

“TO EXCLUDE AS MANY NEGRO UNDERGRADUATES AS POSSIBLE”

Brown v. Board of Education and the University of Texas at Austin

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Abstract

Following the U.S. Supreme Court's 1954 decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*, administrators at the University of Texas at Austin reluctantly decided to admit undergraduate African American students for the 1956 academic year, thus making the University of Texas the first southern school to integrate. While nominally accepting the decision, University of Texas administrators would do as little as they could to help Black students, and they did whatever they could both easily and legally to integrate less than fully. For example, after a faculty committee chose African American Barbara Smith to play the romantic lead in a school opera opposite a White male, the University of Texas president removed her from the production just days before she was to appear, after several White legislators objected and threatened to withhold the University's appropriations. This incident reflected not only the difficulty southern states faced when deciding how—and whether—to fully comply with the Court's mandate in *Brown*, but also how difficult it was for public universities to achieve full and equal integration in the face of “passive” resistance. Those in power at the University of Texas did, in fact, desegregate their school, but their policies ensured that the University would remain segregated in other meaningful ways. What happened at the University of Texas is instructive in showing how racial equality was never embraced as wholeheartedly as most Americans seem to think. Administrators were able to construct a fantasy of integration, all the while enacting racial policies made through “silent covenants” that ensured that policies conformed to priorities set by the Texas legislators and their White constituents.

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Now, I feel, as do hundreds of thousands of other Texans, not “transplanted Texans,” that the Negro just don't have a place in the same schools and colleges that were intended to be strictly white. The point I wish to put over is this: I intend to do my part, as father of two little girls and one boy, to fight integration to the end. Failure of any white college or school to keep the Negroes out of it or them, means

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to me, that I just won't educate them in an integrated school or college. Every Southern White man and woman knows what the N.A.A.C.P.'s ultimate goal is—Intermarriage!

—Letter from White Texan R. G. Hicks to the University of Texas Board of Regents¹

The A.P. sent out a dispatch from Austin last week, to the effect that the Student Body of The University of Texas had voted to accept the Constitution of the United States and the Supreme Court's decision in May 1954, accepting qualified Negro students to the University. If this is true, accept the congratulations of a son of a Confederate veteran.

—Letter from White Texan J. C. Osborne to University of Texas
President Logan Wilson²

On February 26, 1946, Heman Marion Sweatt, an African American postal worker with, as he said, “a yen to become a lawyer,” applied for admission to the University of Texas (UT) Law School. Because the Texas State Constitution required segregated educational facilities for its Black and White students, University of Texas President Theophilus Painter explained to Sweatt that the state would establish a “separate but equal” law school for the state’s African American residents. A team of NAACP lawyers representing Sweatt filed suit to force the University of Texas to admit him. When the Supreme Court decided in June 1950 that Sweatt had a “personal and present” right to a “legal education equivalent to that offered by the State to students of other races,” it ended a four-year fight to desegregate the University of Texas (*Brown v. Board of Education* 1954). In the summer of 1950, Sweatt and some seventeen other African Americans enrolled in the Law School and the school’s other graduate programs, though only African American students who could not enter a degree program at one of the state’s Black colleges could attend the graduate programs at UT. This would remain the status quo at the University of Texas until the Supreme Court’s decision four years later in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*.

In February 1951, Oliver Brown, an employee of the Santa Fe Railroad and an assistant pastor from Topeka, Kansas, filed suit against the Topeka Board of Education on behalf of his nine-year-old daughter, Linda. Brown’s suit focused on the fact that Topeka segregated its school children on the basis of their race and that African American children—who had to cross railroad tracks and the main industrial street in Topeka to catch the school bus—faced danger every day. In addition, Brown’s suit focused on the “humiliating fact of segregation” (Tushnet 1994, p. 154). Although a three-judge federal panel originally rejected Brown’s suit on the grounds that Topeka’s Black schools were equal to those for White students, the suit eventually reached its way to the U.S. Supreme Court. On May 17, 1954, the Supreme Court rendered its decision in what came to be known as *Brown v. Board of Education* (hereafter, *Brown*).³ In its unanimous decision written by Chief Justice Earl Warren, the Court found, among other rulings, that separate educational facilities were inherently unequal. “To keep Black children segregated solely on the basis of race,” wrote Warren, “generates a feeling of inferiority as to their status in the community that may affect their hearts and minds in a way unlikely ever to be undone” (*Brown v. Board of Education* 1954, 98F).

As the nation celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the *Brown* decision, there was strong interest in its meaning and effects. Sheryll Casin’s *The Failures of Integration: How Race and Class Are Undermining the American Dream* (2004); Derrick Bell’s *Silent Covenants: Brown v. Board of Education and the Unfulfilled Hopes for Racial Reform* (2004); Charles Clotfelter’s *After Brown: The Rise and Retreat of School Desegregation*

(2004); and Charles Ogletree's *All Deliberate Speed: Reflections on the First Half-Century of Brown v. Board of Education* (2004) all attempt to explore why, despite a Supreme Court decision that many believed would become the "Holy Grail of racial justice," America's public schools continue to be racially separate and, for some, "educationally ineffective" (Bell 2004, p. 1).

The experience of racial integration at the University of Texas does not generally inform the contemporary conversation about race in America. That is unfortunate, since the history is both relevant and instructive. In recent years, theorists of race in the United States have expressed skepticism about the original imperatives of racial desegregation since the civil rights movement. Despite the demise of Jim Crow segregation and formal exclusion, racial inequalities and disparities continue to exist. Many commentators have wondered whether "racism in America is . . . a curable aberration—as we all believed it was at some earlier point. . . . Rather, [racism may be] a key component in this country's stability" (Bell 1992, p. x). Other commentators have wondered whether one reason why racism has never been eradicated from this country is because the primary motives behind *de jure* segregation were never centered around formal racial equality, especially regarding African Americans. Perhaps because the United States was embarrassed by Soviet propaganda that called attention to America's hypocrisy with regard to its treatment of African Americans, the federal government sought to eliminate the most obvious and vulgar signs of racial segregation after World War II (Goldberg 1990; Dudziak 1988). Instead of eliminating all forms of racial inequality, however, the United States may have addressed only its surface expressions (Omi and Winant, 1986).⁴

