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"A Half-Century of Desegregated Higher Education: From SLI to the University of Louisiana–Lafayette, 1954-2004" By Michael G. Wade

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December 2003

A growing body of scholarship notwithstanding, portrayals of college and university integration in the Deep South continue to consist largely of a series of set images, a sequence of stock events that demonstrate vigorous white resistance to any sully of the Southern way of education.[1] The violence accompanying James Meredith's registration at Ole Miss in 1962, and George Wallace's scripted "stand in the schoolhouse door" at the University of Alabama in 1963 dominate the public's memory of college desegregation.[2] Some old-timers recall Autherine Lucy's brief but tumultuous two-day stay at the University of Alabama in 1957. Fewer remember Charlayne Hunter's and Hamilton Holmes' successful matriculation at the University of Georgia in 1961,[3] and fewer still Harvey Gantt's peaceful entry into Clemson University that same year.[4] These impressions of the desegregation of Southern colleges have been powerfully reinforced by television documentaries, notably the "Eyes on the Prize" series.

Another factor in the construction of these particular memories is sensationalism. Even though both were flagship universities, the violence accompanying James Meredith's entry into Ole Miss is far better known than the peacable integration of Georgia a year earlier. Smaller, regional schools would attract even less attention. As the well-publicized campus integrations of the early 1960s proceeded, the University of Southwestern Louisiana entered its second decade of desegregation. In the fall of 1954, what was then Southwest Louisiana Institute (SLI) became the first state-supported college in the Deep South to desegregate its undergraduate programs.[5] It did so pursuant to a court order issued prior to the May 1954 *Brown* decision. Furthermore, it was a substantial desegregation. At least eighty black undergraduates registered for fall classes at SLI in the summer and fall of 1954. Despite this comparatively large-scale breaching of the walls of segregation, there was no disorder, either on campus or off. The outward peace of the occasion led many whites to later remember the event as evidence of their magnanimity. While it was not that simple, the fact that it happened at a small state college in Lafayette, Louisiana, favored its success, as did the deliberately low-key approach of school leaders. Indeed, SLI's desegregation attracted so little media attention that this historic event appears in almost none

of the scholarship on civil rights.[6] However, the early date and the magnitude of SLI's experiment in racial justice, in combination with its success, make it an important episode in civil rights history.

Historians Armstead Robinson and Patricia Sullivan have argued that "more attention must be concentrated on the origins, process, and outcome of civil rights struggles in local communities before the movement and its consequences can be fully understood....all too often, scholars emphasize the interracialism of the *Brown* decade and the role of the federal government instead of focusing on the vital and essential role played by black initiative before, during, and after the *Brown* decade." [7]

In the case of southern higher education, this is a clear call for a case by case examination of the desegregation experience on individual campuses, not least to determine the degree to which the well-documented experiences at Alabama and Ole Miss, or even at Georgia and Clemson, are representative of college desegregation generally, but also to determine the role played by local communities, for better or worse, in the process. Evidence that local citizens initiated their own civil rights challenges may make it more difficult for unreconstructed segregationists to interpret the efforts of earlier confederates as resistance to government tyranny. Proponents of civil rights will discover a new, larger cast of heroes, even as neo-confederates continue their enshrinement of the James Eastlands and Lester Maddoxes. These issues should be of considerable interest not only to scholars, but also to policymakers in a period of troubled racial relations.[8] Case studies also will inspire questions about the oft-supposed homogeneity of the Deep South on the verge of the Civil Rights Revolution; south Louisiana certainly raises that issue.

On the face of it, Lafayette, a market town in rural south Louisiana, seemed an unlikely locale for leadership in a civil rights movement which had yet to achieve the momentum and support which would define it in the early 1960s. Insofar as it existed south of the Mason-Dixon line, sympathy for experiments in racial justice was more a feature of the upper South, of border states such as Kentucky and Maryland. Less than fifty miles from the Gulf of Mexico, Lafayette was about as far south as a town in Dixie could be. But Lafayette was Deep South with a difference.

Many of Lafayette's the early settlers were descendants of the Acadian exiles who peopled southwest Louisiana in the second half of the eighteenth century. Founded in 1824 as Vermilionville, the village became Lafayette sixty years later.[9] Enriched by infusions of "foreign" French, Germans and Irishmen, *les Americains*, and later Lebanese and Syrian immigrants, the region centered upon Lafayette developed a "Cajun" culture which included the French language, Roman Catholicism, tightly-knit families, and a much-admired cuisine which included not only their adaptations of local foods to French cooking, but also African, French, Native American and Spanish culinary practices.[10] A

substantial Jewish community further enlivened this rich admixture of cultures.[11] At the turn of the twentieth century, the rapidly growing town further expanded its horizons when it acquired a fledgling college, Southwest Louisiana Industrial Institute. That institution, its name shortened to Southwest Louisiana Institute in 1925, made the town a focal point for National Youth Administration programs in the 1930s and for the Navy's V-12 Program during World War II.[12] After the war, Lafayette emerged as one of the chief beneficiaries of the offshore oil boom when local merchant Maurice Heymann developed the Oil Center, a large complex of office buildings which made the town the logical administrative center between Houston and New Orleans, further broadening an already substantial middle class.[13]

African-Americans saw World War II as not only a crusade against fascism, but also as an opportunity to undermine institutionalized racism at home. Unsurprisingly, then, many black Americans emerged from the wartime experience newly determined to insist on fuller and more equitable participation in the benefits of American citizenship. That resolve produced some of the century's nastier episodes of white violence, but there were signs that whites were less approving of race-based murder and mayhem than in the pre-war period. In Louisiana in 1947, Lafayette attorney Bertrand DeBlanc labored mightily on Willie Francis's unsuccessful appeal to escape a second date with the electric chair after the failed first effort to execute him for a robbery-murder conviction by an all-white jury.[14] Southern military bases, such as Chennault Air Base in nearby Lake Charles, racially integrated after 1948, inspired local blacks to press for an end to discrimination while suggesting that the world would not come to an end if the Constitution was respected. Finally, for many south Louisianians, the Catholic Church's clear admonition that racism was un-Christian would have increased meaning as many clerics actively sought to turn preachment into practice.[15] There was another, ultimately unquantifiable factor which would influence residents of SLI's southwest Louisiana service area on the eve of a legal challenge to the college's white-only status.

Lafayette's middle class contained a substantial "black" minority, not a few of whom were descendents of Louisiana's *gens de couleur libres* (free people of color), the offspring of antebellum interracial liaisons and relationships. Not a few white planters in the region had sired offspring by white wives and black or mixed-race mistresses. As one New Iberian of African-American and French ancestry told the late Glenn Conrad, founder of the Center for Louisiana Studies, "We *all* know who our white ancestors are." Historian Vaughan Burdin Baker, whose family can trace its roots to antebellum plantation owners in the Cane River country near Natchitoches, has written of Charlotte Broutin, a New Orleans woman of Afro-French parentage who moved to St. Martinville in the old Attakapas District in the late 18th century. She bore French royal engineer Marin LeNormand six children prior to marrying him just months before his death in 1812. A substantial property owner in her own right, she and her legitimized children "passed" into the white population. One of her daughters married the

son of a prominent Cajun family; the groom produced one family with the Broutin girl and another with a mistress of color.[16] Some of the family names in the old "Mouton Addition" and other black neighborhoods bear witness to the fact that their ancestors had white cousins. The reality of a substantial measure of shared ancestry, the resultant obligations, and the awareness of shared genealogy, of cousins across the color line, were probably factors in the negotiating of racial boundaries that was to come.

