Desegregation of Faculty and Staff of MSCW—Later MUW

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Throughout the United States, places began gradually desegregating in the 1960’s; however, some areas, especially the Deep South, took much longer to desegregate public places. The Mississippi State College for Women, later Mississippi University for Women, began desegregating in 1966. For this project, the faculty bulletins and alumnae news as well as the annual yearbooks were analyzed (years 1966-1996), focusing on when the faculty and staff began desegregating on campus and also at how this gradual desegregation compared to the student body desegregation. By using the years listed above in the yearbooks and faculty bulletins and alumnae news, there will be a firm understanding of the desegregation of MSCW faculty and staff and a grasp of the rate at which this compared to the rate of desegregation of the student body by analyzing the photographs of African American faculty, staff, and students.

The first African American to graduate from the university was Shirley Walker in 1969 that went for four years, starting in 1966. However, even up to 1973 there were still few African Americans. Joyce Webber Clemmons was an African American woman enrolled 1973-1976 and she realls, “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, she tells that by the time that she left the university, the relationship between blacks and whites had changed drastically. On the other hand, as early as 1960, there were exchange students at the university. Astrid Karstad from Stryn, Nordford, Norway, came to MSCW as a Student Christian Association(SCA) exchange

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1 Thomas, Michelle, “Blacks Have Reservations About Role at The W,” newspaper clipping, MUW/Desegregation folder, Vertical File Collection, Special Collections, Fant Library, Mississippi University for Women (MUW), Columbus, Miss.
2 ibid.
This raised the question of why people from other countries could go to the university, but African American students in America could not.

The yearbooks referenced were unhelpful in some cases, as the faculty and staff weren’t pictured some years in the yearbooks. In both 1976 and 1979, the faculty were not pictured, but were listed with their respected positions. In addition to this, certain departments were not pictured in various years. These include the Demonstration School faculty in 1972, 1981, 1984, and 1986, the Personal Development Center faculty in 1977, the Nursing faculty in 1977 and 1981, Psychology and Home Economics faculty in 1980, and the Business Department faculty in 1983. With this being said, it is easy to understand why this topic is so hard to research accurately. Without the pictures in these years, it is hard to get an accurate timeline of the gradual desegregation of the faculty without knowing the ethnicity that goes along with the listed names that were not pictured. Due to this, the faculty alumnae news and faculty bulletins were incorporated in hopes to clear up some unanswered or vague questions that the yearbook posed.

Though MSCW technically began desegregation in 1966, the first African American faculty member at MSCW, Marjorie Carter, was hired at the Demonstration School in 1970 and only stayed for one year. This makes the Demonstration School the first department at MSCW to desegregate the faculty. The next African American faculty member pictured in the yearbook wasn’t until Gertrude Lewis in 1972. She, like Marjorie Carter, was also hired at the Demonstration School, but she stayed for a substantially longer time than Marjorie Carter. She

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3 Faculty Bulletins October 1967, 6, Special Collections, Fant Library, MUW, Columbus, Miss.
6 Kimberly Baucom, “Desegregation of Teaching Faculty and Staff Members at MSCW/MUW,” 2. Meh Lady 1970.
remained at MSCW from the fall of 1972 to the spring of 1989.\(^7\) This means that it was four years after the university desegregated that the first African American faculty member was hired, and it was not until two years later that the next was hired. A sluggish desegregation of faculty happens in the following years; the Nursing department hired its first African American faculty member in 1974, the Business department in 1978, the Communications department in 1986, and The Fine and Performing Arts department in 1987.\(^8\)

