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Charles S. Johnson, Fisk University, and the Struggle for Civil Rights, 1945-1970

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This dissertation is dedicated in memory of my grandparents, Arthur and Mildred Green of Gadsden, Alabama.
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ABSTRACT

This dissertation attempts to examine the role of Charles S. Johnson in his capacity as an activist and his eventual establishment of Fisk University as his base of operation. Fisk University located in Nashville, Tennessee, was founded in 1866 after the American Civil War primarily to educate former slaves, and became a training ground for some of the nation’s most valued civil rights leaders.

The programs of the Race Relations Department and the celebrated gatherings of the Race Relations Institutes are highlighted in order to emphasize structured efforts by Fisk to improve racial conditions. The involvement in the local and national struggles of the 1950s and 1960s of select students, faculty, and local Nashville leaders is also detailed in this study. Although Fisk played an important role in providing leadership during the civil rights movement, this is not a history of Fisk or the civil rights movement. It is hoped that this dissertation will shed light upon Charles S. Johnson’s continuous efforts to achieve racial harmony with the help of the Fisk community.
INTRODUCTION

Fisk University located in Nashville, Tennessee, was founded in 1866 after the American Civil War primarily to educate former slaves, and became a training ground for some of the nation’s most valued civil rights leaders. Despite imperfections, Fisk always had an interracial faculty and frequently an interracial board of trustees. This dissertation attempts to examine the role of Charles S. Johnson, Fisk’s first black president, in his capacity as an activist and his eventual establishment of Fisk University as his base of operation. Additionally, the central role Fisk University played in the struggle for equal opportunity during the post World War II era is highlighted. For example, the programs of the Race Relations Department and the celebrated gatherings of the Race Relations Institutes are detailed in order to emphasize structured efforts by Fisk to improve racial conditions. Fisk University has a long tradition of student and faculty activism regarding civil rights and the promotion of better race relations. The involvement in the local and national struggles of the 1950s and 1960s of select students, faculty, and local Nashville leaders is examined. There are generous amounts of scholarship available regarding Charles S. Johnson and Fisk University. Several studies were indispensable in developing this dissertation. Patrick J. Gilpin’s doctoral study at Vanderbilt University entitled, “Charles S. Johnson: An Intellectual Biography,” delivers a trenchant delineation of the intellectual development of Johnson and of his motives. Richard Robbin’s work entitled, Sidelines Activist, follows suit with a strong emphasis on Johnson’s efforts to ameliorate racism in America. Gilpin and Marybeth Gasman collaborated on yet another study of Johnson entitled, Charles S. Johnson: Leadership Beyond the Veil in the Age of Jim Crow, which provides a strong emphasis on Johnson’s creation of the Social Sciences department at Fisk. This work also provides an examination of his numerous studies affecting the field of sociology and race relations, but none of the above deal with Fisk University after Johnson’s death or the Race Relations Department in an extensive way. Books treating the civil rights movement and its participants number in the dozens, but two were specifically useful for this study. John Egerton’s Speak Now Against the Day: The Generation Before the Civil Rights Movement in the South, creates an excellent
framework of the society in which Johnson lived and worked. Egerton was able to utilize Gilpin’s dissertation and then brilliantly weave Johnson into a broad story of interracial cooperation that is the fabric of America. The examination of Fisk in the 1960s is best described by David Halberstam in his book entitled, *The Children*. Halberstam’s work is a series of biographical vignettes, weaved together to illustrate the role of student led efforts to create an enduring framework of democracy. Joe M. Richardson’s *A History of Fisk University 1865-1946*, is the definitive study of the early development of the institution and its growth in a time of uncertainty, but again does not treat the institution during its later years. Although Leslie Collins’ *One Hundred Years of Fisk University Presidents: 1875-1975*, gives interesting brief biographical sketches of later Fisk presidents, it is not a study of Fisk struggles for equal rights and desegregation. Katrina Sanders’ dissertation, “Building Racial Tolerance Through Education: The Fisk University Race Relations Institute, 1944-1969,” is a solid study, but underestimates the importance of the Institutes. This study endeavors to combine Charles S. Johnson’s many efforts to improve life for African-Americans, and the activities of Fisk both during his life and after his death. Many depositories were instrumental in the completion of the dissertation. The Charles S. Johnson Papers of Fisk and the Amistad Research Center in New Orleans were especially helpful in allowing a closer view of Johnson’s labors through the years. The American Missionary Association Papers, Herman H. Long Papers and Race Relations Department Papers were all important resources from the Amistad. The Kelly Miller Smith Papers and the Nelson and Marian Fuson Papers at Vanderbilt University were quite useful in later chapters. Additionally, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference Papers and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Papers at the King Center in Atlanta provided an exciting wealth of information that strengthened this work.
CHAPTER I