On September 15, 1953, Lafayette Parish residents Clara Dell Constantine, Martha Jane Conway, Charles Vincent Singleton, and Shirley Taylor sought admission to all-white SLI. Local civil rights activist Velma Hollier described these middle-class kids, and by implication their parents, as "four who would" agree to pursue this venture whose risks were unknown.[17] When their applications were denied, they appealed to the State Board of Education without result.[18] On January 4, 1954, their attorneys filed a class action complaint in the United States District Court for the Western District of Louisiana, seeking to permanently enjoin SLI's governing authorities from refusing them admittance.[19]

Constantine v. S.L.I. was part of the NAACP's lengthy struggle to desegregate southern colleges and universities. NAACP Legal Defense Fund lawyer Charles Hamilton Houston's strategy was to insist on the on the full meaning of the "separate but equal" wording of the Supreme Court in *Plessy v. Ferguson*, i.e., an equal education, even if this could only be obtained at an all-white institution.[20] This legal campaign began in 1933 when Thomas Hocutt unsuccessfully sued for admission to the University of North Carolina's pharmacy school because the state had provided no pharmacy school for African-Americans. Two years later, Donald Murray won admission to the University of Maryland's law school. He graduated in 1938, the year that the LSU Law School refused Hurchail Jackson's application for admission. The 1939 creation of the NAACP Legal Defense Fund strengthened their financial position and the end of World War II produced a more favorable legal climate for school desegregation suits.[21]

In 1946, the LSU Law School denied Charles Hatfield's request for admission. The LSU Board of Supervisors and the State Board of Education suggested that he attend law school on an out-of-state scholarship until a separate school could be established at Southern University for the 1947-48 academic year. In the same year, LSU rejected New Iberia resident Viola Johnson's application to the LSU School of Medicine. Judge G. Caldwell Hegert dismissed the resultant suits, saying that the plaintiffs should demand that Southern University provide the appropriate professional schools. Nonetheless, in 1950 there were eight more African-American applicants for the LSU law and medical schools. They too were rejected despite recent successful desegregation rulings in Texas and Oklahoma.[22]

In two challenges to *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), the Supreme Court weakened

the 1896 decision. In each case, the plaintiffs were represented by NAACP legal counsel. In *McLaurin v. Oklahoma Board of Regents* (1950), the Court ruled that the University of Oklahoma's efforts to restrict George McLaurin's court-ordered participation in their doctoral program in education by segregating him from his classmates constituted unequal treatment. In *Sweatt v. Painter* (1950), it ordered Heman Sweatt admitted to the University of Texas Law School even though historically-black Texas Southern also had a law school. The court reasoned that Texas Southern, whatever its positive attributes might be, could not hope to match the law school in Austin in terms of its prestige, influential alumni, and professional contacts. It thereby could not satisfy the requirement of separate equality mandated in *Plessy*. Thus, by 1950, the Court was but a short step from declaring that segregation itself constituted discriminatory treatment.[23]

With some misgivings, the NAACP had already begun to shift its legal strategy from stressing the inequitable results of the separate but equal doctrine to challenging the constitutionality of segregation itself.[24] In *Wilson v. Board of Supervisors of Louisiana State University* (1950), Thurgood Marshall argued that their object was to have LSU remove race from its consideration of applicants. His co-counsel, Alexander Pierre (A.P.) Tureaud, the New Orleans civil rights lawyer, easily refuted the defense contention that Southern provided substantially equal facilities in its three-year old law school. The three-judge federal court, carefully skirting the challenge to *Plessy*, ruled that Wilson must be admitted to LSU's law school because Southern did not afford him the same educational advantages. However, when LSU investigated Wilson's personal background and uncovered a Section 8 military discharge (one of eight charges), Wilson withdrew his application. The first African-American to attend LSU Law School, Lutrill Amos Payne, did so in the summer of 1951 following a successful suit against the university.[25]

The battle to gain access to graduate schools was important, but as Richard Kluger rightly observed, "The handful of graduate-school victories affected only a fraction of the black elite and new ones were slow in coming as the state courts declined to fall in line automatically behind the *Sweatt* and *McLaurin* decisions, which on their face did nothing to tamper with the separate-but- equal principle of *Plessy*." Black undergraduates in the South and border states remained relegated to schools that were markedly inferior in facilities, funding, and faculty, places that Kluger called "academic shanties." In the border states, this situation began to end when a Delaware state court ruled that, because of the glaring inequalities between Delaware's white and black colleges, black undergraduates must be admitted to the University of Delaware.[26]

In 1953, Alexander P. Tureaud, Jr. applied for admission to the undergraduate division at LSU, was rejected, and sued the Board of Supervisors. Eighteen LSU Law School graduates donated their services to the defense, including Leander Perez, the notorious political boss of watery Plaquemines Parish. Despite the display of school spirit, Judge J. Skelly Wright ruled that, because of tangible

inequalities between LSU and Southern, LSU must admit blacks to its combined Arts and Science and Law program. LSU lost on appeal and the younger Tureaud registered on September 18, 1953. On October 28, the Fifth U. S. Circuit Court of Appeals reversed the decision on a technicality. On November 9, Judge Wright vacated his order and on November 10, LSU cancelled Tureaud's registration. On November 16, Tureaud's attorneys successfully applied to the United States Supreme Court for a stay of the Fifth Circuit's judgment, but by then Tureaud had transferred to Xavier University. The following year, *Constantine v. S.L.I.* became the case which resulted in the first undergraduate desegregation of a previously all-white, state-supported college or university in the South.[27]

A. P. Tureaud, a member of Thurgood Marshall's team of NAACP attorneys since 1939, headed the plaintiff's legal team, which also included Marshall, Robert L. Carter of New York, and U. Simpson Tate of Dallas, who authored the complaint.[28] The plaintiffs asserted that, by virtue of its whites-only admissions policy, Southwestern Louisiana Institute was in violation of the 14th Amendment and of federal law, specifically the Ku Klux Klan Act of 1870 (Chapter 114, Sec. 16), which provided for the equal rights of all citizens. They based their argument on the Ku Klux Klan Act of 1871 (Chapter 22, Sec. 1), which authorized legal action by any citizen to redress state-sponsored deprivation of rights secured by the Constitution and laws of the United States.[29]

In this case, the plaintiffs were being prohibited from attending "the sole and only publicly-supported institution of higher learning...at which Plaintiffs and other qualified Negro applicants can receive equal or substantially equal educational advantages, facilities or opportunities [equal] to those provided and afforded...all qualified non-Negro applicants." [30] There was no college in southwest Louisiana which black students could attend. Louisiana had established regional colleges for the convenience of white students, but none for blacks.[31] Because SLI had refused Ms. Constantine and her co-plaintiffs the opportunity to attend college while living at home, the least expensive option for any college student, they would either have to bear the extra cost of room, board and transportation to attend Grambling or Southern, the two nearest historically-black institutions, or else forego their dreams of college education.

Martha Jane Conway, who wanted to major in business education, could not afford to go to an out-of-town school.[32] Shirley Taylor was interested in a law enforcement career with a focus on juvenile delinquents. If she graduated from SLI, she wanted to do graduate work at Atlanta University.[33] Clara Dell Constantine wanted to major in business in order to teach students how to handle their financial affairs more effectively.[34] Charles Vincent Singleton planned to major in elementary education and believed that attending Southwestern would make him more competitive in his chosen field.[35] Taylor and Singleton felt that this opportunity would make them more effective citizens, better able to contribute something to the country. Ms. Constantine thought that

education would allow her to contribute to her race's tradition of progress. In addition to their personal goals, each of the prospective students believed that their suit would benefit, as Shirley Taylor put it, "all people, Black, White, or what have you." [36]

Tureaud requested the above statements from each of the plaintiffs. Beyond that he wanted them to maintain a discreet silence, this to avoid potentially embarrassing publicity. Accordingly, he advised each of his clients that they should refer all requests for public statements on the case to him. [37]