This was certainly the case in Texas. Why did Texas seem to straddle this line between segregation and desegregation? In fact, I shall suggest, UT administrators and Texas legislatures conceived of the University of Texas as neither "Southern" nor "Western," but somewhere in between. While some Texans acknowledged that the state had a history of White supremacy, as in other southern states, others wanted to distance themselves from the more blatant forms of racial segregation. Administrators of the University of Texas in the 1950s did not want their university to acquire the reputation for lawlessness and Negro-hating that "Southern" places and institutions were earning for their intransigence. UT administrators knew all too well how costly a bad reputation could be. Consequently, the administration, with the consent of the Board of Regents, would acquiesce to the Supreme Court's decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*. But, while nominally accepting the decision, the UT administrators would do as little as they could to help Black students, and whatever they could both easily and legally to integrate less than fully. They acted upon a recurring fear, that too much integration would endanger what most White supremacists valued above all: the virginity and purity of White women.

At the time of the *Brown* decision, some twenty-one states and the District of Columbia were operating segregated school systems. Each state now had the task of deciding how and, in many cases, whether to desegregate its public schools. Although some border states reluctantly agreed to comply with the Court's decision, in Texas and other states of the Deep South, many White citizens called for diehard defiance because they believed that *Brown*—which had in essence overturned *Plessy v. Ferguson*—opened the door for potential race mixing. This fear was especially heightened with regard to colleges and universities, where southern Whites feared that the more "liberal-minded" White students might be so inclined as to engage in interracial sexual relationships with Blacks. At North Texas State College (today, the University of North Texas) in Denton, administrators hesitatingly accepted the first African American graduate student, Tennyson Miller, in the summer of 1954. Privately

conceding that they would lose a court challenge, North Texas State College administrators decided it would be better to explain to White parents that “the federal courts, not the college, were responsible for the intermingling on campus of Negroes with their sons and daughters.” At the undergraduate level, however, the first African American undergraduate, Joe Louis Atkins, had to sue for admission to the college with the help of Thurgood Marshall and the NAACP’s Legal Defense and Education Fund.⁵

Some three weeks after the Court’s decision in *Brown*, the National Scholarship Service and Fund for Negro Students sent a postcard to the University of Texas registrar with three requests: (1) to send a copy of the school’s latest bulletin; (2) to put the service on the University’s permanent mailing so that bulletins could be mailed to students as they were published; and (3) to provide an application for admission and scholarship deadline dates. This inquiry prompted University of Texas Registrar and Dean of Admissions H. Y. McCown to send a letter to President Wilson asking him to “take a new look” at the University admission policy “with reference to Negro students.” McCown believed that the University should adopt the same policy that the Texas Commissioner of Education had instituted, that is, to continue maintaining separate schools for the state’s Black and White school children until such time as the Supreme Court made it impossible not to comply with the law. Still, McCown believed that the University needed to begin thinking about its procedures for admitting Black undergraduates in the near future. The current Board of Regents policy stated that the University would admit African American undergraduates only if Texas Southern University for Negroes or Prairie View A&M (the state’s two publicly funded colleges for African Americans) did not offer the students’ desired course of study. This policy had kept Black undergraduates from ever enrolling at the University of Texas. McCown believed that the Court’s decision in *Brown* would force the University to re-evaluate its current policy. Thus, to “exclude as many Negro undergraduates as possible,” McCown wrote in a memo to the president of the University, he suggested that the school adopt a policy that “required applicants for professional work offered at Texas Southern University or Prairie View to first enroll in one of the Negro schools and take at least one year of the academic work required for all degrees.” This solution, reasoned McCown, would “keep Negroes out of most classes where there are a large number of [White] girls.”⁶

McCown’s desire to keep the number of African American students (particularly Black male students) out of classes where there were “a large number of [White] girls” rested on the southern White male’s desire to protect the “purity” of White women from the myth of the “Black beast rapist” (Williamson 1984, 1980; Hodes 1997, 1999; Gilmore 1996; Hale 1998; Moran 2003; Kennedy 2003; Romano 2003; Wallenstein 2002). Although the roots of this myth go as far back as colonial times, this notion of the “pure White southern woman” and the “Black beast rapist” was popularized during Reconstruction, when Congress began to give Black men their civil rights with the passage of the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments to the United States Constitution.⁷ The passage of these amendments frightened many White southerners, as they believed that, in addition to their newfound civil rights, Black men would now insist on having equal access to White women. According to historian Joel Williamson, this new Black threat of freedom, coupled with the White myth of the Black rapist, had to be kept in check at all costs. This led to many lynchings, most of which actually had nothing to do with sexual crimes, though the lynchings were intended by their perpetrators to defend White womanhood (Williamson 1984, pp. 306–300; Williamson 1980, pp. 10–12; Wells-Barnett

1983).⁸ Moreover, White southerners—believing that potential sexual relationships between Blacks and Whites carried with them a hint that the two groups were equal—passed laws prohibiting Blacks and Whites from marrying. These anti-miscegenation laws embodied the very essence of the beliefs that southern Whites held about race, that Whites were racially superior to Blacks and that any mixing of the two groups was bound to sully the racial purity of Whites (Cohen 1991).

Movies like D. W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) helped to spread the myth of the Black sexual predator throughout the South as well as to warn White southerners about what would happen should the two races mix socially. Set during Reconstruction, Griffith based his movie on Thomas Dixon's 1905 novel *The Clansman: An Historical Romance of the Ku Klux Klan*. One purpose of Dixon's books was "to create a feeling of abhorrence in White people, especially White women against colored men." In addition, Dixon wanted to "prevent the mixing of White and Negro blood by intermarriage" (Geduld 1971, pp. 98–99). Hailed as a masterpiece—President Wilson even hosted a showing of the movie in the White House—Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* romanticizes the sanctity and virginity of White women. In this film, the Klan, in an effort to protect the purity of the White woman, rides throughout the town killing and intimidating African American men. While University of Texas administrators may not have ridden through Austin in Ku Klux Klan regalia, the policies they enacted seemed to suggest that they accepted this myth *and* subscribed to the idea that Black men needed to be kept away from White women. Thus, they may have reasoned, as many Black men as possible (especially those younger Black men who might have been more willing to challenge the racial hierarchy already in place) had to be prevented from attending the University of Texas at Austin.

