pace was being applied from within UK by the BSU. Of course, the president continued to make policy, but many of the policies that had to do with the later stages of desegregation were responses to an action, or the threat of action, by the BSU. The BSU sometimes worked in collaboration with black faculty and their supporters, sometimes in collaboration with the outside community, but they began making the calls for change on UK's campus.

As mentioned, one of the biggest calls for change dealt with UK's beloved basketball program. For many black students, basketball was perceived as a last bastion of white supremacy at UK in 1968, aside from the Greek letter organizations. President Kirwan's role in desegregating the basketball program is not documented, but given his past experience in athletics and the fact that he was committed to following many of former president Oswald's goals, it would be a mistake to think Kirwan and Coach Rupp did not discuss the issue.[261] It was President Frank Dickey who first discussed the idea of blacks playing in the Southeastern Conference and his successor, President John Oswald, as we have seen, who wanted basketball desegregated and told Rupp plainly of his intentions. With Kirwan as president, and Rupp passed over for the job of athletic

[261] For information on the desegregation of UK basketball, see Bert and Steve Nelli, *The Winning Tradition: A History of Kentucky Wildcat Basketball,* 2nd edition (Lexington, University Press of Kentucky, 1998), 75-77.

director, it was apparent that Kirwan was very involved in the running of the athletic program. After all, Kirwan had coached football while Rupp coached basketball, and later was involved in the NCAA infractions committee.

To what extent did Kirwan facilitate the signing of Tom Payne, the first black player? Historical uncertainty might linger because archival sources are not rich in correspondence between Rupp and the presidents, but Kirwan, at the very least discussed the issue with Rupp and made it clear that the job needed to be done—especially after the publication of the 1968 *Kentuckian* which showed black demonstrators marching in front of Memorial Coliseum. Certainly Kirwan and the Board of Trustees did not want the matter left to a new president. Another photograph from the 1968 *Kentuckian* shows a graffiti message on the UK campus that clearly expresses what many black students felt about Rupp. It read "Rupp is not dead. He's recruiting in white suburbia."[262]

As the institution's president, Kirwan viewed it as his job to protect UK's image, and that meant stopping the embarrassing protests by recruiting a black player. The BSU's Theodore Berry said that he and members of the BSU met with Rupp and that he solicited their help. The BSU then welcomed prospective black athletes to campus and entertained them. Tom Payne was officially signed in the waning days of the Kirwan presidency. Kentucky had been the first in the SEC to recruit blacks to football, but it lost out to conference rival Vanderbilt in recruiting a black player to the basketball.[263]

The Black Student Union also worked to set up programs to increase the number of incoming black students. Kirwan attended a meeting with the BSU on 25 April 1969. At that time, the BSU asked him to fund a "counseling and tutoring program" and a

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[262] *The Kentuckian*, Tom Grealer editor, 1968, 22.
[263] Theodore Berry Interview with Gerald Smith. 1977. Louie B. Nunn Center for Oral History, University of Kentucky.

"Black Arts Festival." They also presented a detailed list of programs they felt UK needed with an explanation of why. Their appeal, carefully worded in a letter to Kirwan, began: "In order to effectively alter the "white only" image and racist stigma projected by the University of Kentucky to the black community….the Black Student Union emphatically suggests that the University accelerate its efforts to recruit black students."[264] Shortly after the meeting, Kirwan sent a letter to the new BSU president, Marshall Jones, on 16 May 1969, and called their program "worthwhile." He agreed to commit $15,000 in order to subsidize their projects—the full amount asked by the BSU to realize its goals. During the transition to the Singletary administration, however, the funds somehow failed to transfer to the BSU. The request was later reapproved by Otis Singletary at the start of his administration, and the money then reached the BSU.[265]

During the summer of 1968, UK also began a program in which black students with college aspirations could come to the University to see how it functioned and take preparatory classes in various subject areas. The BSU discussed the success of the program they had initiated in a letter to Dr. Kirwan mentioning that 22 of the 48 students had returned to study at UK.[266] One of those students in the program, George Wright, later became a professor in the history department and a future university president himself. More will be said of Dr. George Wright in the next chapter on the presidency of Otis Singletary.

At about the same time in the late 1960s, black students also agitated for black

[264] Document titled "To the Administration of the University of Kentucky," BSU files, Box 3 Folder 22. Otis Singletary Papers, Special Collections and Archives, University of Kentucky.
[265] Stuart Forth to Otis Singletary. October 22, 1969. Box 3, Folder 22, Otis Singletary Papers, Special Collections and Archives, University of Kentucky.
[266] Marshall Jones to A.D. Kirwan, No date. Box 3, Folder 22, Otis Singletary papers. Special Collections and Archives, University of Kentucky.

history courses. As Martha Biondi has argued, black students in the 1960s demanded a role in "the definition and production of scholarly knowledge" and black history courses were a step in that direction. By 1969, a black history course had finally been approved, and it is not inconceivable that Kirwan, as a historian who had spoken on matters of black history, put pressure on chairman and friend Carl Cone to offer such a course. Initially the students had been rebuffed and told that such a course was too narrow in scope, but once approved, *The Kentucky Kernel* called the addition of this course to the curriculum an "historical step" and said that "The Negro in American History," would be valuable because it would "reduce the poverty of knowledge among white students about Blacks' contributions to our society and their historical role."[267]

A. D. Kirwan practiced a philosophy regarding student behavior he acquired as dean of students: *he was in charge* and the students were not. For example, unlike John Oswald, he twice refused to meet with demonstrating students in front of the Administration Building. And students who dealt drugs on the UK campus received no mercy from the president. Late in 1969, Kirwan warned in a press release, that "Time and public tolerance may be running out on the universities."[268] That same year, he ordered the expulsion of four students on campus—going against the recommendations for leniency that came from his advisors.

Throughout his one year tenure, Albert Dennis Kirwan did what he thought was best: in this case, it was to maintain a holding pattern. Though he was sympathetic to the

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[267] "Historical Step" *Kentucky Kernel*, January 16, 1969.

[268] UK Press Release, May 16, 1969, A. D. Kirwan Presidential/Bio File, Special Collections and Archives, University of Kentucky.

reforms of his predecessor, Dr. Oswald, he was chosen to prove he would *not be* a Dr. Oswald. He was to restore calm to the campus, to function as a caretaker. Major change was to be left to his predecessor.

As president, A. D. Kirwan did not issue UK's black students any setbacks. He had been involved in the process of desegregation from its beginning in 1949, when he helped black students adjust to the campus, and he had lectured and taught on blacks in his history seminars. Finally, as president he committed financial support and funding to the BSU, whose mission was to bring more black students to the university and change the institutional culture. We might not know for certain what role, if any, Kirwan played in convincing Rupp and his staff that the desegregation of the basketball team needed to be a *fait accompli* by the time he left office. And, curiously, the black alumni who have been interviewed about the 1960s speak fondly of Dr. Oswald and make no mention of their interactions with A. D. Kirwan—but Kirwan was given only one year. What is known is that desegregation continued in main part because of the efforts of black students themselves. By the summer of 1969, a second historian, Otis Singletary, had taken charge, heading into uncharted waters at a troubled university. But, as was the case with A. D. Kirwan, the new president understood the time had come to listen. Perhaps the greatest years of black progress, mostly initiated by the black students themselves, lay ahead.

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Chapter Seven

Otis Singletary, the Office of Minority Affairs, and the Experiences of Black Students and Faculty

> People in the future are going to want to know about this Mississippian, via Texas, who led the University when race was still an issue…[269]—Terry Birdwhistell to Otis Singletary

During the height of opposition to the Vietnam War, as colleges across the nation continued to witness student unrest, Republican Richard Nixon had taken the White House. At the same time, professors, students, and liberal-minded Americans from all walks of life challenged traditional assumptions about American foreign policy, gender roles, sexuality, and race, and the university was perceived, correctly perhaps, as the incubator for these ideas. On the polarizing subject of race, Nixon told his constituents, "There are those who want instant integration and those who want segregation forever." Though he promised what he called a "middle course," Nixon's actions, which appeared to favor white opposition to racial mixing in the public schools, prompted one NAACP leader to say, "For the first time since Woodrow Wilson, we have a national administration that can be rightly characterized as anti-Negro."[270]

On the American college campus of 1969, pursuing a middle course regarding race was not possible. A "middle course" implied that blacks must continue to wait a little longer for full inclusion in American society, and that they should be satisfied with slow, measurable gains. But, black college students on traditionally white campuses had waited far too long already. Black power was at its height on many campuses in the

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[269] Terry Birdwhistell to Otis Singletary. Singletary Interview. 1990. Louie B. Nunn Center for Oral History, University of Kentucky.
[270] George Brown Tindall, *America: A Narrative History*, Volume 2, 2nd edition (New York: Norton and Company, 1988), 1411.