To hear the case, Chief Judge Edward Hutcheson appointed three judges-- Wayne G. Borah of the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals (New Orleans), [38] and Federal District Judges Benjamin C. Dawkins, Jr. (Shreveport) [39] and Edwin F. Hunter, Jr. (Lake Charles) [40] to hear the case. This was standard procedure when the constitutionality of state laws was in question. [41] Initially, Tureaud and his colleagues had intended to emphasize the advantages that SLI offered over Southern. They initially considered arguing that, in terms of facilities and programs, Southern was not a substantially equal alternative for their clients, by then a proven tactic. However, they also wanted a speedy trial, one which would enable black students to register for the fall term. [42]

When it became apparent that arguing for educational inequality might require numerous witnesses and much time, they agreed to Judge Borah's suggestion that the contending parties stipulate the facts and argue the case on the law because neither Borah nor Hunter saw anything in the facts that would require the testimony of witnesses in open court. Judge Hunter, despite a request by the state Attorney General for a delay until after the Supreme Court ruled on the *Brown* case, fixed the trial for January 29, 1954, in New Orleans. [43]

A pre-trial conference was held on January 28 to hear the motions and begin negotiations on the stipulations. At U. Simpson Tate's insistence, a defense stipulation that segregation per se was not an issue in the case and that the only issue was "equality of facilities, advantages and opportunities" was deleted and the parties reached agreement on the facts in time for trial. [44] By agreement of all parties, Judge Hunter ordered that the new trial date be February 19. [45] There the court denied a defense motion to dismiss the case and, on April 23, ruled that the plaintiff's petition for relief be granted. [46]

Judge Hunter wrote the judgment. The court concluded that the six state colleges had been geographically located for the convenience of their white clientele, "the purpose obviously being to make education available to more people and to make it possible for more people to stay at home and go to college at less expense." [47] The same opportunity had not been provided to Lafayette Parish's black students, who had no college to which they could commute daily.

The burden and the loss of time and money imposed on black students and their

parents was real and substantial. Hunter said that Article 12, Section 1 of the Louisiana Constitution did indeed fail to address equality of treatment and the state had not provided equal accommodations in the vicinity of SLI, thus violating the requirement of equal treatment in respect to any single facility or opportunity furnished to citizens, rather than a balance in state largesse for each race on a statewide basis. The right of an individual black student to public instruction equivalent to that given by the State to an individual white student was a personal one. He concluded that "Equivalency cannot be determined by weighing the respective advantages furnished to the two groups of which the individuals are members." [48]

Well aware that the Supreme Court would soon rule on five cases challenging the constitutionality of *Plessy v. Ferguson*, Hunter ruled that the question of the constitutionality of the State statute was irrelevant.

"The entire theory of the Fourteenth Amendment is that where an officer or other representative of a State, in the exercise of authority with which he is clothed, so uses the power possessed to deny a right given by the Fourteenth Amendment, inquiry concerning whether the State has authorized the wrong is irrelevant. The federal judicial power is competent to afford redress for the wrong by dealing with the officer and the result of his exertion of power." [49]

The court thus granted plaintiff's petition for relief because Louisiana law, **as it had been interpreted and administered by State officials**, violated guarantees provided by the Constitution of the United States. [50] The terms of the decree were settled after official notice to all parties.

On July 16, 1954, the court issued a judgment permanently enjoining SLI President Joel Lafayette Fletcher and his Registrar, James Stewart Bonnet, from refusing to admit the plaintiffs, "or any other Negro citizen of the state, residing in Southwest Louisiana, and similarly qualified and situated," on the basis of race or color. [51] This narrowly-drawn language, intended to restrict applications from black students outside the college's service region, may have come from the defense, which logically could have argued that since the plaintiffs had made the case for regional racial discrimination, the remedy should be restricted to the geographic area in question.

The Attorney-General's office certainly intended to interpret the ruling literally. Assistant Attorney-General W. C. Perrault defined for State Superintendent of Public Instruction Shelby Jackson the thirteen parishes which his office considered "Southwest Louisiana." He said that "this office will advise President Fletcher not to admit Negroes to Southwestern except from the 13 parishes named herein." [52] There is no evidence that this particular issue was a matter of subsequent controversy, no doubt because the Brown decisions enormous broadened the scope of the school desegregation issue.

Pre-registration for the Fall 1954 term began just five days after the injunction was issued.[53] In the ten-day period ending July 30, sixty-eight black students registered at Southwestern Louisiana. Five or six appear to have changed their minds before classes began, but a few more black students registered that fall, bringing the total to eighty when the Fall Semester opened.[54] That entire fall registration line at Martin Hall, fronting on University Avenue, one of the town's busiest streets, and fully visible to passersby, was managed by Dean of Students Glynn Abel and one campus police officer. According to Abel, he refused to allow *Life* magazine photographers pictures of the black students and persuaded the Lafayette *Daily Advertiser* not to publish the pictures which their reporter had taken. Apparently there were no subsequent incidents of a magnitude sufficient to attract journalists.[55]

According to one SLI professor, Julius Gassner, preliminary reactions to the court decision were mixed. Some SLI faculty were appalled. Others were frightened. The government professor predicted violence and bloodshed. Still other faculty members welcomed the opportunity to work for racial justice.[56] The public reaction was similarly mixed. One mother of an SLI coed wrote President Fletcher that she thought African-Americans were untrustworthy: "you don't know when they might stab you, and...there is [sic] too many things that can happen." [57] However, a local gas station operator said that he ate, worked, and hunted with blacks, so why not attend classes with them?

Joseph Hardy of Lafayette said that in the public interest, the issues involved in the desegregation case should be clarified "before the barber shop pedagogues and the pool-room professors who are clacking about socialization, miscegenation, etc. thoroughly muddle up public understanding." In Hardy's mind, the desegregation of SLI was something of a moot point.

"Segregation at S. L. I. has never been based on color but on accent. Black, brown, and yellow people have always attended S. L. I. but they either have had a Spanish or Asiatic accent. Their people, incidentally, have never paid a penny of tax money to support this institution. Further, if the president and other qualified members of the faculty are proud to act as government consultants for the betterment of conditions in Asia and Africa, the group as a whole should not object to practicing a little charity at home."

Furthermore, the students in question were qualified. They were graduates of Paul Breaux High School, which the school board assured the public was a highly-rated institution.[58]

The first desegregated classes met on September 10, 1954, and the semester progressed largely without incident. On the other hand, there is little to suggest that these new SLI Bulldogs were welcomed with open arms. In the main, white and black students made little effort to notice each other. African-American students attended classes, but were otherwise on the margins of campus life. They did not live in the dormitories and did not eat in the dining hall. Not welcome

in the campus student center, they sat in the commuter buses parked next to Earl Long gymnasium or congregated at the Catholic Student Center's Library Annex across the street. Detractors quickly dubbed this tree-shaded facility the "Liberian Annex." [59]

Several parents withdrew their children and at least two met with Registrar Bonnet to make certain that he understood the reason for their departure. That first year, a Lake Charles brick mason met with Bonnet to ask if SLI would allow his son to live in the dormitory. Bonnet's response was that he was entitled to live on campus, but would probably be happier if he found housing in Lafayette's African-American community. "Let this thing develop a little bit," he said, "and maybe next year...people will become accustomed to it and it will be different then." [60] Bonnet's thinking was that a low profile was the best way for SLI's new African-American students to deal with what Holman Hamilton and Charlayne Hunter later experienced at the University of Georgia, i.e., "an atmosphere of uncordiality." [61] As for the integration of SLI's dormitories, the state legislature delayed it indefinitely by including dormitories in state statutes forbidding the races to live together under the same roof. [62]

Acceptance, though grudging, came more easily because of the intellectual abilities of that first group of African-American students. Long-time geography professor Robert Crisler characterized the experience for the first African-American students as "traumatic."

