Overview:

Today Mississippi University for Women has a student body that reflects the racial diversity of the state. Of the roughly 2,500 students who attended MUW in 2014, 37 percent were African American (and 19 percent were male).\(^1\) The story of how a school for “white girls” became a university committed to diversity and global community began in 1966 when six women desegregated the campus of MSCW. Their experience was traumatic and none of the original three freshmen graduated from the university. What follows is a brief introduction to that history and their experience.

Historical Context:

Mississippi University for Women’s original name, as established in 1884, was the Mississippi Industrial Institute and College for the Education of White Girls of the State of Mississippi in the Arts and Sciences (II&C).\(^2\) The only institution of its kind in Mississippi and the first in the South, the II&C was founded by the state for the education of “white women” in the liberal arts and vocational training.\(^3\) Within the category of white women the mission of the

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\(^3\) There are competing claims for the status of “first” public college for women. Historian Amy McCandless argues that the confusion relating to the competing claims rests in unclear definitions with regard to the terms “college” and “public.” What is clear is that the liberal arts and vocational template crafted by the I. I. & C. became a model for public, women’s education that led states across the South to follow suit, including Georgia, North Carolina, Alabama, Texas, Florida and Oklahoma. Amy McCandless, Keynote Address for the 125th Anniversary Celebration, MUW campus, March 12, 2009; Amy McCandless, *The Past in the Present Women's Higher Education in the Twentieth-Century American*
II&C was expansive. The institute offered free tuition and inexpensive board to “educable white girls” from every county in the state. Equally distributed opportunities across the state meant that students from a range of economic backgrounds could find “a type of democracy in education” if only for the “white girls of Mississippi.” On the opening day of the II&C, Governor Robert Lowry remarked that it was only appropriate that the state should offer the same educational opportunity for white girls at it had already offered to “white boys” and “black boys and girls.”

While a majority of legislators agreed white women should be educated there was not agreement on what the education should prioritize. Faculty at the II&C struggled to make the institution a “real college” that prioritized academic rigor and excellence. “It wasn’t easy,” said Pauline Orr, head of the I.I. & C. English and Literature Department. “There were those who said girls didn’t belong in college. And there were those who thought we should go easy on the girls.”

Thus was the II&C born with a radical mission to educate those deemed undesirable or inappropriate to educate previously, but within an entirely segregated system.

In 1920, the institute’s name was changed to Mississippi College for Women (MSCW) and in 1974 the college became the Mississippi University for Women (MUW). In 1982, MUW became a coeducational institution after Joe Hogan sued the university to be allowed entrance to

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4 The university actually required each county to meet a quota of students to enroll. Pieschel and Pieschel, 12-13.

5 Pieschel and Pieschel, 14.


7 Wilkerson-Freeman, 76.
the nursing program. While scholarly work has documented the experience of coeducation, the history of racial integration remains unexamined. Very little is known about the integration of southern women’s colleges and almost nothing has been recorded of the integration of MSCW. Historically, institutions of higher education in the South fought integration longer than in any other parts of the nation, particularly institutions that educated women. In public speeches and narratives, southern women’s universities deemphasize this period of their histories, choosing, as former president Clyda Rent explained, to “keep the best of the past” while focusing on current success. Perhaps due to the lack of importance placed on integration, no study exists of the desegregation of a women’s university in the American South, nor does any published work exist as a template. This makes the attempt to create a narrative of MUW’s desegregation and integration represents the first of its kind.

In order to understand what happened in 1966, we must understand a little about the campus and its commitment to racial segregation. One group that helps provide that context is the Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA), which was one of the most popular student organizations, if not the most popular student organization, during the mid-twentieth century. The campus popularity of the YWCA was challenged when the national YWCA took up the

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8 While research on coeducation is limited to the following thesis by Mona K. Vance, the Golden Girl Interviews (a collection of oral histories from alumni, fifty years after graduation) from 1963 and 1964 include statements by alumni describing preference for gender segregated education (as well as statements of indifference towards coeducation). The former often expressed negative feelings about how allowing men to attend the university broke with tradition and changed the university. Mona K. Vance, “Fighting the Wave of Change Cultural Transformation and Coeducation at Mississippi University for Women, 1884 to 1982,” (M.A. thesis, University of North Carolina-Wilmington, 2008).