USA, and the courts had long ago made it clear that any university receiving public funds could not discriminate in its admissions policies on the basis of race. Indeed, campuses were also warned to diversify their student body or face sanctions by the federal government. Though the murder of Martin Luther King, Jr. left a partial void in the leadership of the civil rights movement, black students and their allies continued to push for more equitable treatment and inclusion at predominately white American colleges and universities. The birth of the Black Student Unions mentioned in the previous chapter promised to serve as a mouthpiece for many black students, and white administrators at previously non-black universities understood they had little choice but to listen.[271]

Sometimes the demands of black college students were enough to elicit concern off campus, and administrators knew they had to act as mediators between town and gown in such cases. At the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, for example, President William Friday used his administrative skills to keep the campus calm after black students and their allies occupied Lenoir Hall and organized cafeteria workers.[272] Like many administrators, Friday knew if he did not solve the problem, North Carolina politicians would. In Kentucky, Republican governor Louie B. Nunn held firm on a law and order platform, and college students in the commonwealth, like those across many parts of the nation, had been warned against any protests that might disrupt university operations. At the University of Louisville, just eighty miles from Lexington, J. Blaine

[271] For an excellent firsthand description of Black Power and the Black Student Union at one institution, see Hayward Farrar, "Prying the Door Farther Open: A Memoir of Black Student Protest at the University of Maryland at College Park, 1966-1970 in Peter Wallenstein's *Higher Education and the Civil Rights Movement* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2008), 137-165.

[272] William A. Link, *William A. Friday: Power and Purpose, and American Higher Education* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 142-158.

Hudson, who later became a professor of Pan African studies and Dean of Arts and Sciences at UL, was one of the students arrested after he and others occupied the office of the Dean of Arts and Sciences .[273]

By 1969, if not before, a significant part of the American public had grown weary of change, confrontation, and social unrest—something that no doubt contributed to both Nunn's and Nixon's election victories. It therefore seemed fitting that the new forty-seven year old University of Kentucky president Otis Singletary should acknowledge the nation's concerns in a speech he gave at Eastern Kentucky University in nearby Richmond. He told his audience, "We are uneasy about the soaring cost of living; annoyed by smog, traffic and overcrowding; frightened by the ominous state of race relations. We are troubled, confused, and divided over the war in Vietnam."[274] Unlike William Friday at Chapel Hill, however, Singletary would deal less with militant racial conflict at UK and more with anti-war activism on campus in the early years of his presidency, but as a white southern university president after *Brown*, he must have suspected that he would soon confront issues related to UK's ongoing desegregation, and that as president, he had the power to determine the next steps to be taken.

Otis Singletary began his tenure with a powerful gesture to Lexington's black community by letting them know on 23 October 1969, that the University of Kentucky, in spite of its growing pains and resulting expansion, would no longer purchase land in the historically black Pralltown community directly across from the central campus on

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[273] Catherine Fosl and Tracy E. K'Meyer, eds, *Freedom on the Border: An Oral History of the Civil Rights Movement in Kentucky* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2009), 213-224.
[274] Otis Singletary, "Our Colleges and Universities: What's Right with them." Copy in Presidential/Bio File, Folder 1, Otis Singletary Papers, Special Collections and Archives, University of Kentucky.

Limestone Street.[275] The institution, which had once excluded black students, but had felt comfortable buying property in historically black neighborhoods, finally had ended a practice that annoyed local black leaders and threatened to eradicate an historic black neighborhood.

This promise was overshadowed by another racial incident—proof that racial harmony was lacking on campus. In October, James McElroy of Alpha Gamma Rho agricultural fraternity sent a letter of apology to Mr. and Mrs. John Muirhead, who lived in the nearby Cooperstown complex. The oblique letter did not mention the fraternity's offense, but it assured the Muirheads that a new fraternity policy provided for "immediate expulsion" of any member involved in "discrimination towards race, color, or creed."[276] The campus newspaper, *Kentucky Kernel*, then printed a letter to the editor that shed light on another misdeed of Alpha Gamma Rho. Jeff Hurd and Peter Mitchell complained about an incident in which members of Alpha Gamma Rho fraternity shouted "Hey Nigger" at a campus policeman. At the letter's end they rhetorically asked, "Does the college community dare to let overt racism go uncensored?"[277]

Into this environment came Otis Arnold Singletary, who took the job as UK's eighth president replacing interim president and fellow historian A. D. Kirwan in 1969. As it turned out, Singletary brought unprecedented stability to the university during a tenure that lasted until 1987. UK historian Carl Cone wrote of the Singletary years, "Given the restlessness of the UK campus, caught up in the agitations of the Vietnam

[275] Alvin Morris to William Bingham, October 23, 1969. Copy in the BSU files, Special Collections and Archives, University of Kentucky.
[276] James McElroy to Mr. and Mrs. John Muirhead, October 21, 1969. Copy in the "Civil Rights" folder, Box 3, Folder 22, Otis Singletary Papers. Special Collections and Archives, University of Kentucky.
[277] "Hey Nigger: Letter to the editor by Jeff Hurd and Peter Mitchell, October 14, 1969. Clipping found in Box 3, Folder 22. Otis Singletary Papers, Special Collections and Archives, University of Kentucky.

War period, few would have predicted that the Singletary administration would last eighteen years, three times the average length of college presidencies in the United States."[278] But what would these eighteen years hold for black students, alumni, and faculty? What, if anything, could a white southern university president do to improve the "ominous" state of race relations at a predominantly white college campus? Now that so much had been accomplished regarding desegregation, what was left to do? At UK, the answers soon became apparent.

White southern university presidents of the late 1960s and early 1970s—men like Otis Singletary—had several tasks to complete to further the cause of desegregation. They would be called on to recognize and interact with Black Student Unions, recruit and retain black students or face sanctions from the Office of Civil Rights, hire administrators for newly-formed departments of minority affairs, make their schools attractive to black professors, acknowledge in some way the black struggle for equity at their schools, mark the anniversary of their institution's desegregation, address grievances by black students, and work to incorporate the "black" town—the local black residents—into the "white" gown—a university that still, in many ways in the 1960s and 1970s, was controlled by, and run for, the white majority. At UK, Singletary became not the initiator of racial change, but one who responded to demands for racial change.