"But they weren't average. They were generally better qualified. They were from better-educated black homes and top students....They wanted an education. They were willing to put themselves on the line to come here and be the pioneers." [63]

Gradually, some black and white students began speaking, especially at the Catholic Student Center. Another positive factor in this adjustment period was the attitude of the college's president, Joel L. Fletcher. [64]

Prior to becoming President in 1940, Fletcher's career as a professor and administrator had centered around programs that attracted deserving students and built the college. [65] While his feelings about integration were mixed, his ambitions for students and SLI remained his focus. If desegregation was the law, then the college must achieve it in ways that advanced the larger mission of educational excellence and expansion. A modest but significant core of faculty and administrators shared this commitment. [66] They included younger professors who arrived in the middle of the decade, notably Milton & Patricia Rickels in the English Department and Amos Simpson in History, as well as continuing faculty like Julius Gassner.

Tactically, the administration solicited cooperation and discouraged publicity. Fletcher had "no comment" on the court decision. [67] Before desegregation

occurred, he traveled the state, informing influential people of his plans and asking their assistance.[68] A campus human relations council composed of faculty and students was established to discuss the problems that black students faced and to work toward solutions.[69] That fall, the registration situation was so well-managed that the New Orleans *Times-Picayune* reported only that the presence of black students "apparently did not create unusual interest or action on the part of other students." [70] Despite Bonnet's spirited insistence, Fletcher refused to allow him to note any student's race on the registration cards, and was then able to say that he had no figures on the number of black students who had entered.[71]

Geography also worked in SLI's favor. The college was set in the heart of French Catholic south Louisiana, where the Cajun minority had some understanding of what it meant to be outside the mainstream. This distinctive culture, noted for its "joie de vivre," was anchored to an agricultural economy that radiated out from Lafayette in all directions. Lafayette itself, its possibilities as a regional oil center already apparent, was a small city of surprising diversity with demographic and cultural characteristics worked to produce a kind of tolerance. Desegregation would test that tolerance and reveal that intolerance was widespread and, in some instances, quite deep. Missouri native Robert Crisler remarked that the people here in south Louisiana as opposed to people in Alabama or north Louisiana are a little bit more willing to accept that sort of change, [they have] a live and let live sort of philosophy...perhaps because they themselves feel that being Catholic and speaking French they are different from the rest of the people in the South themselves."

There was also a critical mass of good-willed people, business leaders like Herbert Heymann, who used their influence in the college's behalf. There would be no spitting, cursing crowds of townspeople such as in Little Rock or New Orleans.

On campus, it was easier to control events. In that much different era in college life, *in loco parentis* was still an omnipresent reality, complete with dress codes for women and rigorous dormitory supervision. Many of the commuters arrived by school bus, just as if they were still going to high school. If Fletcher's paternalistic appeals to their better instincts did not work, sterner measures would follow.[72]

There were problems of course. That first year, four black couples attended a student dance, further stressing already frayed administrative nerves. There were no incidents, but there were also no more dances for some time.[73] A class in audio-visual education was going to see movie projectors in operation at a local theater. The teacher advised the lone black student in the class to seek individual instruction at one of the theaters for blacks. There were isolated instances of faculty discrimination against students. One student, with justification, complained that black students were unable to do practice teaching, thus delaying or preventing them from completing degree requirements in 1955. The

official explanation given was that the State Department of Education had made no arrangements and that something would be done at some future date.[74] Swimming classes were discontinued because the local pool would not allow African-American students to use its facility.[75]

The second year brought more African-American students, many of them transfers.[76] Even so, the campus seemed to be taking integration as a *fait accompli* and, according to an optimistic Julius Gassner, "interracial fellowship was coming into existence." ROTC dances had been desegregated and an interracial meeting of the Gulf States Newman Clubs at the S.L.I. Catholic Student Center in April 1956 was a resounding success. SLI's first black graduate, Christiana G. Smith, received her diploma on May 19, even though she marched without a partner.[77]

In 1956, the state legislature undermined this progress when it passed Act 15, which required that all students submit a certificate of good moral character signed by their high school principal and the local superintendent. A companion act made it a crime punishable by dismissal for any teacher or school official to favor integration, and Willie Rainach, Chairman of the Joint Legislative Committee on Segregation, made it clear that signing a certificate of good moral character for a black student applying to a previously all-white college constituted advocacy of integration.[78] These laws were part of a segregationist package of legislation designed to thwart enforcement of the *Brown* decision; they were vociferously opposed by the Catholic Church and by a few intrepid legislators.

Judges Herbert Christenberry and J. Skelly Wright declared both acts to be unconstitutional in 1957 and the Fifth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals upheld them the next year. In the short run, the uncertainties and tensions generated by the acts caused African-American enrollments to drop drastically.[79] An SLI student who transferred to Grambling said that he couldn't take a chance about his studies in Lafayette. Julius Gassner said that in September 1956, there were so few African-American students at SLI "that the campus all but lost the right to be called integrated." [80]

In the long run, of course, SLI remained integrated, its minority enrollment recovered, and the remaining state colleges were also desegregated. Meanwhile, public attention, never very much focused on this important episode in the desegregation of Southern state colleges and universities, shifted to other fronts in the civil rights revolution, even in Louisiana. So did the attention of scholars.

Writing on the legal campaign against segregation in higher education almost invariably jumps from the *Sweatt* and *McLaurin* cases to *Brown* and the rise of massive resistance. Scholars of the struggle to translate *Brown* into more fully integrated higher education move from that point to Autherine Lucy and James Meredith and other highly-publicized desegregation episodes, with due emphasis on the resultant turmoil. Almost without exception, they miss *Constantine v. SLI*

and the integration of three other Louisiana state colleges. The result is an incomplete and even skewed portrait of desegregation, one that places undue emphasis on the sensational and on flagship universities. *Constantine* marked a further erosion of *Plessy*. It produced the first undergraduate integration of a state-supported college in the Deep South and led directly to the integration of other state colleges in the Louisiana system.[81] And it was a large-scale desegregation, one that tested the leadership and character of the community in which it occurred.[82]

In some respects the desegregation of SLI is unavoidably the story of narrow-mindedness and of bigotry. But it is also a chronicle of individual courage, of magnanimity, of the leadership of a community pulling together to see that doing what the law required was done peaceably and with relative equanimity. They did so reluctantly and imperfectly. But they did it. In 1956, the Southern Manifesto made massive resistance to desegregation regional policy and Dixie's politicians devoted themselves to a 20th century version of what historian Albert D. Kirwan termed "the revolt of the rednecks" in the 1890s. Louisiana was not immune to this plague, and their ignominious 1956 legislative session produced segregationist statutes which were models for other racist rebels. But by then, SLI had been demonstrating the possibility of interracial cooperation for two years.[83] Their achievement stands in stark contrast to the failures in Little Rock, New Orleans, and Oxford, Mississippi a few years later.[84]

As was the case with the South itself, SLI's desegregation ultimately proved to be a liberating force which opened up new possibilities for this traditionally ambitious school which had begun its existence as the smallest of the state colleges. Its desegregated status enabled it to attract a bevy of exceptionally talented young faculty with freshly-minted Ph. D.s from prestigious universities, substantially enhancing its academic reputation, especially in the humanities. In 1960, some twenty outstanding graduates of Paul Breaux High School, inspired by the growing strength of the civil rights movement and determined to broaden African-American participation in campus life, turned down scholarships at other institutions to go to college in Lafayette. They did not win their battles immediately. When they decided to shave their heads and wear beanies, as other freshmen males did, the tradition was discontinued. They pressed for access to the dormitories and the dining halls, for participation in intramural sports and, in 1963, they sought recognition for a chapter of Alpha Phi Alpha. Their chapter had to remain off-campus when they refused to sign an agreement not to admit white students.[85] Their insistent courage inspired others and led to the gradual opening up of campus facilities and activities.