Uplifting Humanity: The Fisk University Dream

Tennessee is a state that extends approximately five hundred miles from Johnson City in the east to Memphis in the west. Racially, socially, politically, and economically it might be considered three separate states. The mountainous section east of the Cumberland Plateau, harbored such powerful Unionist sympathies during the Civil War that Abraham Lincoln urged it to secede from the rest of the state. It was obviously a slave state, but slavery, because of the nature of the terrain, was alien to East Tennessee and attitudes on race had never hardened. The area between the Mississippi and Tennessee rivers could hardly have been more different. Much of the land was alluvial soil, and its politics and demographics were similar to those of the Deep South. “Middle Tennessee, which lay between the Tennessee River and Cumberland Plateau, was a gentle area of small farms which produced a tempered, albeit modest liberalism. The sum of these parts was not without its own unique political contradictions, but there was an essential resistance in statewide campaigns to overt demagoguery for the most part.”

European Americans extending across the Appalachian Mountains established Fort Nashborough. After the Revolutionary War in 1783, settlers poured into the rich Mississippi Valley. North Carolina claimed what became Tennessee until 1790. White indentured servants, free Negroes, and slaves from North Carolina and other eastern states populated the territory so rapidly that Tennessee became a state in 1796. Numerous ships docked at Fort Nashborough on April 24, 1780. Once the fort was built and the lands subdivided, settlers continued to arrive at the site. “By 1787 the settlement had 105 slaves, ages twelve to sixty years. By 1800, Fort Nashborough consisted of 295 whites, 151 slaves, 3 free Negroes, two or three taverns, scattered log frame houses, several stone structures, and abundant economic opportunity.” Nashville named for General Francis Nash, a North Carolina Revolutionary War hero, dates from April 19, 1874, as a name, while roughly six months afterward, Davidson County was named in honor of
another North Carolina hero, General William Davidson.4 “The peculiar institution of slavery in Nashville held roughly 3,226 blacks in bondage by 1860, while there was a sizable free black population as well. In fact, Nashville’s free black population numbered about 719 or roughly 23% of the black population. The early free blacks formed the foundation for an elite group of Negroes in the midst of an urban slave society.”5

From 1861 to 1865, the nation waged internecine warfare for the soul of America, which led to the loss of roughly 618,000 lives. The immediate postwar years were bitter and fearful ones for the former slaves—a time of intimidation, bigotry, lynchings, and murders—nevertheless, many people were optimistic.6 Former slaves knew that the foundation of freedom was based upon access to education and the development of leadership concerned with the improvement of their community. Therefore they assiduously pursued education and predominantly black colleges increased from one in 1854, to more than a hundred by the middle of the next century. By 1866, the American Missionary Association officials realized that grammar schools and colleges developed to train African-American teachers would be the most effective use of their resources.7 Consequently, the association created seven institutions for higher learning within three years, including Atlanta University in Georgia; Berea College in Kentucky; Talladega College in Alabama; Hampton Institute in Virginia; Tougaloo University in Mississippi; Straight University (now known as Dillard) in Louisiana and Fisk University in Tennessee. Most historically black colleges were of three general types: church-related colleges, privately-endowed colleges, and public colleges. While the period of their most rapid growth was the thirty years following the Civil War, the twentieth century witnessed some increase as well.8 However, there was an enormous amount of difficulty obtaining educational funding for African-Americans. In fact, there was no Southern state in 1865, 1866, or even 1867 that made any provision for the education of any Negro from public funds. Meanwhile, white former Confederates seized the opportunity to establish schools for whites only. Florida was the one exception. “Florida in its benevolent and enlightened wisdom,” according to historian John Hope Franklin, thought that there could be some education for Negroes provided by the state. In addition to Negroes paying their regular tax that supported whites-only schools, Negroes would pay a tax of a $1.25 per head to support schools for Negroes.9

Despite the racial reality, few northern whites espoused the cause of ex-slaves more forcefully than Clinton B. Fisk, a Freedmen’s Bureau officer who, according to historian Leon Litwack, commanded the respect of most blacks. In fact, Fisk urged blacks to avoid the cities
and remain on the plantations where they would have a better chance of survival. Northern whites often worked closely with southern whites and federal authorities to curb black movement into the cities, albeit for different motivations.\(^{10}\)