The Board of Regents, also concerned about the possible admission of African American undergraduates after the *Brown* decision, announced its policy with regard to Black undergraduates. They would be admitted only after satisfactory completion of the freshmen prerequisites for their program at a tax-supported and accredited institution of higher education for Negroes in Texas. This new policy cleverly bought the state some time to figure out how it would implement (or continue to circumvent) the law in *Brown*.⁹ The policy also served as a political ploy for Democratic Governor Allan Shivers in the 1954 gubernatorial election. Shivers, whose political allies included most of the regents and prominent University administrators, won his party's nomination after a run-off with another Democratic opponent (McCaslin 1991, pp. 25–26). Moreover, Shivers was in favor of the state legislature passing a resolution to "invoke a support interposition in order [to] more effectively fight desegregation and to help put an end to . . . creeping federalism."¹⁰ Perhaps to show his support for Shivers and the Party's segregationist platform, in August 1954, Registrar McCown cancelled the admission and invalidated the registration of the seven Black undergraduates—all male—whom he had admitted two months earlier. One of those students was John Hargis, an Austin resident who had completed his first year of coursework at Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia. The registrar informed Hargis, who had applied to UT to study chemical engineering, that he had not taken "pre-engineering work" during his freshmen year. According to McCown, Hargis had failed to complete thirteen hours of courses required in UT's chemical engineering program, as well as a six-hour course in American government and a six-hour course in American history. Since these twenty-five hours could be taken at Prairie View A&M (located outside of Houston, Texas, some 120 miles from Austin), the registrar "regretfully" advised Hargis that his acceptance notice was "hereby cancelled."¹¹ The University also revoked the admission of Marion G. Ford, a

talented football player and honor student at Phillis Wheatley High School in Houston, who had also applied to the chemical engineering department. After receiving the notice, Ford filed suit in federal district court to gain admission to the school (Goulden 1955).¹²

On May 31, 1955, the Supreme Court announced its decision in what many have called *Brown II*. Sensing the slow pace of school desegregation throughout the South, the Court ordered that integration be carried out “with all deliberate speed” (*Brown v. Board of Education* 1955). A week after the Court’s decision in *Brown II*, President Wilson announced that the Board of Regents would meet on July 8 in order to “define the path the University will follow on undergraduate integration.” “There can be no question about the general intent or meaning of the Supreme Court’s decision,” Wilson told the school newspaper, the *Daily Texan*, “but there are definitely some specific questions to be resolved.” One law professor believed that integration at UT was inevitable, as he saw “no other recourse than admittance of Negroes” under the “edict handed by the Court.” Black leaders also hoped that university administrators would follow the law in *Brown* and *Brown II*. Rev. M. C. Cooper, president of the Austin chapter of the NAACP, said that he hoped the Court’s decision “would be carried out in good faith” (Morris 1955).

University of Texas faculty and students had actually begun studying the integration of Black undergraduates in the fall semester following the Court’s decision in *Brown* that previous spring. In the first of a series of student-faculty discussions held in the main lounge of the Texas Union, Dr. L. D. Haskew, dean of the College of Education, and Dr. Wayned H. Holtzman, an associate professor of psychology, spoke about integration at UT and in the United States. Both professors believed that desegregation was a “social problem that’s here to stay” and that those who worked to maintain segregation were “simply adding to the complexity of the problem” (Knopp 1954). At a freshman coffee panel in March 1955, seven people—three from the Black Huston-Tillotson College in Austin, and four from the White University of Texas—examined how integration would affect UT. Moderator Jack Lewis, the director of the Christian Faith and Life Community, argued that a “gradual acceptance of the Negro student in the classroom” would lead to a “deeper and richer understanding of the Negro.” This, both a White and a Black student noted, would lead to good race relations, since students of both races would be able to “observe another’s habits and his contributions to the group” (Querolo 1955).

On July 8, 1955, the University of Texas Board of Regents announced that “all qualified students” would be admitted to the graduate school “regardless whether the desired programs of study” were offered at the state’s “Negro institutions” (*Fort Worth Star-Telegram* 1955). The Regents also voted unanimously to abolish racial segregation at Texas Western College for the upcoming school year and at all other branches of the university system beginning in the fall of 1956. With this edict, the University of Texas became the first southern state to integrate all of its colleges and universities.¹³ The decision to integrate, said F. Lanier Cox, assistant to President Logan Wilson, was a difficult one for the “nine good, conservative Texas [Regents].”¹⁴ Although the Texas Constitution had established “separate but equal” schools for Black and White children, Board of Regents Chairman Tom Sealy of Midland (in West Texas) believed that “no legal difficulties” would arise over the Board’s decision.¹⁵ The year delay in integrating UT, Sealy told the press, was the result of budget problems and uncertainty over the availability of adequate housing facilities for the additional students.¹⁶ Even with the year delay, Sealy believed that the Board’s statement was an “indication of good faith” and complied with the Supreme Court’s decree (*Fort Worth Star-Telegram* 1955).

Accompanying the decision to admit African American undergraduates to UT was a decision to set up an “enrollment restriction plan” for all incoming students. President Wilson said that this decision was necessary because of “inadequate funds and the mushrooming enrollment trend that has already developed.” According to Wilson, the restrictions were “in effect a mandate from the legislature because not enough money was appropriated for the increased enrollment.” This “enrollment restriction plan” consisted of a series of aptitude and subject matter tests (the first ever administered by a public school in Texas), along with “some other formula” by which prospective students would be required to reach certain standards.¹⁷ The plan would also alert university officials to the race of the applicant (which it could not legally ask because it would be in violation of the Supreme Court’s rulings), since students would take the test in segregated centers. Although these restrictions would inevitably keep some White students from enrolling at UT, they would, more importantly, keep the number of African American students down without violating the law in *Brown* and *Brown II*, much as poll taxes and literacy tests had legally reduced the number of African Americans who could vote in the South.¹⁸