When the dormitories were opened to black students in the early 1960s, it seemed only natural to housing officials that black students would have black roommates. Natural, that is, until Thetis Simpson came along. A self-described "faculty brat," she was the daughter of historian Amos Simpson and Anne Simpson of the School of Music. A freshman in 1964, she lived in Foster Hall, the

freshman girls dormitory, and joined the Young Ambassadors, an interracial group whose purpose was to promote integration in Lafayette and improve race relations on campus. At that point, all black coeds who resided on campus were housed in one wing of Bonin Hall. That separation ended in 1965 when young Miss Simpson and a black Ambassador, Gwen Sigur from Alexandria, announced that they wanted to be roommates in Bonin Hall. The Dean of Women, fearing that they would be harassed, tried unsuccessfully to dissuade them. Save for one ugly note shoved under their door, Simpson and Sigur roomed together without incident.[86]

Thetis Simpson left Lafayette following her graduation in 1968. When she returned in 1974, she remembers being unable to believe the changes, especially the much larger percentage of black students and the degree to which they participated in campus life. Perhaps the key factor in this change was the university's leadership in desegregating college basketball in Louisiana. On the surface this seems an odd assertion, but coach Beryl Shipley's courageous decision to break the color barrier by recruiting three black high school All Americans for his 1966 team had far-reaching consequences. First, it attracted the wrath of the State Board of Education, which refused athletic scholarships to the recruits and then invited an NCAA investigation, and probation, when Shipley found scholarship money for the players in Lafayette's black community. Shipley had already drawn their ire the previous year when he accepted an invitation to have his all-white team participate in the NAIA playoffs, where they would have to face integrated teams, in violation of a moribund segregationist statute forbidding interracial sports competition by Louisianians.

Second, the advent of highly talented black players fueled the meteoric rise to prominence of Ragin' Cajun basketball. Following a two-year probation during which it was ineligible for postseason competition, and a rebuilding season in 1969-1970, the 1970-71 Cajuns posted a 24-4 record and their sophomore guard, Dwight Lamar, led the college division in scoring with a 36 point average. The following year, competing at the major college level for the first time, the 25-4 Cajuns won a bid to the 16-team NCAA tournament, becoming the first Louisiana team in 14 years to participate. Lamar led the nation in scoring again with a 36.3 average, becoming the only player ever to win both small college and major college scoring titles. Lamar was named 1st team All-American and sophomore center Roy Ebron garnered Honorable Mention. The team garnered a second successive nomination the next year, at one point ranking as high as #4 in the national polls.

Their success filled Blackham Coliseum to capacity, and more, with delighted community members and students who came to cheer "their" team.

To the extent that current knowledge influences our historical interpretation, perhaps it is now time to reevaluate the history of college integration in the 1950s and 1960s. Such a reevaluation would not only focus on cases where integration

was early and why it was relatively peaceful. It would have to consider why these cases have received so little attention. Finally, it would also seek to delineate what went on beneath the comparatively placid exterior of events, both at the time of desegregation and in the years that followed.

[1] Actually, public school desegregation has received more extensive treatment by scholars than has college desegregation. See, for example, Part II of J. Harvie Wilkinson III, *From Brown to Bakke: The Supreme Court and School Integration, 1954-1978* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979) and Raymond Wolters, *The Burden of Brown: Thirty Years of School Desegregation* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1984). Wolters reviews subsequent developments in the five school systems who were defendants in the cases comprising the *Brown* decision and finds that the integration process there has been a failure.

[2] E. Culpepper Clark, *The Schoolhouse Door: Segregation's Last Stand at the University of Alabama* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993). Clark's definitive study describes the great lengths to which the university, and Alabamians, had gone to forestall integration. The racist violence accompanying Meredith's matriculation at Ole Miss is well narrated by William Doyle, *An American Insurrection: James Meredith and the Battle of Oxford, Mississippi, 1962* (New York: Doubleday, 2001).

[3] See Calvin Trillin, *An Education in Georgia: The Integration of Charlayne Hunter and Hamilton Holmes* (New York: Viking Press, 1964). The standard work is now Robert A. Pratt's excellent *We Shall Not Be Moved: The Desegregation of the University of Georgia* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 2002).

[4] Marcia Synott, "Federalism Vindicated: University Desegregation in South Carolina and Alabama, 1962-1963," *Journal of Policy History* (July 1989) ; reprinted in Paul Finkelman, ed., *The Struggle for Equal Education* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1992), 562-588. Vol. 7, Pt. II of *Race, Law, and American History 1700-1990: The African-American Experience*.

[5] The first southern white university in the former Confederacy to admit an African-American undergraduate was Virginia Tech, which admitted Irving L. Peddrew in 1954. See Peter Wallenstein, *Virginia Tech Magazine*

[6] The most notable exception to this omission is Adam Fairclough's *Race and Democracy: The Civil Rights Struggle in Louisiana, 1915-1972* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1995), 165. Fairclough briefly mentions the integration of SLI, and the subsequent desegregations at McNeese State College and Southeastern Louisiana College.

[7] Armstead L. Robinson and Patricia Sullivan, eds., *New Directions in Civil Rights Studies* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1991), 2 & 6.

[8] See, for example, David K. Shipler, *A Country of Strangers: Blacks and Whites in America* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), wherein Shipler examines the continuance of racial divisions thirty years and more after the landmark civil rights advances of the 1960s. Unsurprisingly, there are many good examples of African-American perspectives on the enduring qualities of racial divisiveness. On why middle-class blacks, i.e., those who have supposedly "made it," are often troubled by their very success, consult Ellis Cose's *The Rage of a Privileged Class* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993). Or read Shelby Steele, *A Dream Deferred: The Second Betrayal of Black Freedom in America* (New York: HarperCollins, 1998), for his trenchant examination of the limitations of the liberal-inspired, guilt-induced "culture of preference" that emerged from the 1960s, one which has not only proved unable to overcome racial, ethnic and gender prejudices, but has perhaps re-energized them. Other very good works often come at the issue from a more personal perspective. Examples are Nathan McCall's unsparingly honest *What's Going On* (New York: Random House, 1997) and June Jordan's often angry, sometimes hopeful and always provocative *Technical Difficulties: African-American Notes on the State of the Union* (New York: Pantheon, 1992).

[9] No scholarly history of Lafayette exists. A useful reference, if treated judiciously, is J. Philip Dismukes, *The Center: A History of the Development of Lafayette, Louisiana* (Lafayette, La.: City of Lafayette, 1972). Dismukes asserts that Lafayette's development has been guided by a traditionally strong middle class.

[10] A considerable scholarly literature on Cajun history and culture has emerged in the past thirty years. On cultural considerations, James Dormon, *The People Called Cajuns: An Introduction to an Ethnohistory* (Lafayette, La.: Center for Louisiana Studies, 1983) is a good beginning point. On the Acadian Diaspora and the adaptations of those who came to Louisiana, Acadian descendant Carl Brasseaux's work has supplanted earlier works. See *The Founding of New Acadia: The Beginnings of Acadian Life in Louisiana, 1765-1803* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987). On the African cultural adaptation, and contribution, to south Louisiana, see Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana: The Development of Afro-Creole Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992) and James H. Dormon, ed., *Creoles of Color of the Gulf South* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1996).

[11] Mario Mamalakis, "Alexandre Mouton Donates Land for a Jewish Temple," *Advertiser Centennial*, 83. Jewish merchants—Lazarus Levy, Joseph and Leon Plonsky, Benjamin Falk, and Solomon and Joseph Wise—established general merchandise stores. Their numbers, and their importance to the rapidly growing community of about a thousand people, were such that former Governor Alexandre Mouton, son of the town's founder, donated two lots for the construction of Temple Rodoph Sholom and a cemetery in 1881.

[12] On the school's various names, see Amos E. Simpson, ed., *Southwestern Louisiana Institute: A Self Study*. Southwestern Archives and Manuscripts Collection (SAMC), Dupre Library, University of Louisiana– Lafayette. On the New Deal programs at SLI, see Michael G. Wade, "Farm Dorm Boys: The Origins of the NYA Resident Training Program," *Louisiana History* 37 (Spring 1986), 117-133, illus.

[13] See Andrew Michael Garber, "The Miracle Mile: The Heymann Oil Center and the Oil Economy of Lafayette, Louisiana, 1953-1998." (M.A. Thesis, Appalachian State University, 1998).