Born in Gulfport, Mississippi on 31 October 1921, Otis Singletary attended both Perkinston Junior and later Millsaps College, graduating from the latter in 1947. At Millsaps, he met his future wife, Gloria Walton, a pastor's daughter. His parents divorced early, and Singletary described his father, who performed blue collar work for

[278] Carl Cone, *The University of Kentucky: A Pictorial History* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1989), 160.

an oil company, as being anti-black, anti-Catholic, and anti-Jewish. Speaking of his youth Singletary explained, "I think I grew up in a South where the theory is that, while you didn't like the idea of … blacks in general, you knew and liked and in some cases loved individual blacks."[279]

He met one of those individual blacks at Millsaps, where Singletary ran both the campus bookstore and the grill. Here, he began a friendship with Cevus Meeks, who had run the college bookstore sometime before Singletary arrived. Through the bond he formed with Meeks, Singletary began to understand not only the complexity of racial issues, but the unfairness of segregation. In Singletary's words, Cevus Meeks "was the first experience I had directly with a talented, able black who couldn't go anywhere, do anything because it was just not possible. It was…the system, just frustrating."[280]

A Phi Beta Kappa graduate, Singletary served as a naval officer in both World War II and the Korean War. Later, he earned both a master's and a Ph.D. in history from Louisiana State University, where he wrote a dissertation that examined the role black militia played after the Civil War. That dissertation subsequently became the book *Negro Militia and Reconstruction* published by the University of Texas Press in 1957. For Singletary the story was worth telling because, as he put it, "thoughtful persons have reason to fear a resurgence of racial turmoil in the South."[281] At the University of Texas, where he taught and served as an administrator from 1954-1961, Singletary maintained an excellent relationship with students and was awarded the University of Texas Student Association's Teaching in Excellence Award. During the Lyndon B. Johnson

[279] Otis Singletary. Interview by Terry Birdwhistell. November 19, 1987, Louie B. Nunn Center for Oral History, University of Kentucky.
[280] Otis Singletary. Interview by Terry Birdwhistell, November 19,1987, Louie B. Nunn Center for Oral History, University of Kentucky.
[281] Otis Singletary, *Negro Militia and Reconstruction* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1957), viii.

administration, he took a one year break from college life and directed the Office of Economic Opportunity's Job Corps program. Because Singletary was himself a Democrat, it can be assumed he shared the President's liberal views on race and was in full agreement with the historic civil rights legislation Johnson advocated.

Singletary gained familiarity with racial matters while working at the University of Texas during that school's peaceful integration, and at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro from 1961–1966, at the time of the lunch counter sit-ins.[282] While chancellor at The University of North Carolina's Women's College at Greensboro, he took issue with a statement a spokesperson for the student legislature made about the administration's perceived lack of support for black students. Singletary replied to Sherry Mullens in 1963 that her "implication that the administration does not give equal support to our Negro students … is groundless and false and does justice neither to those who made it or justice about those whom it was made. "[283]

The UK campus to which Singletary arrived was forever altered by the completion of the Patterson Office Tower and the adjacent Whitehall Classroom Building. New dorms had opened bearing the names of former deans Sarah Blanding and interim president A. D. Kirwan. UK was growing and it had a president who remained long enough to grow with it. Over time, Singletary contributed to the discussion on the incorporation of the municipally run University of Louisville into the fold of the Kentucky university system, and he observed one of the most discomforting changes come in 1970. That year, the legislature's appropriations to the university fell severely,

[282] For information on desegregation at Texas, see Almetris Marsh Duren's, *Overcoming: A History of Black Integration at the University of Texas-Austin,* (Austin, University of Texas Press, 1979).
[283] Otis Singletary to Sherry Mullens, April 2, 1963, Otis Singletary Papers, UNC Greensboro, Item #1.85.1389, Credit given to Civil Rights Greensboro. Web.

and as was so often the case, students were asked to absorb the shortage by paying higher tuition. By the end of his presidency, additional buildings had been erected. These included the Markey Cancer Center, the Maxwell Gluck Center for Equine Research, and the Singletary Center for the Arts, built on the site of the old McClean Stadium, Commonwealth Stadium, and Rupp Arena, which invited larger numbers of "Big Blue" spectators to the ever popular and lucrative football and basketball games.

Growth of the physical plant and a decline in the state's contribution to the university's operating budget are only parts of the story. There was also student life. Singletary oversaw the national transition from student rebellion to what might best be termed student complacency. His first three years were no doubt difficult due to the student activism on campus and the shootings at Kent State University in 1970, but during this time, he tried to maintain a delicate balance between allowing students to let off steam, and placating Kentucky's Governor Nunn, who expected students to behave. Finally, Singletary led UK to adopt a more selective admissions policy, and he was an advocate for student representation on the Board of Trustees.

The greatest single threat to UK's autonomy came after the ROTC building went up in flames in 1970. This followed a 1969 incident in which four black students attempted to burn down a building on the UK campus.[284] Singletary knew well that such incidents would not be tolerated by Republican Governor Nunn, who according to Robert Sexton, "saw himself as a strict enforcer of the law and allied himself ideologically and

[284] Doris Walker Weathers, *The University of Kentucky's Office of Minority Affairs; Policies and Programs for Recruiting and Retaining Minority Students, 1971-1985*. PhD dissertation. University of Kentucky, 1987, 199.

politically with the Nixon Administration."[285] After the ROTC Building went up in flames, Singletary banned student demonstrations which resulted in a lawsuit filed by Professor J. W. Patterson of the campus chapter of the American Association of University Professors. The courts decided in favor of the university.[286]

As the 1960s gave way to the 1970s, UK slowly returned to the placid campus it had once been, but black students and the local black community kept up the fight for equity which had predated the arrival of the first black graduate students on campus in 1949. Black concerns were now in the forefront, heard by a new president willing to listen, and black students were no longer considered an insignificant part of the University community in spite of their small numbers.

While Singletary served as president, academic matters were always his focus, and he once said he was engaged in a conspiracy to offer Kentuckians a better university than they wanted.[287] After retiring from UK in 1987, Singletary remained in Lexington and maintained close ties to the university. During his lifetime, a book on his presidency never materialized though he had planned to write one. After Singletary's death from prostate cancer in 2003, he was honored at a huge memorial celebration in the building named for him, the Singletary Center for the Arts. Like his predecessors Herman Lee Donovan, A. D. Kirwan, and Frank McVey, he was buried in Lexington Cemetery. At

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[285] Lowell Harrison, ed., *Kentucky's Governors*, Louis B. Nunn 1967-1971, (Lexington, University of Kentucky Press, 2004), 208.
[286] For Singletary's views on the Gay Liberation Front, See Terry Birdwhistell's Oral Interview. Singletary to Birdwhistell. December 1, 1988. University Special Collections and Archives.
[287] For biographical information on Singletary, see the Presidential Biographical File 1, Otis Singletary Papers, Special Collections and Archives, University of Kentucky.

his death, current Dean of Libraries, Terry Birdwhistell, called Singletary's administration, "the most progressive and important in this university's history."[288]

Though Singletary may have had a rough start, it becomes apparent that his headaches were fewer than those of other white southern public university presidents of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Chancellor Peter Fortune's experiences at the University of Mississippi illustrate happened when a white university president failed to respond to the concerns of black students. In 1970, black Ole Miss students became incensed after one of the white trustees made widely quoted racist statements. In his reaction, Chancellor Fortune underestimated the volatility of the situation, and ninety black students were arrested following a demonstration during a theater performance. Fortune had planned to suspend several of the students but faced stinging criticism of his faculty.[289] Nearer UK, as has been mentioned, at the University of Louisville, black frustrations with the administration boiled over when they occupied the Administration Building office in 1969. Perhaps due to the open dialogue President Singletary had with black students and faculty and the Lexington black community, nothing so drastic happened at the Lexington campus.

The Singletary administration was framed by several important legal cases involving both race and education. In primary and secondary public education, the schools often mirrored the communities in which they were situated which prompted calls for a more aggressive desegregation program, and the decision rendered in *Swann vs. Mecklenburg County* ensured that bussing in Charlotte, North Carolina, promoted

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[288] Art Jester, "Laughter and Tears", Copy in Box 8—A Singletary Papers, File 11, Special Collections and Archives, University of Kentucky.
[289] David Sansing, *The University of Mississippi: A Sesquicentennial History,* (Oxford: University Press of Mississippi, 1999), 323.

desegregated schools in that city. By 1971, there were also important changes going on in Lexington-Fayette County Schools of which Singletary certainly took note, knowing that any litigation affecting the public schools had the potential to affect the University. In a case similar to *Swann*, parents led by plaintiff Robert Jefferson sued Fayette County Public Schools in 1971 over its segregated schools. In *Jefferson vs. Fayette County Board of Education*, federal judge Mac Swinford ruled that the Board of Education "eliminate all vestiges of segregation in the elementary and junior high schools."[290] The Board then closed several black schools in Lexington, including Dunbar High School, and began bussing to promote school desegregation.