The Regents’ announcement to integrate Texas colleges and universities was met with a mixed reaction. At Texas Western College, Dean of Student Life Judson Williams said that students and the administrative staff at the school “welcome the ruling of the Board of Regents to end segregation and admit Negro students to the college this fall” (*El Paso Herald Post* 1955). The editor of the *Daily Texan*—a White male from very conservative East Texas—praised the Regents as “judicious, humane and courageous in handing down their edict.” “Their move,” the editor wrote, “will go a long way in promoting understanding . . . and in proving to the entire South that tolerance is workable.” The editor also called on the NAACP to accept the year delay in integrating UT by “understanding the Regents” and meeting them “half-way” (*Daily Texan* 1955b). UT Dean of Student Life Arno Nowotny predicted that integration on the undergraduate level would create no problems since there were just going to be a “few of them” anyway. Moreover, since those African American students who had attended UT had been graduate students who were, according to Nowotny, “pretty high class, both morally and economically,” he felt confident that integration would go smoothly (Morehead 1955). The University Religious Council, an interfaith body composed of student religious organizations, expressed its “appreciation” regarding the Regents’ decision to admit African American undergraduates. The Council, like most other religious organizations on campus, believed that the policy of segregation was “contrary to the teachings of Christ.” The Baptist Student Union wrote that “We are therefore heartily in favor of the decision on integration made by the Board of Regents and pledge ourselves to a wholehearted implementation of this policy in every area of university life.”¹⁹ Many UT alumni supported the Regents’ decision to integrate the school. Mary E. Post, a 1954 graduate, wrote to the Regents that she was “proud and pleased” about their decision. “It must be very gratifying to you,” Post ended her letter, “to know that you are helping build a healthier, happier country.”²⁰

Not everyone, however, was happy with the Regents’ decision to integrate UT. A group of Whites in Houston filed suit seeking a writ of mandamus to stop integration at the University, but the Texas Supreme Court refused to hear the lawsuit. Governor Shivers, believing that compulsory integration was “unconstitutional,” urged Texas administrators to “avoid haste in abolishing segregation” (Jones 1956, p. 337). Attorney General John Ben Shepperd said that the State of Texas would “exhaust every remedy before complying” with the Supreme Court’s decision, because the immediate or too-sudden mixture of Black and White students would be “rash,

imprudent, and unrealistic" (*Daily Texan* 1955a). Four Texas representatives and Texas Senator Price Daniel—who as attorney general had fought *Sweatt v. Painter*, the lawsuit that integrated UT's graduate and professional programs—had signed the "Southern Manifesto," which declared *Brown* a "clear abuse of judicial power." The Sons of Confederate Veterans branch in Dallas, upset that the Supreme Court had intended to "destroy the only creative group [i.e., White people] by ordering their amalgamation through integration" vowed to do all in its power to preserve its heritage and to "resist the attempts of those who would destroy our civilization." It called on the Board of Regents to "redeem" themselves with the White people of Texas by "rescinding this tragic order."²¹ White Texan M. Barn accused the Regents of not having "half as much self-respect, manhood and decency as a rotten skunk." If they did, reasoned Barn, the Regents would never have consented to "allow even 1 nigger to enter the U."²² One White University of Texas coed said that "I've been taught for twenty-one years that Negroes should know their place—which is not in White circles. I can't change my attitude now" (Ray 1954). A parent of another University of Texas student said that he could not have his "son or daughter on a dance floor or swimming in a pool with someone as Black as the ace of spades and with a skull three inches thick" (Schafer 1954).

Before the first African American undergraduates set foot on campus, University administrators gathered to set the tone for how far integration would go on the UT campus. H. Y. McCown, at this time the UT dean of students, and Mr. Nolen, the director of the Texas Union, worked on a solution for avoiding problems at the Union, which in the 1950s served as the center of student social activity. Because student groups held teas, receptions, and coffees there, UT administrators wanted to take steps to limit the amount of social intermingling that took place between Black and White students. While there had been no incidents involving these specific events, the two men worried about dances because Black men would have access to White women in such social settings. Consequently, they agreed not to schedule any more dances, especially the Paul Jones dance, where, they said, a person had little or no choice in selecting a partner.²³ McCown also believed that UT administrators would be "on firm ground" should they counsel African American students against participating in extracurricular activities, for the test scores of these students indicated that they would "have difficulty meeting our academic standards." UT administrators thus argued that they would be doing these Black students a favor, since "in fairness to themselves" they needed to "devote all of their efforts to adjusting to the new situation."²⁴ McCown believed that his plan for limiting the interaction between Black and White students would be enough to keep most parties—the members of the UT Board of Regents, UT administrators, and the White citizens of Texas—satisfied that only a little bit of desegregation was taking place.

In the fall of 1956, some 100 African American freshmen, graduate, and transfer students—along with 18,000 other students—enrolled at the University of Texas (*Dallas Morning News* 1956). There were few protests by the time they actually arrived on campus, in contrast to the fanfare that accompanied the admission of the first Black undergraduate students at other southern colleges and universities. At Lamar State College of Technology in Beaumont, Texas (located in Southeast Texas), Whites not associated with the school set up picket lines on the outside of the campus and later harassed two Black students when they tried to attend classes (*Daily Texan* 1956). At the University of Alabama, President Oliver Cromwell Carmichael—with the consensus of the board of trustees and the governor—encouraged turmoil within the student body, faculty, and the campus, as all of them stood by while segregationists invaded the campus to demonstrate and riot against

African American Autherine Lucy's admission (Clark 1993, p. xvii). Six years later, at the University of Mississippi, two National Guardsmen protecting African American James Meredith were killed when riots on the Ole Miss campus broke out (Barnett 1965).