[14] Arthur S. Miller's, *Death By Installments: The Ordeal of Willie Francis* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988) is quite competent, but not nearly as haunting as Mary Alice Fontenot's unpublished "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot: Willie Francis Rides Twice," Mary Alice Fontenot Papers, Collection 97, Box 7, Folder 15, SAMC.

[15] Pope Leo XIII's 1883 encyclical, *Rerum Novarum*, condemned racial discrimination as contrary to God's word. Church periodicals for south Louisiana readers, such as *The Southwest Louisiana Register and Catholic Action of the South*, are filled with evidence of the Church's position, and with actions taken to support it. These publications display an interesting blend of racial liberalism and cultural conservatism, as they attack segregation while excoriating rock and roll. The common ground would seem to be that they regarded both as the work of the devil.

[16] Vaughan B. Baker, "Obstacles and Opportunity in Francophone Louisiana: The Example of Charlotte Broutin," Conference Paper, Western Society for French History, Newport Beach, California, 2003, *passim*.

[17] Interview with Velma Hollier, J. Carlton James Oral History Project, SAMC.

[18] George T. Madison to A. P. Tureaud, January 11, 1954, Box 65, File 21, A. P. Tureaud Papers, The Amistad Research Center, New Orleans. Madison said that the Board had not answered because it had found nothing in Tureaud's appeal to justify overruling the actions of SLI officials. Interestingly, Madison also told Tureaud that the Board had a new president, information that would enable Tureaud to correct his pleading and expedite the case; Dan Byrd to A. P. Tureaud, September 17, 1953, Box 65, File 21, Tureaud Papers. Byrd, an NAACP field secretary who was apparently present when the four were denied admission by SLI's Registrar, had requested that Tureaud file the appeal. Byrd noted that J. Stuart Bonnet was "very courteous and nice" about the matter. He was also amazed to learned that SLI's fees were apparently much cheaper than those at Southern and Grambling. In the suit, Byrd wanted to ask the court to enjoin the State Board from denying black students admission to any of the state colleges.

[19] *Constantine, et. al. v. Southwestern Louisiana Institute, et. al.*, Civil Action No. 4401, U. S. District Court, Western District of Louisiana, Shreveport, La., 1954, 102 F. Supp. 412 (D La 1954) (hereinafter cited as *Constantine vs. SLI*); "4 Negroes Seek Entrance to SLI," *Lafayette Daily Advertiser*, January 5, 1954.

[20] Houston's remarkable life and his place in the civil rights movement is the subject of Genna Rae McNeil, *Groundwork: Charles Hamilton Houston and the Struggle for Civil Rights* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983).

[21] Richard Kluger, *Simple Justice: The History of Brown v. Board of Education and Black America's Struggle for Equality* (New York: Random House, 1975), 155-58, 187-95; Barbara Ann Worthy, "The Travail and Triumph of a Southern Black Civil Rights Lawyer: The Legal Career of Alexander Pierre Tureaud, 1899-1972," (Ph. D. Dissertation, Tulane University, 1984), 60-61 and 71. According to Worthy, the suits focused on graduate and professional schools because it was easy to prove inequality, they were costly to duplicate, judges might have fewer objections to interracial mingling among older students, and it was assumed that white graduate students would be less likely to riot. See also Edward J. Kuebler, "The Desegregation of the University of Maryland," *Maryland Historical Magazine* 71 (Spring 1976), 37-49. For the origins of college segregation, see John Hope Franklin, "Jim Crow Goes to College: The Genesis of Legal Segregation in the Southern Schools," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 58 (1959), 225-35.

[22] Worthy, "Travail and Triumph," 70-76.

[23] David R. Goldfield, *Black, White, and Southern: Race Relations and Southern Culture, 1940 to the Present* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), 58-59; Kluger, *Simple Justice*, 266-84 passim. In the *Sweatt* case, the Supreme Court ruled that the Texas Southern Law School failed to offer equal educational advantages in terms of faculty prestige, alumni influence, administrative experience, and general standing in the legal profession. To force him to attend the all-black school would place him at a disadvantage in his chosen profession. See also John T. Hubbell, "The Desegregation of the University of Oklahoma, 1946-1950," *Journal of Negro History* 57 (October 1972), 370-84; John T. Hubbell, "Some Reactions to the Desegregation of the University of Oklahoma, 1946-1950," *Phylon* 34 (June 1973), 187-96; Michael L. Gillette, "Blacks Challenge the White University," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 86 (October 1982), 321-44; and Alton Hornsby, Jr., "The 'Colored Branch University' Issue in Texas-Prelude to *Sweatt v. Painter*," *Journal of Negro History* 64 (Fall 1979), 316-41.

[24] Kluger, *Simple Justice*, 291-94.

[25] Worthy, "Travail and Triumph," 76-81; Kluger, *Simple Justice*, 287-88.

[26] Kluger, *Simple Justice*, 289-90.

[27] Worthy, "Triumph and Travail," 83-85.

[28] U. Simpson Tate to Robert L. Carter, December 30, 1953, Box 65, File 21, Tureaud Papers.

[29] *Dictionary of Louisiana Biography*, Vol. II, s.v. "Tureaud, Alexander Pierre," by Joseph Logsdon; Constantine vs. SLI.

[30] *Constantine vs. SLI*, Complaint, p. 8.

[31] *Constantine v. SLI*, Plaintiff's Memorandum of Law, March 17, 1954, p. 11. The plaintiffs contended that because the Louisiana legislature had acted to create LSU for whites and Southern for blacks, "and over and above that to distribute six State-supported colleges strategically in the several sections of the State for the convenience of its majority white citizens and has failed to provide similar facilities in the same sections for its minority Negro race, its legal obligation to its citizens is the same, as though it had set up college districts."

[32] Martha Jane Conway to A. P. Tureaud, January 10, 1954, A. P. Tureaud Papers, Box 65, File 21, The Amistad Research Center, New Orleans, LA.

[33] Shirley Taylor to A. P. Tureaud, January 12, 1954, A. P. Tureaud Papers, Box 65, File 21.

[34] Clara Dell Constantine to A. P. Tureaud, January 13, 1954, Tureaud Papers, Box 65, File 21.

[35] Charles Vincent Singleton to A. P. Tureaud, January 9, 1954, Tureaud Papers, Box 65, File 21.

[36] Taylor to Tureaud, January 10, 1954, Tureaud Papers.

[37] A. P. Tureaud to Clara Dell Constantine, Martha Jane Conway, Shirley Taylor, and Charles V. Singleton, January 2, 1954, Box 65, File 21, Tureaud Papers.

[38] *Biographical Dictionary of the Federal Judiciary*, 26. Borah, a Truman appointee to the Fifth U. S. Circuit Court of Appeals, was a Republican well-connected in New Orleans social circles. Educated at Philips Exeter, Washington and Lee, the University of Virginia, and LSU, he was in his thirtieth year on the bench when he heard the *Constantine* case.

[39] Benjamin C. Dawkins was described by J. W. Peltason, *Fifty-Eight Lonely Men: Southern Federal Judges and School Desegregation* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1961), 133, as "one of the more ardent segregationists serving

on the federal bench." Dawkins had been appointed in 1953 to succeed his father, who had held the position since 1924.

[40] Peltason, *Fifty-Eight Lonely Men*, 227; Worthy, "Travail and Triumph," 153. Hunter had been a classmate and was a close personal friend of Louisiana Attorney General Jack P. F. Gremillion. Nonetheless, he found him guilty of contempt of court for his courtroom antics in the later litigation involving the desegregation of the New Orleans public schools.