9 McCandless, 1.

10 McCandless, 280.

issue of race relations in the early 1930s. The national organization sent the MSCW chapter correspondence encouraging all chapters to embrace racial equality and outreach to racial minorities. For example, the national YWCA sent out pamphlets in 1936 detailing, among other things, a “Program of Worship for Interracial Sunday” about understanding racial differences and improving relations with African Americans.\textsuperscript{12} By the 1940’s, the national chapter increasingly pushed for interracial meetings and conferences. The MSWC chapter was resentful of the national organization’s efforts at fostering racial inclusion. In response to one request, Elizabeth Hudson, MSCW Resident Secretary of the YWCA replied “Then too I do not think any suggestion will be of very much help to planning for an inter-racial conference as I under the present conditions would not feel it wise to participate in one of that type.”\textsuperscript{13} MSCW members voted to officially separate from the national organization in 1945.\textsuperscript{14} MSCW’s chapter voted to end any affiliation with the national YWCA and became the Student Christian Association. Of the three reasons cited, the foremost was displeasure with the national organization’s push for racial inclusion, specifically “inter-racial relations, between the white and the negro races, and between the white and the negro students in their national conference.”\textsuperscript{15} If a popular student organization such as the YWCA was representative of the student majority, the atmosphere on campus could be described as conservative and clearly in favor of segregation. The event demonstrates resistance to racial equality by many on campus – and that attitude changed little in the years leading up to the college’s desegregation.

\textsuperscript{12} Quoted in Dane McCulloch, “The Silent Separation,” 3.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 6.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 7.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid, 7.
With the 1954 decision of *Brown v. Board of Education*, the Supreme Court ruled that separate was not, in fact, equal and, the following year, required public schools to desegregate with “all deliberate speed.” For public universities, the ruling meant they would need to alter admissions requirements and begin enrolling African American students, even setting quotas for minority admissions. MSCW students must have anticipated integration by the mid-1960s. In May 1966, Betsy Seitzinger explained in *The Spectator* (the MSCW student newspaper) that public universities would be integrated soon or risk losing federal funding. She expressed hope that MSCW would not follow Ole Miss’s violent example of resisting integration, despite the prompting of some. She ended the article by saying that she felt the integration of MSCW was inevitable. Seitzinger did not actively oppose or support desegregation; she was resigned to its inescapability and hopeful that MSCW would not repeat the mistakes of Ole Miss. Ole Miss’s example presented a stark contrast to Mississippi State University, where Richard Holmes desegregated the university in 1965. Unlike the harassment James Meredith faced at Ole Miss, Holmes recalled “how the MSU family had treated him respectfully, both on the first day of summer classes and throughout his studies.” MSCW’s integration story is different from both Ole Miss and MSU, but if those universities represent the desegregation spectrum MSCW’s story is nowhere near MSU. While Holmes remembers that, “no student would close a door in my face as I entered a classroom… they would simply hold the door until I entered,” students like

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19 Ibid.
Diane Hardy Thompson remember very different encounters with fellow students at MSCW.\textsuperscript{20} As for Seitzinger, other than laying out a negative example to be avoided, she does not provide any insight into how students might proceed, nor does she express desegregation as something that would benefit the campus.

It is not clear whether Seitzinger’s attitude of resignation without enthusiasm or violence reflects the apathy of the entire student body on the issue; however, it is clear that \textit{The Spectator} offered very little opportunity for commentary on important issues of the day throughout the 1960s. In 1967, Martha McGee criticized the lack of real content in \textit{The Spectator}, and, in her case, argued for the publishing of letters from both African American and white students.\textsuperscript{21} Janie Ray, the editor of \textit{The Spectator}, in 1967, spoke out against the MSCW administration for banning political figures from speaking on campus. When MSU planned a discussion between Sen. Edward Kennedy, George Wallace, Bishop James A. Pike, Aaron Henry, and Peter Bertocci, MSCW had the opportunity to invite the speakers to its campus as well. Ray was particularly upset that students were denied the choice of whether to bring the speakers in, saying: "Certainly MSCW is isolated enough from the outside world without banning speakers from students."\textsuperscript{22} It is important to note that the speakers in question were traveling to southern colleges and universities specifically to debate issues such as desegregation and racial equality. She charges the administration with being undemocratic because of their unwillingness to allow students to decide such issues.