The first Black graduates at UT found their reception mixed. While some enjoyed their experiences at UT, many did not. Austin resident John T. King said that his experiences at UT had been "nothing but pleasant" (Ray 1954). Willie Jordan, who enrolled in the School of Architecture, said that he valued his experience at UT. "I still do respect, almost all if not all of my architecture deans, professors, and classmates. Our [the first Black students'] approach," Jordan recalled, "was not to be angry."²⁵ King's and Jordan's experiences, however, were not common. Most, like John Hargis, found UT to be "lonely and unpleasant" (McCaslin 1991, p. 26). Edna Humphries Rhambo, the first Black student to receive an undergraduate degree from the University of Texas, said that White students sometimes dirtied her chair and engaged in other forms of "petty harassment" (Smith 1999). Leon Holland said that his family warned him to be careful at UT, and once he got to campus, he thought it would be wise to heed their advice, since he knew that not all the White students wanted to go to class with him and the other African American undergraduates.²⁶ His wife, Peggy (Drake) Holland, recalled several incidents in the College of Business, where she was enrolled as an undergraduate. She said that White business students would often purposely run into her, sometimes knocking her and her books to the floor. Mrs. Holland said that she used to study in the business library, and one evening an older White man sat down at her table, facing her. She said that after staring at her for a couple of minutes, the man wrote something on a piece of paper and slid it to her. Mrs. Holland said that she didn't read the note and quickly got up and ran off. It was the last time she would study in the business library.²⁷ Aware of Mrs. Holland's negative experiences, one business professor insisted on driving her to a business seminar at the Driskill Hotel in downtown Austin, because he said he was "very concerned for my safety."²⁸ Marion Ford, whose admission University administrators had cancelled in 1954, returned to Texas to attend UT after two years at the University of Illinois. "The University of Texas was where I wanted to go," Ford said. Ford spent most of his time studying, however, because he was not allowed to participate in intercollegiate sports, as he had at Illinois. He took twenty-one hours during his first semester at UT. "There was very little to do except study," he remembered. "We had to fight for everything, including eating on the Drag."²⁹ Little had changed from six years earlier when John Chase enrolled in the School of Architecture, thus becoming the first African American to enroll at the University of Texas following the Supreme Court's ruling in *Sweatt v. Painter*. Chase had reported that he experienced some hostility from White students and also received hate mail with racial slurs. Chase also remarked that he had a great deal of sympathy for Heman Sweatt, who received the brunt of the hate directed toward Blacks by White segregationists, and who never graduated from UT. "I knew Sweatt," he recalled, "and if the case had been built around me, I would not have graduated either" (Roser 1999).³⁰

Overall, many African American students felt that the University of Texas and its students never completely welcomed them. They felt, like Black undergraduate Anthony Henry, that "Negro students on the University campus" had been "desegregated, but not integrated" (Howard 1957). Others were humiliated as much by White students' "overwhelming welcome treatment" when they did try to join clubs and organizations as they were by overt acts of discrimination. The reason for these feelings had as much to do with overt discrimination on the part of White

students as it did with UT administrators' deliberate attempts to maintain the racial status quo while appearing to be following the law in *Brown*. We can see this in a memo that Dean McCown wrote to President Wilson in May 1957. In this memo—which was a summary of a meeting amongst all deans, directors, and key personnel of student activities—McCown explores the “integration problems” that the University might face in its first year of complete “integration.” He worried specifically about three “problem areas”: (1) intimate social contact between Black and White students (in labs, at dances, and in plays); (2) African Americans in positions to make decisions affecting White students (as teaching assistants, counselors, graders); and (3) public appearances between Blacks and Whites, where this relationship could be offensive to [White] observers.³¹

Black student Anthony Henry had made a keen observation. Though now desegregated by law, the University of Texas at Austin never fully integrated. The distinction made here—though seemingly subtle—is an important one. For, while the University of Texas desegregated its undergraduate and graduate programs in compliance with the Court's decision in *Brown* and *Brown II*, it never *integrated* them, that is, it never allowed Black students to become full and participating members of the University of Texas community. In other words, what existed on the UT campus was a very clear distinction between public and private integration. Publicly, African American students were allowed to enroll in classes and take part in extracurricular activities. Privately, however, University of Texas administrators took steps to limit the kinds of extracurricular activities in which African American students could participate, especially those activities that suggested—either implicitly or explicitly—that Blacks and Whites might be equal. Administrators specifically targeted those activities in which interracial sex—or hints of it—might be present. One telling incident on the University of Texas campus highlights this distinction between public and private integration, as well as the challenges of maintaining the status quo with regard to segregation while at the same time trying to follow the letter of the law in *Brown v. Board of Education*, which required equal access to educational facilities.

In the spring of 1957, Barbara Louise Smith was a nineteen-year-old African American music student in the College of Fine Arts. A transfer student from historically Black Prairie View A&M, Smith came to the University of Texas in the fall of 1956 to study with Edra Gustafson, a well-regarded music professor. That fall, a faculty committee chose Smith—who many people said had the best soprano voice of anyone in her class—to play the female lead in Purcell's opera, *Dido and Aeneas*. Based on Virgil's *Aeneid*, the opera is a classic recounting of the tragic love between Dido, the queen of Carthage, and Aeneas, the Trojan prince. Because the committee had chosen two White men, David Blanton and David Richards, to play the role of Aeneas, the opera would have an interracial cast. Few knew at that time that the opening lines of the opera would prove to be so prophetic: “Oh my sorrow. I am possessed with torment. Peace and I are strangers grown.”

Immediately after the faculty committee chose Smith, both she and E. W. Doty, the dean of the College of Fine Arts, began receiving as many as three threatening anonymous calls per week (*Time* 1957).³² Some callers threatened to do “bodily harm” to Smith and to exact revenge against the University of Texas.³³ One such call to Smith's dormitory came from a state representative's wife, who, after asking if Smith lived at that residence, said that she “better not appear on the stage” (Massa 1984). In spite of the phone calls, Doty refused to remove Smith from the Opera.

Few seemed to notice (or at least they did not publicly comment upon) Smith's role in the play until Representative Jerry Sadler of Percilla, in East Texas, raised the issue of an African American woman playing the romantic lead opposite a White man

during a legislative session that winter. Sadler said that he was specifically protesting “the inclusion of a Negro in the cast, particularly the role of Dido, who, he said, is a redhead” (Wall 1957). Sadler’s description of Dido being a redhead (as if only White women could be redheads) differed from the faculty committee’s description of Dido and Aeneas, who had argued that there was “virtually no action on the part of the principals, who merely stand and sing.” Nonetheless, because the title characters were supposed to be in love, the idea of a Black Dido and a White Aeneas proved offensive to many people.³⁴

To further make his point, Sadler promised to vote against appropriations for the University of Texas because, he said, “they have Negro undergraduates” (Smith 1957a). Representative Joe Chapman of Sulphur Springs, in East Texas, also objected to Smith’s inclusion in the opera, arguing that the people of Texas “don’t want [the] mixing of Negroes and Whites publicly and the University of Texas should not do it from that standpoint” (Smith 1957a). Some six weeks before the College of Fine Arts was to stage its production of *Dido and Aeneas*, UT President Logan Wilson instructed the college to remove Smith from the cast. Smith, however, was not told of President Wilson’s decision until just a couple days before the production was to go on (Smith 1957a). Her removal touched off a storm of controversy and highlights the lengths to which University of Texas officials would go to keep African American students from being full members of the school. It also highlighted the University’s fear of Black bodies, interracial sex, and White Texans’ obsession with protecting the South’s greatest treasure: the White woman.