[41] Robert L. Carter to A. P. Tureaud, February 5, 1954, Box 65, File 22, Tureaud Papers; Order of Hon. Joseph C. Hutcheson, Jr., Chief Judge, Fifth Circuit, January 7, 1954, Civil Action No. 4401, United States District Court for the Western District of Louisiana; *Constantine v. SLI*, Memorandum of Law, March 17, 1954, pp. 6-7, argued that Article XII, Section I of the Louisiana Constitution, which provided for separate free public schools made no provision for the equal treatment of black students and was administered so as to actively discriminate against blacks; *Constantine v. SLI*, Opinion of Judge Edwin F. Hunter, Jr., April 23, 1954, p. 1. Hunter noted that the complaint had been "precisely draw for the purpose of requiring the convening of a three-judge court under Section 2281, et. seq., Title 28 U.S.C."

[42] Actually, U. Simpson Tate had hopes of getting a hearing in time for students to be admitted for the Spring 1954 term. Judge Hunter shared his desire for a speedy trial. Unfortunately, delays in serving summons on the defendants in various parts of the state made this impossible. See U. Simpson Tate to A. P. Tureaud, December 30, 1953, and A. P. Tureaud to Robert L. Carter, January 19, 1954, Box 65, File 21, Tureaud Papers.

[43] A. P. Tureaud to Robert L. Carter, January 19, 1954, Assistant Council, NAACP, Tureaud Papers, Box 65, File 21.

[44] U. Simpson Tate to Edwin F. Hunter, Jr., February 10, 1954, Box 65, File 22, Tureaud Papers. Tate said that the segregation issue constituted a question of law "for the court itself to decide on the pleadings;" James J. Davidson, Jr. to Joel L. Fletcher, January 30, 1954, Fletcher Papers, Southwestern Archives. Davidson indicated that the defense was "able to accomplish a few things in connection with the stipulation of facts, which we believe were definitely to our interest." It was perhaps one of these accomplishments to which Tate objected.

[45] James J. Davidson, Jr. to Joel L. Fletcher, January 28, 1954, Fletcher Papers, Southwestern Archives, Lafayette, LA. Davidson emphasized that the rescheduling "insures that any adverse ruling will not affect registration for the term which commences about Feb. 1st."

[46] *Constantine v. SLI*, Docket. During the trial, Judge Dawkins raised the issue of whether the court properly had jurisdiction of the *Constantine* case. Apparently

this issue was worked out, at least to the satisfaction of the plaintiffs, since the case was not appealed. See A. P. Tureaud to U. Simpson Tate, February 22, 1954, Box 65, File 22, Tureaud Papers.

[47] *Constantine v. SLI*, Opinion, p.4.

[48] *Constantine v. SLI*, Opinion, pp. 5-7. Hunter said that the issues in the case were almost identical to those in a 1953 Texas case, *Wichita Falls Junior College District v. Battle*, except that the commuting distances in that matter were 367 or 411 miles.

[49] *Constantine v. SLI*, Opinion, p.7. As precedents for this interpretation, Hunter cited *Westminster School District of Orange County v. Mendez*, *Barney v. City of New York*, and *Snowden v. Hughes*.

[50] *Ibid.*; "Federal Judges Order SLI to Admit Negro Students; Court ruling Equal Accommodations Not Available to Race In Area," *Lafayette, Daily Advertiser*, April 23, 1954.

[51] *Constantine v. SLI*, Judgment, July 16, 1954,

[52] However, the intent of the defendants was quite clear. See W. C. Perrault, First Assistant Attorney General to Shelby M. Jackson, State Superintendent of Public Instruction, July 26, 1954, USL Papers, Presidential Series, Box 205-m, Southwestern Archives, wherein Perrault defines the thirteen parishes which constituted "Southwest Louisiana," and says that "this office will advise President Fletcher not to admit Negroes to Southwestern except from the 13 parishes named herein."

[53] "Negro Woman Applies for SLI Summer Session," *Lafayette Daily Advertiser*, June 7, 1954. Claudette Arceneaux applied before the final judgment was rendered and was denied on the grounds that J. Stewart Bonnet could not register her without prior authorization from the State Board of Education. Ms. Arceneaux, who wanted to major in elementary education, successfully pre-registered for the fall term in July. The first black student to successfully register for classes at SLI was John Harold Taylor of Arnaudville, an engineering student. He registered without incident on July 22, 1954. See "Negro Registers at SLI to Study in Engineering," *Lafayette Daily Advertiser*, July 22, 1954.

[54] "Registration Hits 3,251," *Vermilion*, Vol 51, no. 2 (September 24, 1954); Registrar's Records, USL Papers, Southwestern Archives. About two-thirds of the black registrants were female; Florent Hardy, Jr., "A Brief History of the University of Southwestern Louisiana 1900 to 1960," (M. A. Thesis, University of Southwestern Louisiana, 1969), 91, says that seventy-five black students registered that fall.

[55] Glynn Abel, interviewed by Michael Wade, April 28, 2000, Lafayette, Louisiana.

[56] Julius Gassner, "Integration in Acadia," *Interracial Review* (February 1959), 28-29; Julius Gassner to Leon O. Beasley, December 30, 1982, copy in author's possession. Gassner taught at SLI from 1952 through the 1956-57 academic year.

[57] Mrs. J. Wallace Lovell to Joel L. Fletcher, August 7, 1954, Fletcher Papers, Southwestern Archives.

[58] "Upholds Negroes' Right to Education at SLI," *Lafayette Daily Advertiser* clipping, n.d. Paul Breaux High School was named in honor of the leading figure in education for the black community. Paul Breaux and his wife came to Lafayette in 1887 to teach classes at the CME Church and the Good Hope Baptist Church. Breaux later opened the four-room Washington Street School for the community's black children.

[59] Julius Gassner, "Integration in Acadia," *Interracial Review* (February 1959), 28-29; Julius Gassner to Leon O. Beasley, December 30, 1982; Interview with Fr. Alexander Segura, n.d., by Professors Patricia Rickels and Barry Ancelet, Lafayette, LA, USL Oral History Collection. The shade trees were live oaks planted by Edwin M. Stephens, the first President of SLI.

[60] Interview with J. Stewart Bonnet, February 1981, by Michael Foret, USL Oral History Collection. According to Bonnet, "Everyone was afraid....Everyone's afraid that you're going to intermarry. That's the big thing." Except that he did not reside in any dormitory, what the young man from Lake Charles did is uncertain. Bonnet said only that the father thanked him, saying that he would act on the advice.

[61] Calvin Trillin, *An Education in Georgia* (New York: The Viking Press, 1963), 100. In his treatment of the history of desegregation in Southern colleges and universities, Trillin seems to be unaware of what had occurred at SLI nine years earlier. For Hunter's own recollections of her experience, see Charlayne Hunter-Gault, *In My Place* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1992). The definitive work on desegregation in Athens is now Robert A. Pratt, *We Shall Not Be Moved: The Desegregation of the University of Georgia* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2002).

[62] Interview with James W. Oliver, n. d., by Michael Foret, USL Oral History Collection.

[63] Interview with Robert Crisler, n.d., by Michael Foret, USL Oral History Collection.

[64] Interview with Joseph A. Riehl, Retired Vice President for Academic Affairs, University of Southwestern Louisiana, conducted by Michael Foret, March 16, 1981, Lafayette, LA. According to Riehl, Fletcher and the faculty "took the position that any student who came to Southwestern should be given a fair chance to succeed, regardless of color, or past, or anything else." That Fletcher's stand came at personal cost to him is indicated by R. Vernon Guthrie to Joel L. Fletcher, June 13, 1954, Joel L. Fletcher Papers, Box 23, File 16, Southwestern Archives, wherein Guthrie returns Fletcher's letter of resignation from the First Presbyterian Church of Lafayette.

[65] Michael G. Wade, "Farm Dorm Boys: The Origins of the NYA Resident Training Program," *Louisiana History* XXVII, no. 2 (Spring 1986), 117-33, details Fletcher's role in attracting significant New Deal programs to Southwestern.

[66] This can readily be detected in the interviews with faculty and administrators conducted by the USL Oral History Program in the early 1980s.