Perhaps most important to President Singletary, however, were the *Bakke* case, which sent a conflicting message about racial quotas and the use of race as a factor in college admissions, and the *Adams vs Richardson* case, which held that several states that maintained dual education programs for blacks and whites must set up more aggressive desegregation plans. *Adams* thus forced several states, Kentucky initially not being one of them, to come up with acceptable desegregation plans to placate the Office of Civil Rights. By 1981, though, Kentucky could not stay off the radar of that office, and UK was ordered to develop a plan that would remove the vestiges of segregation.[291]

In her seminal text *Campus Life,* Helen Horowitz wrote, "As non-black colleges and universities responded to the imperatives of the civil rights movement, many of them rethought their admissions and financial aid policies to open their institutions to greater

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[290] William Fortune, *Call Me Mac: A Biography of Judge Mac Swinford (*Louisville: Integrated MediaCorp, 2012).

[291] Doris Walker Weathers, *"The University of Kentucky's Office of Minority Affairs; Policies and Programs for Recruiting and Retaining Minority Students, 1971-1985* ," 329, See also *Adams vs. Richardson* and *Bakke vs. Regents of California.* Web.

numbers of black students."[292] During President Oswald's tenure at UK, the quest for a more desegregated student body was not as high a priority as a desegregated athletic program. John Oswald wanted to make the campus more inclusive for those blacks already there, thus an expanded attempt to recruit black students was largely outside the scope of his presidency. During the Singletary administration, however, the new demands of the federal government and the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. no doubt contributed to the idea that black students must be recruited to the UK campus.

If one counts the initial admission of black students to UK in the summer of 1949, the University to which Singletary arrived in 1969 had been officially desegregated for twenty years. Although black students were small in number—perhaps less than a hundred—there was an active Black Student Union and a handful of black faculty including sociology professor Doris Wilkinson, who had been one of the first black undergraduates admitted to the University and who later received her PhD from Case Western.[293] When it came to recruiting black students and faculty, much unfinished business in this area remained at UK, however, and in the eyes of some black students, change was too slow in coming. With the addition of the Office of Minority Affairs, change would come soon enough, but UK would still encounter problems with low black student enrollment, and UK's reputation for being a forbidding place for black students was hard to shake.

The fact that black students did not occupy the president's office at UK should not imply that they, black faculty, and members of Lexington's black community were apathetic about racial matters on campus. After black students mobilized and demanded

[292] Helen L Horowitz, *Campus Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987) 241.
[293] Doris Wilkinson. Interview with Terry Birdwhistell, June 21, 1988, Louie Nunn Center for Oral History, University of Kentucky, Lexington, Kentucky.

support services across the United States, many schools began to form offices of minority affairs. Doris Weathers has pointed out that at UK, blacks students were in part responsible for the creation of this office, but so too were black UK faculty, who felt pushed to their limits in teaching and research while at the same time mentoring black UK students. The black faculty thus published in 1970 a document titled "A Proposal for the Reduction of the Drastic Attrition Rate of Black Students and for the Development of a Relevant Advising System."[294] Additionally, a Lexington citizens' council, the Black Action Group, called for changes at a UK they had long suspected of being anti-black. Robert R. Jefferson, who had pushed for the desegregation of the Lexington public schools, was a member of this group, and he and black community members met with Singletary in 1971 to propose changes at UK.

Finally, during the late 1960s and early 1970s many university presidents began to consider the meaning and imperative of President Johnson's Executive Order Number 11246, known primarily as the order that introduced affirmative action in the workplace. As Joy Ann Williamson argued, "Though the order focused on employment, many in higher education institutions understood the charge and established similar policies."[295] White university presidents must have sensed that if they resisted forming offices of minority affairs on campus, they would be bucking a trend, and, at the same time, opening themselves up to charges of racism or, at the very least, insensitivity to the needs of black students.

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[294] Doris Walker Weathers, "*The University of Kentucky's Office of Minority Affairs; Policies and Programs for Recruiting and Retaining Minority Students, 1971-1985*," 202.
[295] Joy Ann Williamson, *Black Power on Campus: The University of Illinois, 1965-1975 (*Urbana: University of Illinois, 2003), 56.

Singletary's establishment of the Office of Minority Student Affairs in 1971 was one of the most important actions he took which directly impacted the welfare of black UK students because it served as the primary tool for the promotion of a more desegregated and inclusive university. Initially staffed by Mr. Jerry Stevens, the establishment of the Office of Minority Affairs did not solve all problems for black students.[296] For example, with the publication of the 1973 *Kentuckian* it was apparent that a number of black students were unhappy with what they felt was the slow pace of racial change at UK. Several students lamented that they felt marginalized on campus and that their concerns had fallen on deaf ears within the administration.[297] Later, in 1974, President Singletary commissioned a report to study black issues at the University Of Kentucky titled "Status of Minorities at the University of Kentucky" authored by Victor Gaines. Perhaps disturbed by the outcome of that report, Singletary made the next move.[298]

In 1975 the minutes of the UK Board of Trustees noted the appointment of Dr. John Smith as Vice President of Minority Affairs. Smith was a Lexington native who served as president of Jefferson Community College in Louisville. By appointing the first black man to a cabinet level position at UK, Otis Singletary had made campus history. Smith, whose credentials were well known in Lexington, grew up on Tates Creek Pike and had taught English at the all-black Dunbar High School. He also held the

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[296] Doris Walker Weathers, "*The University of Kentucky's Office of Minority Affairs; Policies and Programs* for *Recruiting and Retaining Minority Students 1971-1985*. "Dissertation, University of Kentucky, 1987. This dissertation meticulously examines the genesis of the Office of Minority Affairs and is complete with much statistical data related to spending and minority enrollment.
[297] *The Kentuckian,* 1973, 205-211.
[298] Doris Walker Weathers, *The University of Kentucky's Office of Minority Affairs; Policies and Programs for Recruiting and Retaining Minority Students, 1971-1985,* 207.

distinction of being UK's first black PhD. Singletary described Smith as "a superior man who has already demonstrated skillful abilities within the University of Kentucky Community College System."[299]

In an oral interview conducted by Doris Walker Weathers, Smith said that in 1974 Singletary asked a black friend to come to UK and, based on what he observed, make some recommendations about minorities on campus. One thing Singletary's friend suggested was a cabinet level position for a minority. Smith said that when he was offered the position, he was convinced Singletary "was sincere in this effort to get more blacks and to change the image of…the University of Kentucky." The only condition Smith put on accepting the job at UK was that he not be expected to be a "magician" and change the campus overnight. As he told it, Smith worked to help all minority students, not simply black students, and added that he was not a "separatist." Smith also stated that Singletary never turned down a request made by the Office of Minority Affairs because Smith had always "done his homework" on matters related to minority affairs.[300] After Smith retired, he was succeeded in 1984 by Dr. William Parker on the suggestion of Singletary.

From 1975 to 1984, the Office of Minority Affairs received a total of $2,750,310 in funding from the University.[301] By 1978, UK had added an Office of Minority Recruitment, whose office was charged with attracting more minorities to UK, and an Office of Minority Fiscal Affairs to oversee scholarship and grant programs for black students. There had finally been movement among the white educators who felt that

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[299] Minutes of Board of Trustees, University of Kentucky, January 27, 1975. Web.

[300] John T. Smith. Interview by Lauretta Byars. June 23, 1987, Lexington, KY: Louie B. Nunn Center for Oral History, University of Kentucky Libraries.

[301] Doris Walker Weathers, "*The University of Kentucky's Office of Minority Affairs; Policies and Programs for Recruiting and Retaining Minority Students, 1971-1985,"* 348.

black students needed an internal support network. With an Office of Minority Affairs, UK had entered into the mainstream of the American college and university.

But even with Dr. John Smith as Vice President of Minority Affairs, the campus atmosphere was not to the liking of all black students. In 1976, almost fifty black students from the BSU organized a march through campus to protest racism at UK. One sore point of the group was the perceived glorification of the plantation system they felt was personified in Kappa Alpha fraternity's Old South Week. Black students were also concerned with the recruitment of black faculty and students. Said one organizer, "We'd like to see UK open its doors to more blacks." The administration, extremely quick to respond to the protest, issued an un-authored statement that said officials understood the concerns of the BSU and that gains had been made. They cited an increase in black enrollment from 217 students in 1971 to 580 in 1976.[302]

Discontent was to be reoccurring. Four years later, in 1980, BSU president Reann Saunders complained that "The Office of Minority Affairs, in the basement of Miller Hall, is something the administration should be ashamed of."[303] A more crushing blow came in 1981 when Singletary received a directive from the Office of Civil Rights that said UK had failed to attract enough black students and faculty members.