President Wilson’s decision to dismiss Smith relied in part on many Texans’—both Blacks’ and Whites’—fears of miscegenation. Although White Texans usually manifested this fear with regard to sexual relations between Black men and White women—a fear that had led to the lynching of hundreds of Black men—a Black woman playing the romantic lead opposite a White man brought these fears into the forefront. About Smith’s role, Wilson had said: “In any American university this would be regarded as venturesome but in a Southern university it would inevitably be provocative of far-reaching consequences” (*Fort Worth Star-Telegram* 1957). The White citizens of Texas, Wilson believed, were not ready for social integration, let alone seeing a Black woman on stage in love with a White man. Perhaps this sight too powerfully reminded these White people of the thousands of illicit relationships between White men and Black women that had been going on for centuries in Texas and other southern states. “On basic social issues,” Wilson had said in defending his decision to remove Smith, “it [the University] is subject to the will of the majority of its citizens.”³⁵ In essence, President Wilson wanted desegregation at the University of Texas to be more like Booker T. Washington’s definition of integration—as separate as the fingers in all things social (Washington 1901[1993]). The University had desegregated, which many White Texans thought was disgraceful enough, but to have a “White boy and a Negro girl enacting those passionate love scenes,” as White citizen Raymond Orr of Kerrville wrote in a letter to President Wilson, was, for many “disgusting” and “downright vulgar.”³⁶

Most University of Texas students believed that University administrators should not have removed Smith from the opera. They argued that Smith had a right to appear in the play since she had fairly won the title role. A number of University of Texas students—a significant portion of whom supported full integration at the school—expressed their disapproval of Wilson’s decision to remove Smith in several different ways. Some simply wrote letters to the *Daily Texan*. Other students more dramatically expressed their discontent with Wilson’s decision. An unknown student or group of students hung two effigies that carried the names of Representative

Chapman and Sadler from the second-floor railing in the rotunda of the Texas Capitol building (Vela and Salazar, 1957). The Young Republicans and the Young Democrats adopted a resolution urging the investigation of “all cases of racial discrimination” and the University’s dropping of Barbara Smith. “The entire student body of The University of Texas,” the resolution read in part, “is affected when any student is denied his or her right to participate on an equal basis in student activities” (Smith 1957b).

University of Texas faculty members were divided in their opinion of Smith’s removal. Roger Shattuck, an assistant professor in romance languages, believed that Smith’s removal was “distressing and damaging” to complete integration. In a speech before the Faculty Council, Dr. John Silber, a philosophy professor, called the University’s lack of official policy about the participation of African American students in social functions “unfair to our Negro students” (*Fort Worth Star-Telegram* 1957). Business professors Charles Zlatkovich and Joseph Bailey defended Wilson’s actions. In a statement delivered before the Faculty Committee in June, Bailey said that, since the majority of Texans did not support an interracial cast, and since the University of Texas was a state-supported institution, it was compelled to conform to the desires of the majority of its citizens (*Houston Chronicle* 1957).

The Committee of Counsel on Academic Freedom and Responsibility offered a more guarded opinion regarding Smith’s removal. In its official statement on the case, the Committee claimed that the University of Texas had accepted the Supreme Court’s decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* in “good faith” and had been successful [at integrating its African American students] in a considerable degree.” The Committee conceded, however, that only “educational integration” had occurred at the University, though the goal of integration should be “full opportunity to participate in . . . both curricular and extracurricular” activities. Taking into account the social climate in the State of Texas in the late 1950s, the Committee concluded that Wilson’s decision to remove Smith was “wise,” since its citizens were not quite ready for an interracial cast in a university opera.³⁷ The Whites of Texas were simply not ready to see a Black woman playing a romantic lead opposite a White man, even if that Black woman had the best voice in the school.

Many people commended Smith for how she reacted to her removal from *Dido and Aeneas* and to the controversy that followed. An editorial in the *Dallas Morning News* praised Smith for refusing to “become another Autherine Lucy” and boasted that her graceful handling of the situation had done “much to help race relations” (*Dallas Morning News* 1957). African American Carter Wesley wrote in the *Houston Informer*, a Black weekly, that Smith should be congratulated “for refusing to strike back or to show any resentment over the denial . . . of rights due [her].” Miss Smith, wrote Wesley, was “too dignified and poised to fight in the gutter for honors [she won] by their merit and worth, [even] if those who gave the honors were little enough to want to take them back for cheap reasons” (Wesley 1957).

When reporters first asked Smith about her removal, she was reluctant to answer, replying only that it was not because of her singing abilities: “Don’t you know that if it was my singing ability, I would never have been selected for the part in the beginning?” (Wesley 1957). When she finally did speak to the press, Smith explained that her first reaction was “one of great hurt.” “I do not believe anyone who had been practicing a role for six months and who had any feeling for the role she was trying to interpret could react otherwise when the role was taken from her for any reason,” she said (*Houston Informer* 1957a). Smith would later say that her dismissal was “best for harmonious integration” and that the faculty committee that chose her to sing the lead in the opera “displayed striking naïveté.” Although shocked by her removal,

Smith said that she would have done the same thing if she were President Wilson: “I believe they want the same thing I do, and are trying to achieve the most harmonious fulfillment of integration at the University” (McMeans 1957). “I just want to get back to being a student,” she said (*Houston Informer* 1957a).