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{21} Marsha Mcgee, Letters to the Editor, \textit{The Spectator}, 06 December 1967.

\textsuperscript{22} Seitzinger.
The Hogarth Administration (1952-1977):
Though the students may have known that desegregation was inevitable, they could not have known the lengths to which President Charles Hogarth’s administration would go in order to delay it. Evidence suggests that he delayed desegregation for as long as possible and tried to retain control of the process. On the national scene, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 outlawed racial discrimination with regard to students, employees, and job applicants on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, and sex.\(^{23}\) Specifically, Title VI of the act ended discrimination in any program receiving federal financial assistance, which directly impacted institutions of higher learning. After the Civil Rights Act of 1964, public institutions could face withdrawal of federal funding if they remained segregated.\(^{24}\) The act should have allowed African American students to attend the university; still President Hogarth did not allow desegregation until the fall of 1966.\(^{25}\) In the meantime, the college saw several applications from African American students in 1965, but those applications went into a dead file labeled “Letters from Prospective Students (Considered Wise not to Respond)”. Upon suspecting a prospect’s race as black, a staff member in admissions would explain their reasoning in a note on the file (for example, they would note “negro” high school, or note that the prospective came from a supposed black neighborhood, even that prospect’s name might seem black to the staff person) and then file the letter away to be ignored.\(^{26}\) Clearly, the administration and staff actively worked to keep black students out. Hogarth’s thinking and rationale for this reluctance remains unknown.


\(^{24}\) Ibid.


\(^{26}\) Ibid.
The first indication that the college would desegregate came in March 1966, in an alumnae board meeting in Gulfport. Hogarth announced that “three negro girls from Lowndes county” would be admitted as “day students,” (which means that they would not live on campus). Although he seems to have selected Diane Hardy, Laverne Green, and Barbara Turner already, neither he nor Admissions let the three know that they were admitted until a few weeks before the semester began.\(^{27}\) Other than this announcement to alums, Hogarth kept the university’s integration very quiet, and he offered no explanation for why those three students.\(^{28}\) Certainly choosing three local students living in town allowed him to avoid desegregation of the dormitories, which may have been his goal. Surprisingly, his reluctance does not seem to have been shared by all the alumnae, at least those who contacted him after the announcement. The responses preserved in his records were overwhelmingly positive, and many, such as Hilda Bush Ringwald, endorsed further integration, recommending a plan to provide scholarships to black women from every county in the state. Whether this was an anomaly or whether he anticipated support from the Gulfport alums and selected them because he thought they might be sympathetic is unknown.

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\(^{27}\) Diane Hardy Thompson Oral Interview with Jaleesa Fields, Local History Room, Columbus-Lowndes Public Library, Columbus, Mississippi.

\(^{28}\) Knowing why President Hogarth delayed segregation until fall of 1966 or why he chose certain students is difficult. Because the college was an important part of Columbus and the surrounding area, Hogarth’s relative silence on desegregation could have interesting implications. He may have been afraid of harming the reputation of the school; he may also have feared the backlash from the highly conservative surrounding area. It is even possible that, witnessing the violence of James Meredith’s entrance into Ole Miss, he felt a quiet desegregation to be the safest option for all involved. Regardless of Hogarth’s reasons, no news of the integration of MSCW has been found in the town or county newspaper. Ibid.
The Experience of the First Six:

In September 1966, Diane Hardy, Laverne Greene, and Barbara Turner became the first freshmen to desegregate the college, along with Jaqueline Edith Edwards, Mary L. Flowers, and Eula Mae Houser who were registered as “special” students. All three freshmen were Columbus natives and graduates of R.E. Hunt High School, and the three registered special students were teachers from the same school. The experience of the first six can only be described as harrowing and traumatic. During their time at the college, the other students, faculty, and community members made the three freshmen feel lesser and unwelcome. Though some faculty, like Dr. Robert Gilbert, professor of sociology, remember that these students met no open hostility, the oral interviews of the women themselves provide a different perspective and reveal a different reality. The two extant oral interviews describe how the freshmen were met daily with threats, ostracism by the other students, and suspicion from the administration.