[67] "Federal Judges Order SLI To Admit Negro Students," *Lafayette Daily Advertiser*, April 23, 1954.

[68] Interview with Dr. Mary Dichmann, July 14, 1981, by Michael Foret, USL Oral History Collection. Dichmann thought that Fletcher's careful groundwork was crucial. "I think that this accounts for everything going as well as it did at USL. In fact, it went so well that people away from Lafayette, I think even people in Louisiana, didn't know for ten or fifteen years that USL was integrated."

[69] Interview with Dr. James Oliver, n.d., by Patricia Rickels and Barry Ancelet, Lafayette, LA

[70] "Negro Students Enrolled at SLI," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, September 9, 1954.

[71] Interview with J. Stewart Bonnet, February 1981, by Michael Foret, Lafayette, LA, USL Oral History Collection. The meticulous Bonnet, determined to know who was who, memorized the name of every black high school so that he could distinguish black applicants from white.

[72] Interview with Milton Rickels (SLI English Professor), n. d., Interviewer unknown; Interview with Roland J. Cambre (Retired Professor and Head, Freshman Engineering), n.d., by Michael Foret. Cambre recalled one of the first black engineering students arriving with his father, who said to Cambre: "I want this boy to behave himself. I want him to get an education and if he don't behave, I want somebody to beat the hell out of him."

[73] Foret Interview with J. Stewart Bonnet

[74] C. S. Trotter to A. P. Tureaud, September 9, 1955; A. P. Tureaud to Joel L. Fletcher, September 14, 1955, Box 65, File 22, Tureaud Papers. Trotter was a married working student with four children and the delay threatened to work a considerable hardship on him.

[75] Interview with Vesta Bourgeois (Retired Professor and Head, Department of Women's Physical Education), February 1981, by Michael Foret, USL Oral History Project.

[76] "Distribution of Students By Race Within the Several Academic Areas," USL Papers, Presidential Series, Box 236-f, shows that 125 black students were enrolled in the fall of 1955. Eighty-seven of this number were in the College of Education.

[77] Gassner, "Integration in Acadia," 29; "Old Times There Are Not Forgotten: USL's First Black Graduate Recalls Commencement 1956 With Mixed Emotions," *USL Alumni News* (Fall 1986), 12. Mrs. Smith, the object of great admiration by the university's black students then and now, died in Dallas, Texas, in 2003. The relatively positive view of desegregation at SLI is based largely on interviews with whites who were present and involved in the process. Many more interviews need to be conducted, particularly with the black students who formed the vanguard of the movement to integrate SLI. Geography Professor Robert Crisler suggested that the trauma associated with desegregation was substantial and Professor Patricia Rickels and others have emphasized that, because the process was relatively peaceful, a myth quickly developed, especially among whites, that the experience was not a painful or costly one.

[78] Bertrand DeBlanc to Joel L. Fletcher, August 24, 1956, USL Papers, Presidential Series, Box 236-f, Southwestern Archives; "Bucks Stand on Eligibility for Students," Shreveport *Times*, August 30, 1956, clipping in USL Papers, Presidential Series, Box 236-f. State Attorney General Jack Gremillion ruled that the requirement for certificates of good moral character applied only to new students. However, Lafayette District Attorney Bertrand DeBlanc warned President Fletcher that the law applied to all students and that he would file charges against any school violating the law; Goldfield, *Black, White, and Southern*, 80. Goldfield's reading of the laws suggests that they were intended to delay the implementation of Brown. That they were. But they were also clearly designed to end the integration already accomplished at Southwestern Louisiana, McNeese State, and Southeastern Louisiana College; Samuel L. Gendy, "Desegregation of Higher Education in Louisiana," *Journal of Negro Education* 27 (Summer 1958), 269, contains the text of both acts. Gendy, a Dillard University Professor of Philosophy, also notes that while shared social life was almost non-existent, cafeterias and lounges were open, and black students attended some athletic events at the Louisiana state colleges which had desegregated. In terms of interracial relations on the aforementioned campuses,

Gandy rated them somewhat more friendly at McNeese than at Southwestern, and less favorable at Southeastern.

[79] Worthy, "Triumph and Travail," 101-102.

[80] Gassner, "Integration in Acadia," 29; Joseph T. Taylor, "Desegregation in Louisiana--One Year After," *Journal of Negro Education* 24 (Summer 1955), 271. Taylor, a Professor of Sociology at Dillard University, noted that the Governor had signed a bill providing for the establishment of a branch of Southern University in Lafayette, this after the legislature decided that it could not immediately carry out its plan of establishing a new black college in Lafayette Parish. Taylor said that the black community was not enthusiastic about the idea. The following year, in "Desegregation in Louisiana--1956," *Journal of Negro Education* 25 (Summer 1956), 262-72, Taylor noted that, although blacks had now been admitted to at least four state colleges, there was rising opposition to the court decisions and "a conspicuous absence of constructive effort to meet the challenge provided by the demise of legal segregation." Nonetheless, a careful survey of L'Acadien, the SLI yearbook, for the mid-to-late fifties indicates a significant number of African-American students.

[81] Worthy, "Travail and Triumph," 93-118 passim. *Hilda Combre v. John McNeese State College* (1951) finally resulted in Judge Hunter's December 17, 1954, order for the desegregation of McNeese. *Thomas C. Wells et. al. v. Luther H. Dyson* produced the integration of Southeastern Louisiana College by order of Judge Herbert Christenberry. A similar action against Northwestern State College in 1955, *Hamp Williams et. al. v. Northwestern State College*, faltered when only three of the nineteen plaintiffs proved willing to press the suit to a conclusion. Ten years later, a desegregation order resulted from *Pearl Jones Burton et. al. v. Northwestern State College*. In 1965, A. P. Tureaud represented civil rights activist Mary E. Jamieson when Grambling denied her application for admission, a scenario undoubtedly encouraged by legendary Grambling president Ralph Waldo Emerson Jones. Judge E. Gordon West, who had ordered Louisiana Tech to admit blacks two months earlier, also ruled in favor of Ms. Jamieson.

[82] Joe Gray Taylor, *McNeese State University, 1939-1987: A Chronicle*. Edited by Cheryl Ware and Thomas Fox. (Lake Charles: McNeese State University, n.d.), 82-85. The first black students registered at McNeese in the Spring 1955 semester. Taylor concluded that McNeese President Lethar Frazer's leadership was the key to the relative peace of the process. Frazer made it plain to students that he would tolerate no trouble and probably used his influence with community leaders and the media to see that the issue was not inflamed. Joel Fletcher probably did the same thing in Lafayette. Although many, if not most, whites opposed the idea, Fletcher appears to have had the support of some key community figures, including businessman Herbert Heymann. Southeastern's integration was somewhat more troubled. In fact, the Klan conducted a parade on the Hammond campus in 1956.

[83] J. W. Peltason, *Fifty-Eight Lonely Men: Southern Federal Judges and School Desegregation* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1961), xi. Peltason concludes that federal court decisions would have to be supplemented by executive and legislative action if they were to be enforced. While this is generally true, SLI's integration was accomplished by local leadership in the face of executive and legislative inaction at the federal level and determined opposition at the state level.

[84] Morton Inger, *Politics and Reality In An American City: The New Orleans School Crisis of 1960* (New York: Center for Urban Education, 1969). Inger argues that school desegregation in New Orleans in 1960 was so ugly and tumultuous because of a failure of leadership by the mayor and the community's elite. It would seem that these were probable sources of strength in Lafayette. The Catholic Church was a significant force for fairness, and important people in the local political and business communities seem to have played a positive role. This important issue will require further attention.

[85] James and Jeri Caillier, Interviewed by Michael Wade, April 29, 2000, Lafayette, Louisiana.

[86] Thetis Simpson Cusimano, Interviewed by Michael Wade, May 2, 2003, Lafayette, Louisiana.