After reading about Smith’s removal in the *New York Times*, Harry Belafonte called Smith. Belafonte was no stranger to the University of Texas and the city of Austin. In 1954 he had appeared at Gregory Gym on the UT campus, as a part of the Cultural Entertainment series. Though he had “one of the best and most appreciative audiences of his career” at Gregory Gym, Belafonte was not able to get a hotel room in Austin. In his telephone call to Smith, Belafonte told Smith that he wanted her to know that there was someone “in her corner,” and he offered to give her money so that she could study music “anywhere she chose” (*Houston Informer* 1957b). Although “thrilled to death” about Belafonte’s offer, Smith said she wanted to stay at UT, telling Belafonte that she had “found exactly what I wanted here and that I want to finish here.” She also said that she was getting the best voice training she could find anywhere and that, except for this opera incident, she had been treated well at the University (*Daily Texan* 1957). Smith did, however, accept financial assistance from the Belafonte Foundation of Music and Arts for her final two years at the University of Texas.

Dido and Aeneas went on as planned, though there were only two performances instead of four, and Martha Ann Kelly, a White student and Smith’s alternate, played the role of Dido. Smith, who had earlier said that she “wouldn’t miss it,” attended the opera on its opening night. By all accounts, the opera was a failure. Bradford Daniels of the *Daily Texan* wrote of the opera that, “In a word: The opera was disappointing. Primarily, it lacked spirit.” He said that Kelly’s singing “lacked force and imaginative styling.” Daniel said that Dido’s lament, “When I am Laid in Earth,” was “most disappointing” because “she didn’t sound like or appear to be a heart-broken woman” (Daniel 1957). *Time* magazine reported that the auditorium was only half full for both performances, and that from the flagpole in front of UT’s main building hung a swastika flag with the words “No Comment” on it (*Time* 1957).

Although the opera-casting controversy died down for most people, Smith said the “nightmares” of the incident haunted her for years. “The irony of all of this,” she later recalled, “is that all I wanted to do was be a student in the classic sense of the word . . . and I was denied” (Massa 1984). Smith did return to the University of Texas the next fall, and she admitted that she felt such pain at being betrayed by people she trusted “at the high echelons.” The audience packed the auditorium for Smith’s junior and senior recitals; some people even stood outside the auditorium to hear her sing (*Austin American* 1958). Smith received a bachelor of music in applied voice in 1959, to which Representative Chapman responded, “I wish her all the success in the world. She is a great artist” (*Austin American* 1959). Shortly after graduation, Smith left Austin for New York City to study voice, drama, dance, and languages with funds from the Harry Belafonte Foundation. She changed her last name to Conrad after discovering that there was already a Barbara Smith registered at Equity (*Austin American-Statesman* 1979). Smith has done well in her musical career, touring Europe and signing on with the Metropolitan Opera in 1981. In an ironic twist, Smith played Marian Anderson, the African American woman whom the Daughters of the American Revolution had barred from singing in Constitution Hall in 1937, in the 1975 ABC production of *Eleanor and Franklin* (Massa 1984).

In 1984 Smith returned to the University of Texas—for the first time since her graduation—to sing in Earl Stewart’s production of his opera *Al-Inkishafī*. Based on

an ancient Kiswahili poem and translated as “The Soul’s Awakening,” the performance marked “the end of an inner struggle and a new beginning” for Smith. “For me, it was a wonderful, exciting experience,” she said. “The whole celebration of *Al-Inkishafi* was a celebration of ‘me today’” (Massa 1984). It was after this performance that Smith said the wounds of 1957 finally began to heal. The University of Texas worked to heal these wounds as well. In 1985 Smith received the University of Texas Distinguished Alumnus Award, and in 1987 she returned to the University, this time as the recipient of the Texas Cowboys’ Centennial Lectureship (Beaver 1987). Smith’s subsequent visits to Austin have included some “long, serious conversations” with UT administrators. When asked about the opera-casting controversy, Smith says that “the past is the past.” “In spite of all you have read about that was not good,” she said in a 1984 interview, “I had a lot of marvelous experiences and good friends in Texas” (Massa 1984).

The lessons that University of Texas administrators learned were quite different from Barbara Smith’s. They saw the casting incident as a mere “complication” to the integration problem. “It will cause the students to be looking for incidents,” one administrator wrote, “and make the more liberal students to bend over backwards to make Negroes feel that they are accepted” (Massa 1984). What administrators really feared was that this acceptance by White students of the Black undergraduate might cause more young Black Texans (especially young Black males) to apply for admission to the University of Texas. This prospect frightened White officials, who perhaps reasoned that these “more liberal students” might also accept the commingling of the races, not just in the classroom, but outside of the classroom, and maybe even in the bedroom. This was as unacceptable to them as it was to many other White citizens of the State of Texas in the 1950s.

Some might argue that the first year of “integration” at the University of Texas was a success, since University administrators managed to desegregate the school without allowing Black students to integrate into all facets of campus life, especially those aspects of life where hints of interracial sex were present. Although this incident happened nearly fifty years ago, it nonetheless reflects the difficulty southern states faced when deciding how—and whether—to fully comply with the Court’s mandate in *Brown*. What the Barbara Smith incident also reveals is how difficult it is for public universities to achieve full and equal integration in the face of “passive” resistance. Those in power at the University of Texas did, in fact, desegregate the University, but their policies insured that the University would remain segregated in other meaningful ways. But real integration is more than simply allowing Black students to take classes alongside White students. Real integration means that Black students are able—and feel welcome—to join in all aspects of campus life. This still does not happen today, as White students often exclude Black students from social fraternities and clubs, thereby leading Black students to turn to each other—and to historically Black social structures—to fulfill their needs outside of the classroom. What happened at the University of Texas is instructive in showing how racial equality was never embraced as wholeheartedly as most Americans seem to think. The administrators at the University of Texas were able to construct a fantasy of integration, all the while enacting racial policies made through “silent covenants”—unspoken convergences of interest and involuntary sacrifices of rights—that ensured that policies conformed to priorities set by Texas legislators and their White constituents. Nonetheless, we must acknowledge the courage of that faculty committee who in 1956 chose an African American woman to play the romantic lead opposite a White male at a time when Jim Crow ruled the state. The fact is that racial integration was, and continues to be, limited, and with

limited effects, belying several arguments about “the end of racism” in the United States.