Laverne Greene walked to school through a white neighborhood, where she had to pass the house of a man who insulted her. As she described: “Each day he told me to get off the sidewalk and get in the street, so the cars could run over me. He said I had no business going to that school.”29 Often the man sprayed her with a water hose. The daily indignity only ended when Greene’s mother finally made her take a different route. But the humiliation did not stop there. One afternoon as she was having lunch at the Golden Goose, a group of white students upended a garbage can onto her food and laughed at her. A nearby cashier told her to clean up the mess. These incidents of humiliation punctuated what was otherwise a very lonely time. She recalled:

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29 Laverne Greene Leech Oral Interview with Jaleesa Fields, Local History Room, Columbus-Lowndes Public Library, Columbus, Mississippi.
“Because we [the three freshmen] were pretty much separated, and everybody else just kind of ignored me. It was like I wasn’t even there. You know? And this included students, faculty, and everybody. So, it was kind of a loneliness.”

Despite being allowed to attend the college, Greene says, “We weren't welcome there... Most of the time we just found a little nook where we could sit.”\textsuperscript{30} She finally left MSCW and enrolled at Rust College in order to escape the hardship and harassment.

Her experience appears common to the original six students. Diane Hardy’s father was threatened with the loss of his job at a local tire factory (Moss Tire, later Kerr McGee) when she enrolled at MSCW. He received several notes in his work locker and phone calls to his home as unknown persons tried to intimidate him.\textsuperscript{31} Despite the harassment, Hardy’s father supported her decision to attend MSCW. He told her: “My tax dollars support that school, just like everybody else. So if you wanna go, you go;” “I am behind you 100 percent.”\textsuperscript{32} Once she arrived on campus, Hardy was met with exclusion by the students and blatant mistreatment by some of the faculty. She recalls white students refusing to sit by her and, worse, she was left standing alone during dance class because white students refused to partner with her. They did not want to physically touch her, she remembered.\textsuperscript{33} Hardy, who described herself as “extremely introverted,” found the treatment very difficult to deal with. Hardy internalized the constant rejection and insults: “the school taught me – I think I always say that – taught me hatred.”\textsuperscript{34} Which proved very true when Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated in 1968. She was in


\textsuperscript{31} Diane Hardy Thompson Oral Interview.

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{33} The faculty person stepped in to be her partner on these occasions. [Is that correct? Rain, check that for me please.]

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid.
class and remembered that “the teacher couldn’t teach anymore, because the whole class was celebrating.” She also recalled many students bragging loudly about family members in the Klan. It was the step too far for Hardy, who left the college shortly thereafter.  

Although Barbara Turner has yet to be interviewed, it is clear that the freshmen met impossibly difficult situations during their time at MSCW, and all three left by 1969. For much of the rest of her life, Diane Hardy felt intense hatred for MUW, yet refused to let it conquer her. She was the sole freshmen to eventually graduate from the school (returning years later and graduating with a degree in elementary education in 1992). Laverne Greene and Barbara Turner left the college and for many years after found it too painful to visit or even drive by the campus. But that pain dissipated over time, at least for Greene. In 2013, Greene she noted: "We all kind of had a bad taste in our mouth about the 'W.' But as time went on and healing began, I think we all felt better. ... Diane and I began to reconcile and to see the progress the W has made now, we were happy. And we knew that whatever we went through, it was well worth it for the students today.”