While the Office of Civil Rights was no doubt correct that UK had a low number of black students, Singletary's administration witnessed increases in the number of black athletes being recruited to the university. Nowhere was this becoming more evident in basketball. As has been mentioned, the first discussion of the desegregation athletic programs at UK began under the administration of Frank Dickey, although it was under

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[302] Al Marsh, "Protest Over 'Racism' Held ON UK Campus", *Lexington Herald*. April 15, 1976, A-3.
[303] Bob Cochrane, "New BSU president wants 'Attitude change'" *Kentucky Kernel*, 1980.

President John Oswald that the football program first desegregated.[304] Oswald also wanted Coach Adolph Rupp to recruit black basketball players, but the actual signing of a black player occurred only after Oswald's departure in 1968. As mentioned in the previous chapter, after several failed attempts to recruit black basketball players, Rupp finally desegregated the all-white UK basketball team just before Singletary arrived on campus on 9 June 1969. This followed demonstrations against Rupp's perceived racism that had taken place on campus in 1968.

The timing of the desegregation of the UK's basketball program could not have been better: the outgoing administration and the trustees clearly did not want the negative shadow of an all-white basketball team to be cast upon the presidency of their preferred candidate, Otis Singletary. And Adolf Rupp and his coaching staff understood if they didn't make the move, someone would make it for them. John Smith, who declined to pass judgment on Rupp, acknowledged that it was the image of the coach that had, in the past, discouraged many blacks from having a connection to the University.[305]

In 1969, a young black athlete was found to desegregate the basketball program at UK. The new recruit was Tom Payne, a seven foot Louisville native who had attended Shawnee High School. Shown in a famous photograph in which Coach Rupp, sandwiched between Payne and his father, displays the contract as Payne's mother smiles next to her son, Payne was ineligible for a scholarship his first year due to his low grades. Russell Rice, former sports information director at the University of Kentucky, described Payne as "a calculated risk at best, a rough, unpolished, inexperienced young giant who

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[304] For information on what one black UK football recruit experienced, see Nathanial Northington, *Still Running: The Autobiography of Kentucky's Nate Northington, the First African American Football Player in the Southeastern Conference (*Bloomington: iUniverse, 2013).
[305] John T. Smith interview with Lauretta Byars, June 23, 1987. Louie Nunn Center for Oral History, Lexington, Kentucky.

had not participated in an organized sport until his sophomore year in high school."[306] Payne played but one season for the Kentucky Wildcats before going professional.

Payne later said in an interview that he had a good experience with Coach Rupp, to whom he referred as a father figure. Still, being the first African-American was not an easy experience for Payne, who later went to prison after being found guilty of rape. Booed at UK and other schools while he played, at an away game at the University of Tennessee, Payne found racial slurs drawn on his locker. In an article posted on *America Online*, it was also reported that Payne was hung in effigy on the UK campus.[307] The Kentucky faithful, who today understand that a good basketball player might remain only one or two years at UK before going professional, did not take kindly to Payne's early departure to the NBA. Russell Rice offered a critical appraisal of the fallen star: "He was trying to look out for himself, and not the team's interest."[308] Shortly after Payne was signed, Singletary informed Rupp that the coach would be leaving after he reached retirement age. UK would thus embark on a new course without the legendary Rupp, and it passed the torch to Joe B. Hall where the recruiting of black athletes is evident in photos from the 1970s. For example, Bert and Steve Nelli's book on Kentucky basketball shows the changing racial composition of the team in 1976/1977. In a preseason team photo, seven of the thirteen team members are black.[309]

Another pressing matter involved who would have access to tickets to the ever popular basketball games after the erection of Rupp Arena in Lexington's downtown. In

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[306] Russell Rice, *Kentucky Basketball's Big Blue Machine* (Huntsville, Alabama: Strode Publishers 1976) 346.
[307] David Steele, "Prison defines Life of Tom Payne, Kentucky's first black player", May 27, 2010. Web.
[308] Russell Rice, *Kentucky Basketball's Big Blue Machine* (Huntsville, Alabama: Strode Publishers 1976), 346.
[309] See Bert and Steve Nelli, *The Winning Tradition,* 110.

her dissertation, Doris Weathers discusses the formation of the aforementioned Black Action Group which, among other things, wanted seating for blacks at the basketball games and a scholarship fund established to recruit black youth to UK. In 1976, Rupp Arena opened with much fanfare in downtown Lexington. Singletary had been president for seven years, and the Kentucky basketball program had been desegregated since 1969.

Before Rupp Arena opened, Sanford Roach, the former legendary black coach at Dunbar High School, approached Singletary about the black community having access to basketball tickets. As a young teacher during the Dickey Administration, Roach suffered the indignity of being asked by Bernie Shively, the athletic director, to vacate the lower arena seats at UK for which he and a friend had tickets in 1957. Shively upheld a policy of not allowing blacks to sit in front of whites at Memorial Coliseum. When Singletary learned of Roach's efforts regarding desegregation, he appointed him to the UK Athletics Board and helped Roach obtain 200 lower arena seats he could sell within the black community which thus paved the way for black spectator participation in UK sports. As former athletic director Larry Ivey put it, "Coach Sanford was pretty persuasive and Otis Singletary always wanted to do the right thing…"[310] The arrangement Singletary brokered with the black community was kept quiet, but in 1977 Leonard Hunt, another member of the Black Action Committee thanked Singletary. He wrote, "Now that Rupp Arena has opened, it is quite gratifying to see blacks able to obtain seats… This act alone, which I must attribute to you, has been a turning point within the Black community and the attitudes toward the University."[311] Singletary must have taken pleasure in the fact

[310] Linda Blackford, "200 UK Tickets Fostered Healing: The Hidden History of Civil Rights in the Bluegrass." December 19, 2004, Kentucky.com. Web.
[311] Leonard Hunt to Otis Singletary. January 20, 1977. Box 35, Folder 39. Otis Singletary Papers. UK Archives and Special Collections.

that an opportunity had presented itself to promote equity and good public relations within the black community.

Two years later, in 1979, Lyman Johnson, the Louisville teacher, activist and NAACP leader, who, in 1949, sued for and won the right to attend the University as a graduate student in history, was invited back to UK to receive an honorary degree. It had been thirty years since the lawsuit against Johnson won with the help of then lawyer Thurmond Marshall. While returning to UK must have been a bittersweet for Johnson, who never completed his PhD in history, he had an opportunity to see in the library a display to remind the UK community of the days when Johnson was considered a black troublemaker instead of a subject worthy of admission much less an honorary degree. Johnson recalled the reception at Maxwell Place in his memoir adding that Singletary came up to him three times saying at one point, "Mr. Johnson, we are proud to give you this degree."[312] Through its president, UK attempted to show a new face that spring as it marked thirty years of desegregation, and Singletary, who had attended segregated schools in Mississippi and Louisiana, left a positive impression on Johnson, who had once referred to the University as a dump.

Under the Singletary tenure the first black trustee was appointed at UK. While such appointments were not the job of the UK president, Zirl Palmer's presence on the board was bound to have an impact on shaping race relations at UK. Palmer, a self-made man, was a Lexington pharmacist and the first black man in Lexington to own his own pharmacy. Severely injured in 1968 when his store on Georgetown Street was firebombed by reported Ku Klux Klan members, Palmer served on the UK Board of

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[312] Wade Hall, Lyman Johnson, *The Rest of the Dream*, (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1988), 158.