In addition to this, one African American faculty member who taught in the Business department in 1984, Della Posey, attended MUW in 1977.\(^9\) While there, she was in Phi Beta Lambda and Pi Omega Pi, of which she was the president.\(^10\) She got her B.S. degree in 1977 and her M.S. in 1978; she received her PhD, but research did not show in what year she received it.\(^11\) Nonetheless, she returned to MUW in 1984 and was an assistant professor in the Business department.\(^12\) According to the yearbooks she only remained at MUW for one year which was the fall of 1983 to the spring of 1984. During her time at the school, there were also a few African American staff members, one of which was Debbie Billups of Student Services.\(^13\) The previous year there were also some African American staff members: Debbie Jackson, advisor of the Corettas social club, Edmond McDavis, Post Office Personnel, Leon Phillips, MUW Bookstore Staff, and Betty Tate, Administration—President’s Office.\(^14\)

\(^7\) 1973 Meh Lady, 72. 1974 Meh Lady, 217. 1975 Meh Lady, 238. 1976 Meh Lady, 211. 1977 Meh Lady, 261. 1978 Meh Lady, 229. 1979 Meh Lady, 229. 1980 Meh Lady, 235. 1989 Meh Lady, 37. The years not listed were the years in which her picture could not be found in the yearbook.

\(^8\) Kimberly Baucom, “Desegregation of Teaching Faculty and Staff Members at MSCW/MUW,” 2. Meh Lady.

\(^9\) 1977 Meh Lady, 203.


\(^11\) Faculty Directories

\(^12\) 1984 Meh Lady, 33. Her face is mostly covered by a man in front of her in the picture.

\(^13\) 1984 Meh Lady, 127.

\(^14\) 1983 Meh Lady, 198, 195.
Despite the small amount of African American faculty and staff members in the early 1980’s, the amount of African Americans in the student body began to flourish. In the 1982-1983 school year alone, there were more than 30 African American students and even a social club that was for African Americans (along with others ethnicities), the Corettas.\textsuperscript{15} When Della Posey attended years earlier, in 1977, there was also a large African American student body population.\textsuperscript{16} Needless to say, the African American student body seemed to flourish more rapidly than the faculty and staff population, and to break it down even further, more African Americans were hired as staff than faculty.

Though the faculty bulletins and alumnae cleared up a few question posed, they were unable to clearly give a stronger grasp of the desegregation of the school. In them there were hopes to find statements clarifying that the treatment of African Americans should be equal to that of whites; something along the lines of non-discrimination statements in our current day syllabi. Also, there were hopes of finding some sort of welcoming of the first African American faculty member in the faculty bulletins or a piece on the first African American student in the alumnae news, but there was nothing of the sort. Needless to say, the faculty bulletins and alumnae news was a dead end in attempting to better understand the desegregation of the university. This silence present in the faculty bulletins and alumnae news on this topic shows a sort of “pushing it under the carpet” method that the university seemed to adopt. The information shown in these, or lack thereof, slyly releases the university’s opinion of desegregation.

\textsuperscript{15} 1983 Meh Lady.
\textsuperscript{16} 1977 Meh Lady.
In conclusion, the faculty and staff of the university desegregated at a drastically slower rate than did the student body; however, the African American students enrolled felt somewhat shunned by the white professors and students for many years after desegregation. An example of this is Clemmons quote mentioned in the opening paragraph. Also, many of the African American faculty and staff hired did not stay for more than one year.\(^{17}\) It is still very unclear as to whether the African American faculty and staff members got treated differently than the white faculty and staff by the college, but according to the way African American students were treated, they did. One African American student even claimed, “[b]lack students do not feel a part of MUW.”\(^ {18}\) However, now at the university there is a flourishing African American faculty and staff population and even African American department heads. In addition to this, African Americans are freely welcome and encouraged to attend the W.

\(^{17}\) Kimberly Baucom, “Desegregation of Teaching Faculty and Staff Members at MSCW/MUW,” 4.  
\(^{18}\) Thomas, Michelle, “Blacks Have Reservations About Role at The W,” newspaper clipping, MUW/Desegregation folder, Vertical File Collection, Special Collections, Fant Library, Mississippi University for Women (MUW), Columbus, Miss.