Even the three registered special students, who were adults already working in Columbus in 1966, had extreme difficulty attending the college. According to Dr. Ellen Pope, who taught one of the first integrated graduate classes with the registered special students, the three black

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36 Diane Hardy returned multiple times in an attempt to complete her degree. She found being back in the classroom at MUW re-traumatizing and had a hard time concentrating in classes and in discussions with other students. She persevered, however, and earned a BA in Elementary Education in 1992. Ibid.


38 Ellen Weathersby Pope Oral History, Full Manuscript Golden Days, Southern Women’s Institute, Mississippi University for Women, Columbus, Miss.
women sat apart from the others and were afraid to leave Pope's side during field trips. Jacqueline Edwards alone received her diploma and she became the first black woman to graduate from MSCW with a Master’s degree. Since at least Sojourner Truth, black women had dared ask “aren’t I a woman?” Alone and isolated, but in a longer line than they could initially perceive, the first six answered that question for themselves and demanded that the college and the community of Columbus recognize their right to an equal education.

The administration offered no support to the initial six and only began interceding on behalf of the black students when the students demanded action be taken to stop widespread discrimination against them. While the Hogarth administration failed to support these students, it did create detailed charts on any prospective African American student who looked interested in applying to the school. President Hogarth monitored Hardy, Greene, and Thompson for during their time at MSCW and received weekly updates on their grades and attendance. The charts created by the Admissions office tracked all African American students who applied for admission. The charts began in September 1966 and were delivered, sometimes daily, sometimes weekly to Hogarth until May 1968. Why Hogarth requested this information specifically on African American prospects is uncertain. It is clear that the administration investigated prospective black students, even contacting local law enforcement from the prospective student’s hometown in an effort to determine whether the backgrounds of the women were “unstable.” He did not perform similar investigations into the backgrounds of all prospective white students; however, over the years it is clear that some white students with suspect backgrounds were investigated by Admissions, so the process was not entirely new. For

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three years Hogarth received these increasingly lengthy reports, which grew longer after more students enrolled. The reports ended after students demanded access to the dormitories—the last reports document the selection of the women who integrated the dorms (Erie J. Cousin, Arelya J. Mitchell, Marion Dilworth, and Shirley Bishop).\textsuperscript{40} However, the weekly reports do not appear to have prompted any action \textit{on behalf of} the African American students or the prospective students.

\textbf{Formation of the Civil Rights Committee:}

Not until a Civil Rights Committee was formed in the fall of 1969 did any of the early students gain an outlet to voice their mistreatment and frustration. In the 1960s, the federal Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) Department made several recommendations to desegregated universities to improve race relations in varied areas, including student organizations and housing. In particular, HEW advocated the creation of an outlet for students “to provide a means whereby complaints and problems of Negro students can be brought to the attention of College officials at the highest echelon with little delay.”\textsuperscript{41} Hogarth did not immediately act on the recommendations. Only when on March 11, 1969, three African American students – Helen Mason, Bernice Munson, and Cynthia Walker – came to the administration to voice complaints about discrimination did the administration act. Because President Hogarth was unavailable, the students met with his administrative assistant, E. A. Knight.\textsuperscript{42} The students reported discrimination from the social clubs, which denied them membership and ostracized any member who associated with them. They faced similar treatment

\textsuperscript{40} Ibid, 4.

\textsuperscript{41} Melissa Luke, “The Creation of the Committee on Civil Rights,” private collection of Erin Kempker, Mississippi University for Women, Columbus, Miss.

\textsuperscript{42} Ibid.
in the college’s Tearoom, where servers often gave them smaller portions or ignored them altogether. It escalated even more in classes where, they reported, professors were “literally teaching around them” and refused to recognize their questions or include them in discussion. As the three students explained to Knight, they would not mind such discrimination, except their disadvantages in class, such as working alone and being graded more harshly than white students, kept their grades extremely low; they feared being denied admission to graduate schools if it continued. The very same day, Knight sent a confidential memo to Hogarth wherein he proposed implementation of the Committee on Civil Rights. The committee was active the following year, chaired by Donald King (chair of the Department of Mathematics), and it included faculty and students (white and black students each had representatives on the committee).\textsuperscript{43} The timing here is telling. On the same day that the three students came to Knight with evidence of discrimination in several areas, the administration created a civil rights committee. Put another way, the administration seemed only willing to create resources for African American students with prompting. Hogarth may have created the committee out of genuine concern for the students. Or, perhaps he feared federal or state action if he failed to address the complaints. In any case, the committee represented progress; no longer would discrimination against African American students be easily ignored by the administration.