Trustees from 1973-1979. Later, Edythe J. Hayes, a local educator in the Lexington-Fayette County Schools, sat on the Board of Trustees as the first black woman during the end of the Singletary administration.[313]

When it came to black faculty and staff, four black voices from the Singletary era tell two different stories. One voice is that of Dr. George C. Wright, who studied history at UK and later wrote books about racial violence in the commonwealth and the "polite racism" of Louisville. Today, he is president of Prairie View A&M University in Texas. Wright, who arrived at UK as an undergraduate in 1968 on a Martin Luther King, Jr. scholarship, earned his undergraduate degree in history in 1972 and his M.A. in 1974. Later, he earned PhD in history at Duke and served as a history professor at UK from 1977 until 1980.

Otis Singletary, "who later became one of Wright's close friends" later urged Wright to accept a history position at the University of Texas at Austin.[314] Wright fondly recounted his experiences at UK, and cited several professors who helped him achieve his goals. Wright, who worked his way through college, makes no mention of any negative experiences at UK, and in a recent profile in *Kentucky Alumni* said, "If it's possible to love a University, then I love the University of Kentucky." So highly did Singletary think of George Wright that later he attempted to recruit Wright back to Kentucky, writing letters on his behalf when vacancies occurred at two Kentucky colleges.[315]

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[313] For information on Hayes and Palmer, see the oral history transcripts available at the Louie B. Nunn Center for Oral History at the University of Kentucky and the UK African-American database, nkaa.uky.edu. See also John Wright Jr., A, (Lexington: Lexington-Fayette Historic Commission, 1983), 202.
[314] Robin Roenker, "George C. Wright: Presidential Success", *Kentucky Alumni.* Winter, 2012, 19.
[315] Al Smith, "Ask George Wright about Affirmative Action." *Lexington Herald Leader*, June 27, 2003. Copy in Otis Singletary, Pres/Bio File. Special Collections and Archives, University of Kentucky.

Dr. Lauretta Byars, who, during the Singletary years was both a graduate student and a vice chancellor in the Office of Minority Affairs, was equally positive in her assessment of Singletary, "From my experiences, he was a supporter of desegregation and left a record of firsts to prove it." Dr. Byars, also an administrator at Prairie View A&M in Texas, listed several firsts for Singletary. For her, he was the first white UK president to promote black administrators, the president who established the Office of Minority Affairs, and the first UK president to promote an African-American (Dr. John Smith) to a high position within the community college system.[316]

Black professors had become a hot commodity at white institutions by 1969, and UK simply did not attract many. In an article from the late 1970s, Singletary argued that finding and keeping black faculty members "continues to have a very high priority "in the university's affairs. He further added, "we must continue to make the effort to seek out and hire more black professors.[317] That article noted that UK had doubled its black faculty.

Then, a bombshell of sorts dropped in 1981, when Dr. Charles Henry Rowell, a rising black English professor, Alabama native, and acting dean of undergraduate studies, charged that UK discriminated in its hiring of blacks. Responding on behalf of the administration was Chancellor Art Gallagher, who admitted, "There have probably been people around here who were willing to discriminate against blacks…We are trying to correct that, and in recent years we have come to make a dent into that."[318]

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[316] E-mail correspondence with Dr. Lauretta Byars, September 22, 2013. Dr. Byars has graciously allowed me to quote her for this dissertation. E-mail in possession of the author.
[317] Betty Tevis, "A Look at UK's Black Faculty" No date. Box 103, Folder 1, African-Americans at UK, Special Collections and Archives, University of Kentucky.
[318] Everett J Mitchell II, "UK officials refute statements alleging discriminatory hiring of qualified blacks". Kentucky Kernel, Volume LXXXIII. No 116. Wednesday March 4, 1981.

But equity and the hiring and retention of black professors continued to haunt UK. Rowell, who published the black literary journal *Callaloo,* did not stay and later found his way first to the University of Virginia and then to Texas A&M. Recently featured in an interview in the *Los Angeles Times Review of Books,* Rowell discussed how one day he was summoned to the office of the chair of UK's English Department and asked to explain a homoerotic poem that had been published in his literary journal. Rowell explained to the baffled chair, "It's a good poem, and it is about a human experience…When that experience is very well-represented, and is not anti-human, I will publish it in *Callaloo*."[319] Whether Rowell left UK because of the incident with the chair of the English Department or because of his belief that UK held black teaching applicants to a higher standard than whites is unclear.[320]

Finally, a former Harvard-educated black faculty member of the College of Law, Reginald Thomas, who later ran for and won a seat in the Kentucky General Assembly in 2013 where he now represents the district that includes UK, was denied tenure in the UK Law School in the 1980s and wrote to the then dean of the Law School afterwards, "I do think that the University of Kentucky College of Law ought to consider carefully its commitment to black students and faculty and I would urge the Law faculty to give this issue some attention."[321]

After retirement, Singletary discussed the chronic shortage of black professors, arguing that part of the problem was rooted in the fact that UK was more demanding in

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[319] Vivee Francis, "In Voluntary Solitude: An Interview with Charles Henry Rowell." May 31, 2013. *Los Angeles* Times *Review of Books*. Web.

[320] In a short e-mail to the author, Rowell did not respond to a query about his experiences at UK. He merely verified the position he held at the University.

[321] Jack Brammer, "Questions surround candidate's 1984 departure from the University of Kentucky," Kentucky.com, November 22, 2013. Web.

its hiring than other institutions. Singletary said that nobody at UK was interested in finding black professors "just for a head count." He also acknowledged a more sobering truth regarding the hiring of black professors by adding "if your faculty doesn't want to hire them, if they don't go out and locate them and find them, it's just not going to happen." For Singletary, the real issue was that there were not simply enough faculty members to go around. He said, "The real problem here is a small pool of blacks who had the credentials to be considered for those kind of jobs and most of them were at institutions far more attractive than Kentucky."[322]

Archivist and interviewer Terry Birdwhistell asked Singletary about the complex subject of race at the University of Kentucky. He told Singletary that "in the future, people are going to want to know about this Mississippian, via Texas, who led the university through a time when race was still an issue…"[323] In 1979, a UK report said that the University climate was positive towards blacks, but Singletary disagreed, and he acknowledged that during his time at UK it was easier for a white person to be accepted on campus than a black person from Louisville.[324]

Realizing the need to reach out to black students, Singletary continued a tradition that began during the era of his predecessor John Oswald, by meeting with black students and listening to their concerns. He told the black students with whom he met, "My ambition for you is that you get through this place so that you can stand on your own feet and say doggone, I did this."[325] At the same time, Singletary repeated something that

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[322] Otis Singletary, Interview with Terry Birdwhistell. 1989. Louie B. Nunn Center for Oral History, Lexington, Kentucky.

[323] Otis Singletary, Interview by Terry Birdwhistell. 1990. Louie B. Nunn Center for Oral History, Lexington, Kentucky.

[324] Ibid.

[325] Ibid.

former President Oswald had said years earlier. Like John Oswald, Singletary didn't see the need for two universities, a reference to historically black Kentucky State University in Frankfort. "We don't need two universities here, one for blacks and one for whites. We need an institution where it (race) doesn't matter."[326]

But race continued to matter at the University of Kentucky and to white southern university presidents like Otis Singletary, who took office after the desegregation of undergraduate and graduate offerings, athletic programs and dormitories. They are not often remembered for their advocacy of, or involvement in, issues specifically related to black students. Perhaps this is related to the widely held belief by many historians that desegregation was an event and not a process, as Virginia Tech historian Peter Wallenstein argued.[327]

Though he began his tenure in the midst of a chaotic era, Otis Singletary brought stability to the University of Kentucky during his eighteen year tenure. Thomas Clark told Singletary upon the latter's retirement, "Whatever achievement you have accomplished … and there have been many—you can…take deep satisfaction in the fact you have brought to this campus a sense of calm and order."[328] Of course, Singletary's legacy was more than calm and order, and his administration is proof that the desegregation of the southern universities continued long after the admission of the first black students to the University of Kentucky in 1949.

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[326] Ibid.

[327] Peter Wallenstein, *"Black Southerners and Non-Black Universities: Desegregating Higher Education, 1935-1967,* in *History of Higher Education Annual.* Volume 19 (State College: Penn State Press, 1999), 121-148.