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NOTES

1. R. G. Hicks to the Board of Regents, March 10, 1956, box 34, folder “Desegregation,” University of Texas (UT) Chancellor’s Office Records, Center for American History (CAH), University of Texas at Austin.
2. Letter from J. C. Osborne to University of Texas President Logan Wilson, March 16, 1956, box 34, folder “Desegregation,” UT Chancellor’s Office Records, CAH.
3. *Brown v. Board of Education* combined pending desegregation cases in Virginia, Delaware, South Carolina, and Washington, DC (Tushnet 1994, p. 154).
4. In the past, racial movements have often altered the meaning of racial categories, and even race itself, without eliminating racial inequality. Almaguer (1994) discusses the changing meaning of race in California. Foley (1997) discusses the changing meanings of “Black,” “White,” and “Mexican.”
5. For a discussion of integration at North Texas University, see Marcello (1996).
6. H. Y. McCown to Logan Wilson, May 26, 1954, box 9, folder “Negroes,” UT Chancellor’s Office Records, CAH.
7. The Thirteenth Amendment abolished slavery; the Fourteenth Amendment made African Americans citizens of the United States and protected their rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; and the Fifteenth Amendment gave African American men the right to vote.
8. Some historians argue that almost three-quarters of the lynchings of Blacks did not involve charges of rape or attempted rape.
9. President Wilson to Registrar H. Y. McCown, November 12, 1954, box 125, folder “Desegregation,” UT Chancellor’s Office Records, CAH.
10. Not to be outdone on the segregation issue, Republican gubernatorial candidate Reuben Senterfitt asked the Texas State Department of Public Safety to launch an all-out immediate investigation of the NAACP. Senterfitt said he was concerned that the NAACP had strong ties to the Communist Party. “The people of Texas,” Senterfitt said, “Negro as well as White, are entitled to know if the objectives of the NAACP and the Communist Party are accidentally the same or as the result of careful design” (Jones 1956, p. 337).
11. H. Y. McCown and Dean of Admissions to John Willis Hargis, September 7, 1954, box 34, folder “Desegregation,” UT Chancellor’s Office Records, CAH.
12. Some people have speculated that the University revoked Ford’s admission because he had announced that he planned to try out for the UT football team. African American John W. Walker, who had applied for admission into the petroleum engineering department, filed suit in the San Antonio district court after the University revoked his admission. His suit was dropped (Pennington 1987, p. 116).
13. The University of Oklahoma had integrated before the University of Texas, but some considered Oklahoma to be a “border” state, not really a southern state.
14. Letter to Mrs. H. E. Brown from F. Lanier Cox, Feb. 27, 1956. UT Chancellor’s Office Records, box 34, folder “Desegregation,” CAH.
15. In October 1955, the U.S. Supreme Court voided Section 7, Article VII, of the Texas Constitution, and Article 2900 of the Texas statutes, both of which provided for separate schools for Black and White children (Tushnet, p. 139).
16. The increased enrollment was due in part to the advent of the G. I. Bill following the end of World War II. For a discussion of the G. I. Bill and higher education, see Olson (1974).
17. H. Y. McCown to President Logan Wilson, memorandum, May 21, 1955, box 102, folder “Desegregation,” UT President’s Office Records. CAH.
18. The plan worked. While the University Registrar admitted 45.6% of White students who took the exam during the 1956 academic year, he admitted only 19.6% of Blacks

- tested. (H. Y. McCown to President Logan Wilson, memorandum, May 21, 1955, box 102, folder "Desegregation," UT President's Office Records. CAH.)
19. Jean Thompson, President of the University Religious Council, to Tom Sealy, Chairman of the Board of Regents, April 3, 1956, box 34, folder "Desegregation," UT Chancellor's Office Records, CAH.
 20. Mary E. Post to the Board of Regents, July 26, 1955, box 34, folder "Desegregation," UT Chancellor's Office Records, CAH.
 21. Lloyd S. Riddle to the Board of Regents, July 16, 1955, box 34, folder "Desegregation," UT Chancellor's Office Records, CAH.
 22. M. Barn to President Wilson, n.d., box 34, folder "Desegregation," UT Chancellor's Office Records, CAH.
 23. In the Paul Jones dance, the announcer was to say that it was time to change, after which participants would switch partners with the person closest to him or her. (H. Y. McCown to President Wilson and Vice-President C. P. Boner, confidential memorandum, September 19, 1961, box 53, folder "Desegregation," UT Chancellor's Office Records, 1950–1970.)
 24. H. Y. McCown to President Wilson and Vice President C. P. Boner, confidential memorandum, Sept. 19, 1961, box 53, folder "Desegregation," UT Chancellor's Office Records, 1950–1970.
 25. Willie Jordan, telephone conversation with the author, January 17, 1997.
 26. Leon Holland, conversation with the author, November 3, 1998.
 27. Mrs. Holland assumed the note was racist and an attempt to frighten her, which it obviously did. (Peggy [Drake] Holland, conversation with the author, November 3, 1998.)
 28. Peggy Holland, conversation with the author, November 3, 1998.
 29. Marion Ford, telephone conversation with the author, May 17, 2000. While a student at the University of Illinois, Ford was a member of the school's swimming, wrestling, and football teams.
 30. John Chase became the first African American to be licensed as an architect in the State of Texas, to be appointed to the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts, and to be named a University of Texas Distinguished Alumnus. In July 1998, Chase also became the first African American president of the University of Texas Ex-Students' Association.
 31. H. Y. McCown to President Logan Wilson, memorandum, May 21, 1957, box 102, folder "Desegregation," UT Chancellor's Office Records.
 32. See also "Statement to the Faculty," May 14, 1957, box 102, folder "Desegregation," UT Chancellor's Office Records.
 33. "Statement to the Faculty," May 14, 1957, box 102, folder "Desegregation," UT Chancellor's Office Records.
 34. "Statement of the Committee of Counsel on Academic Freedom and Responsibility," May 23, 1957, box 102, folder "Desegregation," UT Chancellor's Office Records.
 35. "Statement to the Faculty," May 14, 1957, box 102, folder "Desegregation," UT Chancellor's Office Records.
 36. Raymond Orr to President Wilson, May 11, 1957, box 30/B.b, folder "Opera Casting Incident," UT President's Office Records.
 37. "Statement of the Committee of Counsel on Academic Freedom and Responsibility," May 23, 1957, box 102, folder "Desegregation," UT Chancellor's Office Records.

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