\textbf{Student Life:}

Further evidence of unrest on campus can be found in the student literature magazine \textit{The Dilettante}. The 1968 issue is full of student poetry centered on themes like race, inequality, and

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{43} Ibid.}
frustration with society. The 1968 issue broached controversial topics that The Spectator largely ignored, and students wrote poetry that expressed desire for change. Poems published in issues up to 1975 continually pushed the boundaries of racial identity, going so far as to question human nature and social concepts like “race.” While students questioned racial attitudes and ideas, it is equally clear that not a single poem from 1968 to 1975 expressed race relations positively or described diversity as something to be celebrated; also absent were any poems that hinted at Black Power or race pride.

In the early 1970s, MSCW’s treatment of African American students seemed better, at least to some. Joyce Webber Clemmons was enrolled between 1973-1976 and she recalls, “I was the only black in most of my classes during my freshman year. There was one professor who resented blacks sitting in the front of the class and who did not give blacks a grade higher than a ‘C’ in … course work.” However, by the time that she left MSCW, the relationship between blacks and whites had improved, she thought. In 1969, Shirley Walker was the first black woman to graduate from the W. Like the original freshman three, she was from Columbus, but her experience was less traumatic. At the invitation of the Office of Minority Student Services, she was willing to return to campus in February 1985 to speak about her time there. Susie Shelton was on campus in the early 1970s and she explains that problems with faculty and students continued in her time, even if black women found ways of fighting back. Shelton was


46 “MUW’s First Black Graduate,” flyer, McDevitt Hall Collection, Mississippi University for Women, Columbus, Miss.
handed an incorrect, disorganized schedule during her freshmen year and passed from one professor to the other. Since she was not allowed to stay in class until her schedule was fixed, she had no way of knowing whether she would even get the classes she needed or what the classes she needed were—and her professors refused to help. She described the feeling the experience gave her: “You’re smooth sailing – you get knocked off again…Like, I’m just reminding you. ‘Stay in your place’.”47 When she was finally able to attend class, she was ignored by many of her professors. And Shelton felt strongly that the administration was her enemy, not her ally. Still, surrounded by animosity, Shelton fought back. When white students stared at her, she stared back. When other clubs excluded her, she helped form the Corettas.

The only real positive story to emerge from the early desegregation period was that of a special interest student organization called the Corettas. The Corettas were founded during the 1969-1970 academic year with Arelya Mitchell serving as the first president.48 It was the first racially-inclusive organization at MSCW, and the first centered on the needs of African American students. Named for Coretta Scott King, the organization listed, “promoting a better understanding among the student body and the faculty” among its goals.49 Unlike other organizations on campus, it advertised itself as open to every student, white or black. Over the course of the organization’s existence, it generally had a healthy membership, even including a few white students in some years, though its membership fluctuated in the 1980s. After disappearing a few times, the Corettas reappeared in 1992 as a “social club” as opposed to a

47 Susie Shelton Oral Interview with Ericka Burkhalter, Local History Room, Columbus-Lowndes Public Library, Columbus, Miss.


49 Ibid.
student organization. At MUW, a social club functions similarly to a sorority, but is smaller and entirely unique to the university.\textsuperscript{50} Throughout the club’s existence, the Corettas remained dedicated to inclusion – and became a place of safety and friendship between African American students.