[328] Thomas Clark to Otis Singletary, May 5, 1987, *The Register of the Kentucky Historical Society*, Number 103, Volumes 1 and 2 Winter/Spring, 2005.

During the Singletary years, blacks expanded their presence on this southern flagship university campus and continued to claim in earnest what was rightfully theirs. Singletary, who sensed the unfairness blacks faced while an undergraduate at Millsaps College in Mississippi and was unable to help Cevus Meeks, was, as university president, finally in a position to help advance the cause of desegregation to correct past wrongs. If UK's black enrollment was often stagnant, usually hovering at about 3% of the student body, there were more black students on campus than when Singletary arrived. An active Black Student Union continued to thrive at UK, along with an Office of Minority Affairs headed most notably by Lexington native and UK graduate Dr. John Smith, and later by Dr. William Parker. Black faculty increased, too, though at a discouraging rate. One of those faculty members was Dr. George Wright of the history department, who later went on to Duke and the University of Texas before assuming the presidency of Prairie State A&M in Texas. Perhaps the best compliment paid to Singletary was from a former administrator in view of his efforts to secure seating for blacks at Rupp Arena, "Singletary was not the kind of person to get things done for personal recognition…He did things because he thought they were right."

Especially from 1969-1973, the road was not always easy for Singletary to travel, but he clearly felt a moral obligation to black students and the black community. The President continued meetings with black students just as John Oswald had done, and during these meetings he expressed his belief that they could succeed. One of those who succeeded was Steve Reed, an African-American Law School graduate who went on to become Chairman of the UK Board of Trustees. Reed later said of Singletary, "Dr Singletary was very insightful and had demonstrated a love for the students of the

university. When you talked with him, you just left with such a wonderful feeling."[329] Of course, desegregation was by no means complete when Singletary retired in 1987, but the process could only continue.

As is the case at most of the historically white public universities of the South, UK's desegregation proved to be ongoing. Although the BSU and the Black Action Committee pushed for changes in the Singletary years, the course of action taken was still determined by the UK presidents who, with the consent of the trustees, were responsible for setting policy at the executive level. In spite of much unfinished business on the racial front, the University of Kentucky, whose trustees and president had, forty years earlier, in 1949, fought to keep blacks out, was, in the future, to be headed by presidents eager to increase the numbers of incoming black students and retain the black students already enrolled.

[329] Art Jester, "Remembering Otis Singletary: Laughter and Tears," September 25, 2003, Copy in Otis Singletary Presidential/Bio File, Box 8-A, Special Collections and Archives, University of Kentucky.

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Chapter Eight

Epilogue and Conclusion: Specters of the Past amidst Social Change

Epilogue

A new president, David P. Roselle, a mathematician from Virginia Polytechnic Institute, came to the University of Kentucky in 1987. His brief tenure was largely overshadowed by yet another infamous basketball scandal (one in which a former assistant basketball coach was accused of sending money to a recruit), NCAA sanctions, and funding disputes with the Kentucky General Assembly and its parsimonious governor, Wallace Wilkinson. But within a year of taking office, circumstances forced David Roselle to address the issue of UK's past racial practices in a very public way. The situation involved comments about university investment in Africa made by an elderly former governor then serving as a trustee.[330]

On 5 April 1988, during a meeting of the UK Investment Committee, trustee and former Governor Albert "Happy" Chandler, the same governor who in 1939 told blacks the time was not right to enter UK, but who later sent National Guard troops to western Kentucky in the 1950s to enforce school desegregation in the communities of Sturgis and Clay, was busy discussing university investment in Africa with other board members. At some point during the meeting, Chandler made a racial slur overheard by a reporter for the Lexington *Herald-Leader* who, with her editor's permission, chose to run the story. Later, Chandler freely admitted saying, "The question of Zimbabwe has arisen, and you know what's happened there. It's all nigger [*sic*] now. There are no white folks there

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[330] For information on the Roselle presidency, see Carl Cone's *The University of Kentucky: A Pictorial History* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1989), 231-239.

anymore."[331] Whatever his intent, and Chandler maintained his message was said in neither "anger" nor "jest," the former governor forced university officials, who in the 1940s had fought to delay the admission of black students, into a corner. If David Roselle had remained silent, his behavior might have implied that Chandler's remark was harmless, but by 1989 the nation was becoming more impatient with such public acts of racism. Too, UK's faculty and students would have questioned the moral judgment of their president. Accordingly, Governor Wilkinson asked the former governor, then in his late eighties, about the remark. Chandler finally apologized, Roselle repudiated Chandler's statement, and the issue was dropped. But when Chandler made the remark about Zimbabwe to a *Kentucky Kernel* reporter a second time on 27 February 1989, Roselle sprang into action.[332]

In perhaps one of the clearest and first public statements made by a UK president on racism, David Roselle, during a 7 March 1989 board meeting at which Chandler was present, along with the first black female board member, Edythe J. Hayes, for whom a Lexington middle school was later named, gave a less than thinly veiled repudiation of statements attributed to the former governor: "I abhor racial bigotry and as UK President remain committed to implementation of programs that evidence this institution's desire to recruit and graduate black students, to provide career paths for black employees, and to recruit and promote black faculty members."[333]

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[331] Albert "Happy Chandler. *Heroes, Plain Folks, and Skunks: The Life and Times of Happy Chandler.* (Chicago: Bonus Books, 1989), 292.
[332] Ibid., 293.
[333] Minutes of the UK Board of Trustees. See also "Students Protest Racial Remark, Call for Happy Chandler's Resignation." Mike Embry, April 7, 1988, Associated Press. Web. http://www.apnewsarchive.com/1988/Students-Protest-Racial-Remark-Call-For-Happy-Chandler-s-Resignation/id-6e091180e36c18e78fa32f23d3c2ccd5, see also 1989 Kentuckian, 23.

Concerned about the volatility of Chandler's remarks, Roselle also met with a group of angry students including future actress, Ashley Judd. With his carefully worded statement, preserved for the public record and accessible to all who view online the minutes of the Board of Trustees, a UK president had for the first time taken a very public stand against racism.

Though Governor Wallace Wilkinson declined to remove the elderly Chandler from the board of trustees—Chandler was a regular at basketball games where he brought some alumni to tears with his rendition of Stephen Foster's *My Old Kentucky Home*—it had finally become clear that fifty years after President Herman Lee Donovan had authorized a makeshift law school to keep black applicant John Wesley Hatch in Frankfort, Kentucky, black UK students, faculty, and alumni were considered part of the mainstream and their feelings were important to UK administrators. Roselle, the outsider, chose to speak up rather than make excuses for the former governor, realizing perhaps, that this placed him in political danger in a state where university presidents did not often cross politicians. Roselle's public condemnation of Chandler marked a clear break from the past.

Ten years later, in 1998, when the University of Kentucky bestowed an honorary doctorate on esteemed black historian and author of *From Slavery to Freedom* John Hope Franklin, it was Roselle's successor, Charles T. Wethington Jr., who initiated the fifty year commemoration of the admission of blacks to the University of Kentucky. This celebration known as *50 Years of the African–American Legacy* prompted Stephen S. Reed, a black trustee to write, "What does all this mean to me? America is the greatest democracy in the history of the world. I believe JUSTICE is the bedrock of our

democracy." [334] Reed undoubtedly spoke for many black alumni who by now understood that through this year-long celebration blacks and their ongoing struggle for equity had become part of the official narrative of UK.

Charles Wethington's successor, Lee Todd, a Kentucky native with a Ph.D. from Massachusetts Institute of Technology, faced even greater criticism from a more vocal crowd about the lack of black students and faculty at the University. After receiving a vote of no confidence from the black faculty, Lee Todd hired a coordinator for diversity, Dr. Judy Jackson, from Vassar College. But for Todd it was not Jackson's appointment, but a crude prank, that allowed him to show true leadership on racial issues. In October of 2008, an effigy of then presidential candidate Senator Barack Obama of Illinois was found hanging in a tree on the UK campus. Not surprisingly, the story made national headlines. Incensed by this act with its overtones of lynching, President Todd opined, "We work hard every day to break barriers. I am outraged because we work very hard, every day, to build bridges across the divides….Diversity and inclusion are amongst our most precious core values. Episodes like this serve to erode our confidence in and respect for one another." The president then called for a full investigation into the effigy, held a campus vigil, and his handling of the issue received much praise.[335]

Conclusion

The desegregation of the University of Kentucky has often been viewed as a two part event beginning with the court-ordered admission of Louisville teacher Lyman T.

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[334] Steven S Reed, "Our Community Together: UK Celebrates 50 Years of African-American Presence and Contribution", Kentucky Alumni Magazine, 1999. Web.

[335] "Obama Effigy Found at University of Kentucky." Jeffrey McMurray. October 29, 2008. *Houston* Chronicle, http://www.chron.com/news/nation-world/article/Obama-effigy-found-at-University-of-Kentucky-1670186.php. Web.

Johnson to the UK Graduate School by Judge H. Church Ford in 1949 and completed with the voluntary admission of blacks to undergraduate programs in 1954 following the *Brown* decision. In actuality, the desegregation of UK is a complicated ongoing process following the typical non-violent pattern described by historian Peter Wallenstein.[336]

Desegregation was also a *process* in which the presidents of the University of Kentucky were, by design and default, very much involved. As the CEOs of their institutions, the UK presidents from Herman Lee Donovan to Otis Singletary had to be involved; for without desegregation, without inclusion of blacks, the UK campus could not lay claim to representing the students of the commonwealth, and the university could easily have been seen as avoiding the mandate of the court. Desegregation was thus carried out under the legal and moral authority of the presidents who, over time, came to share the belief that "America was a culture of aspiration," to use the words of David Levine.[337] Though Herman Lee Donovan might not have understood that this imperative applied to black Kentuckians, by the mid-1960s, under John Oswald, UK's presidents clearly understood blacks had not only a legal right to lay claim to full membership in the UK community, but also a moral right, as well.

While Louisville public school teacher Lyman Johnson's NAACP-supported lawsuit opened an unwilling University of Kentucky to black students, Johnson's admission and that of about thirty other black students to the Graduate School in the summer of 1949 was but the catalyst for change—only part of an extended story that continues to unfold on the UK campus today. Without question, the lives and stories of

[336] Peter Wallenstein, editor. *Higher Education and the Civil Rights Movement: White Supremacy, Black Southerners, and College Campuses.* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2008), 1-59.
[337] David Levine, *The American College and the Culture of Aspiration, 1915-1940* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988).

UK's pioneering black students must be told, but the complete narrative of desegregation must be framed by a discussion of the actions of UK's white presidents during the desegregation era.

After the courts had spoken, it was left to UK's presidents to deal with the "how" and "when" of the desegregation. To overlook their involvement means the story of UK's inclusion of black students is only partially told, and it downplays the power wielded by university presidents. What if Donovan had agreed with the university trustees in 1949 that UK should appeal the court ordered admission of blacks to the graduate school? What if Dickey and Oswald had not pushed for blacks in the SEC? What if Otis Singletary had not created an Office of Minority Affairs? These questions, thankfully, don't need to be answered, but they do point to the power UK presidents wielded in affecting social change on campus.

The presidents of the University of Kentucky, in their unique ways, postponed, pushed, retarded and responded to the process of desegregation on campus from 1941-1987. When he began the presidency at UK in 1941, Herman Lee Donovan attempted to postpone what he believed was the school's inevitable desegregation in order to placate a group of trustees who were unwilling to entertain the thought of black students studying there. Later, the federal court order of Judge H. Church Ford in 1949 simply accelerated the desegregation process when Donovan chose not to fight the ruling and urged his trustees to do the same. Likewise, Donovan helped to ease the process of desegregation by corresponding with and consoling worried white constituents. But, by limiting the amount of publicity given to his program of desegregation, Donovan's unannounced rules provided confusion. His suggestion for segregated seating in UK's classrooms and in its

cafeteria was met with opposition by both black and white students and by professors like Thomas D. Clark, who made it clear there would be no segregated seating in his history seminar regardless of the Day Law. There is no more fitting metaphor for Donovan's approach to desegregation than the title of his predecessor Frank McVey's history of education in Kentucky, *The Gates Open Slowly.*[338]

The half-opened university door which Marcia Graham Synott described in her chronicle of the early to mid–twentieth minority admission of minorities at Harvard, Yale, and Princeton, opened slightly wider at UK in the 1950s and 1960s thanks to the actions of Frank Graves Dickey and John Wieland Oswald who, for a number of reasons, believed that the University of Kentucky football team, and by association the Southeastern Conference, should be desegregated. Desegregation on the UK gridiron finally occurred in 1965 with the signing of Nat Northington to the Kentucky Wildcats' football team, but the tragic death of another black recruit, Greg Page, from injuries sustained during a grueling practice session threatened to disrupt this important step.[339]

There were serious mistakes along the way, however. Frank Dickey's treatment of two activist professors, Drs. Reichert and Marlatt, who stood up for racial equality marred his otherwise positive tenure and sent a warning to other activist faculty. Today, almost 50 years later, Dickey's actions have not been forgotten due to an archived AAUP web posting of the important documents related to the case.[340]

President John Wieland Oswald, who attempted to modernize UK, was well-respected by many former black students, including Chester Grundy, who for 30 years

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[338] Frank L. McVey, *The Gates Open Slowly: A History of Education in Kentucky* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1949).

[339] See Nat Northington, *Still Running: The Autobiography of Kentucky's Nate Northington, the First African-American Player in the Southeastern Conference* (Bloomington: IUniverse, 2013).

[340] http://web.as.uky.edu/biology/faculty/djones/PDF/5/5.xiii/Marlatt_Case.pdf.

served as director of UK's Martin Luther King, Jr. Cultural Center, and Theodore Berry, a Lexington lawyer. Oswald might possibly have been the first president to meet with black students collectively to address their concerns, though he was clearly not well-received by the state's black elite when he suggested consolidating UK with historically black Kentucky State University in Frankfort. After Oswald suggested the consolidation of the two schools, black leaders flat out told the transplanted Californian to table any suggestion of a merger and the issue was not seriously revisited.

At the peak of the black student movement in the late 1960s, interim president and historian Dr. Albert D. Kirwan promoted the advance of blacks on campus by funding the Black Student Union. Kirwan's successor, fellow historian and Mississippi native Otis Singletary, opened the Office of Minority Affairs, thus ensuring minority representation in the decision making process and advocacy on a campus that, well into the 1980s, remained almost overwhelmingly white. Singletary was also responsible for following the federal courts' rulings and ensuring that satisfactory recruitment of minorities went on after citations were given to the University for its low black enrollment. In spite of his efforts, Singletary's actions were not always viewed in positive terms by black students as evidenced by the negative comments black students made about the administration in the 1973 *Kentuckian.*

In summary, the actions of the UK presidents support the assertion that no account of the history of southern higher education is complete without examining the role these white southern state university presidents played in the desegregation of their institutions. By neglecting the view from the southern state university president's office, the historiography of the desegregation of higher education in the South is incomplete.

To borrow from Rice University historian Melissa Kean, the "intelligent white men of the South," whether through coercion, lawsuits, or default, were deeply involved in the process of desegregating their historically white colleges and universities and continue to be involved today. Their involvement must be told by historians—not to diminish the efforts of the pioneering black students who desegregated the historically white universities of the South—but to complete the larger narrative of the civil rights movement.[341] Peter Wallenstein closed his text on the desegregation era in higher education with a chapter titled "Unfinished Business". The chapter title is equally relevant for concluding this study, for until scholars examine the roles the white southern university presidents played in pushing along, halting, or retarding the process of desegregation at their institutions, there will continue to be much "unfinished business" in the historiography of the desegregation of American higher education.[342]

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[341] Melissa Kean, *Desegregating Private Higher Education in the South: Duke, Emory, Rice, Tulane, and Vanderbilt* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 2008).
[342] Wallenstein, *Higher Education and the Civil Rights Movement,* 229-237.

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Databases

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