The other social clubs have a different trajectory. In the twenty-four years after desegregation only five social clubs (of around eighteen) desegregated and none were fully integrated.\textsuperscript{51} And though students ordinarily participate in social clubs for their entire time at the university, the few African American students to desegregate often only participated for one year. The first to desegregate were the Hottentots in 1975, followed by the Ma’amseles (1977), the D’belles (1979), the Rosettes (1980), and finally the Revelers (1984). By the late 1980s, only these five clubs had \textit{attempted} desegregations, with the exception of Las Amigas. Las Amigas was a social club that appeared in 1981 whose membership was entirely African American. It seems after many attempts to be accepted into established social clubs, the solution of Las Amigas was to create a club of their own that promoted diversity and tolerance. While the Coretta’s may have filled some of the roles of a social club for the excluded girls, Las Amigas was the first official, fully-fledged social club created for African American students at MUW.

\textbf{Faculty Desegregation:}

Integrating the faculty was possibly an even slower process. The first department to integrate was the Demonstration School, which was in a unique position since it operated as an

\textsuperscript{50} Sarah Whitt questioned whether the club’s not originally forming as a social club, but a “student organization” was evidence of the college’s unwillingness to even let black women participate in the social club tradition in a segregated/separate way. This was only conjecture, as there is no evidence.

independent elementary school on MSCW campus, as well as an experimental lab for the teacher training program. Marjorie Carter was hired as an instructor in 1970 and she appears to be the first African American faculty member at MSCW, though she only stayed a year. A total of four African American faculty members were hired at the Demonstration School during the first twenty-five years of integration, making it perhaps the most integrated faculty on campus. With twenty-one staff members and only thirteen faculty members hired over the course of twenty-five years, Kimberly Baucom makes the case that very few African Americans were hired for university positions, with the majority not arriving (especially in staff positions) until the late 1980s and 1990s. Even then, several only stayed or were employed for one year, especially in the early stages of desegregation.52

President Clyda Rent (1989-2001) responded to the Ayer’s case in the late 1980s and 1990s by increasing diversity programming and creating events aimed at minority students.53 She also helped create forums for addressing minority concerns. Yet, her motives for the increased programming are less clear. While she could have been genuinely concerned for minority students at the university, she could just as easily have been creating quick programming to avoid bad publicity and the consolidation of MSCW with another state university.

52 Kimberley Baucom, “Desegregation of Teaching Faculty and Staff Members at MSCW/MUW,” MUW Student Research, available online at https://muwinintegrationhistory.wordpress.com/student-research/kimberly-frp/.
Conclusion:

Over the course of the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s, the university saw important “firsts.” Phillip “Flapp” Cockrell became the first African American SGA President in 2002-2003. He greatly improved campus by introducing book vouchers, free laundry, and increased parking. He went on to organize the “March for Unity” on Dr. Martin Luther King’s birthday. Cockrell represents an important push for true integration at MUW, because he was elected by popular vote to represent the students and because during his presidency he created campus-wide civil rights programming. Toni Seawright represents another first, since she became the first African American Miss “W” in 1987. Formerly a member of the Corettas, Seawright went on to be crowned Miss Mississippi, the first African American woman in the state to hold the title. These and other African American leaders were chosen, in some capacity, to represent the university. While we believe true integration was not achieved until perhaps as late as the 2000’s, these students and their stories signify its beginning.

In conclusion, the integration of MSCW took decades. Beginning in 1966, African American women (and later men) worked to earn their degree in an environment that failed to recognize them as equals. Over time, the racial tensions on campus eased, so that by the late 1980s some African American students on campus felt there had been progress. What students today think about the racial climate on campus is unknown, and the degree to which our university is living up to its potential to be a place for democratic education remains to be seen. It is clear that the women who desegregated MSCW—Laverne Greene Leech, Diana Hardy Thompson, Barbara


Turner Leigh, Eula Mae Houser, Jacqueline Edwards, and Mary Flowers—paved the way for others at great expense to themselves. They may have decided upon MSCW for the same reasons as many other women at the time and since—that the school provided a quality education that could be gotten “just down the street”—but their experience proved how threatening simple ideas like universal equality could be.\(^{56}\) They paid a price for going first, and they lived with the feelings of frustration and insecurity that the experience created. In fall of 2016, we will celebrate their courage and fortitude.

\(^{56}\) Green Leech talks about how she had no interest in desegregating the university/college, but wanted to get a college education from someplace close by. Laverne Greene Leech Oral Interview.