A curious relationship developed, eventually, between many white northern industrial philanthropists and the proponents of black education. According to Vincent Franklin and James D. Anderson, “the industrial philanthropists were more concerned with education as a means to economic organization and efficiency and political stability, than with the civil and human rights of Southern blacks.”\(^{11}\) Railroad executive William H. Baldwin, president of the General Education Board, fittingly stated the philanthropists’ policy of black economic servitude:

> In the Negro is the opportunity of the South. Time has proven that he is best fitted to perform the heavy labor in the Southern states. The Negro and the mule is the only combination so far to grow cotton. The South needs him, but the South needs him educated to be a suitable citizen. Properly directed he is the best possible laborer to meet the climatic conditions of the South. He will willingly fill the mere menial positions, and do the heavy work, at less wages, than the American white man or any foreign race which has yet come to our shores. This will permit the Southern white laborers to perform the more expert labor, and to leave the fields, the mines, and the simpler trades for the Negro.\(^{12}\)

Nevertheless, many northerners, including AMA officials, advocated liberal education for freedmen and created schools and colleges which sustained generations of students. In fact, before 1900, northern white teachers provided practically all of the instruction in college departments of Negro schools.\(^{13}\)

In the fall of 1865, the Reverend Mr. E. P. Smith became District Secretary of the newly created Middle West Department of the American Missionary Association of Cincinnati, Ohio.\(^{14}\) Smith, along with John Ogden, Erastus M. Cravath, and Clinton B. Fisk, helped establish one of the outstanding black universities in the United States. Ogden and Cravath were particularly suited for this grand experiment. Ogden became concerned about former slaves while serving as a lieutenant in the Second Wisconsin Cavalry. Because of his interest in the freedmen and his previous experience as principal of the Minnesota State Normal School, he was appointed superintendent of education for the Freedmen’s Bureau in Tennessee and took office in 1865 with headquarters in Nashville.\(^{15}\)

Cravath also had the proper background for his important work in education. Born to an abolitionist family in Homer, New York, he was sent to New York Central College,
founded by abolitionists. He came in contact with slaves and slavery at his father’s house, which was an Underground Railroad station for escaping fugitives. In 1851, the Cravath family moved to Oberlin, Ohio, where young Cravath entered Oberlin College, a hotbed of anti-slavery agitation. In December 1863, he resigned as pastor of the Berlin Heights Ohio Congregational Church to become chaplain of the 101st Regiment of Ohio Volunteers.  

Impressed with the needs of the former bondmen during the war, Cravath decided to devote his life to educational work in the South. When he was mustered out in Nashville in June 1865, Cravath accepted the position of Field Secretary of the American Missionary Association. The American Missionary Association working through General Clinton B. Fisk, the Commissioner of the Freedmen’s Bureau for Tennessee and Kentucky requested the free use of U. S. Government Hospital buildings, located on the property of Mr. W. R. Haynes for a school for former slaves. Although there were no funds available for acquiring privately owned land on which the Union hospital was located, Ogden, Cravath and Smith refused to be thwarted by lack of funds and pledged personal notes.  

The purchase price was $16,000, with one-fourth down and the remainder to be paid in three annual installments. Obviously, higher education for blacks was not seen universally as a positive development during this period. In fact, according to AMA treasurer H. W. Hubbard, “The purchase of the land in the name of individuals was the policy of the societies for reasons well understood at the time.” The American Missionary Association and the Western Freedmen’s Aid Commission paid the second and fourth installments and eventually reimbursed the original buyers. The third payment of $4,000 was made by the Freedmen’s Bureau. The land had been purchased, but the hospital buildings still belonged to the government. At the urging of General Fisk, the United States Government gave the hospital buildings to Fisk School, newly named in honor of General Fisk, because of his active influence in securing use of the Government buildings and his personal interest in the school.  

Fisk School was opened on 9 January 1866 with appropriate ceremonies, and students came by the hundreds. Almost 200 were enrolled immediately and by February there were 500 scholars in day school and 100 in a night class. On May 1 there was an enrollment of 900 pupils and the number increased to an average daily attendance of 1000 for 1866. Not all the pupils were children. One teacher had a class ranging in age from
seven to seventy, reading on the same page. Parents and children, husbands and wives were all trying to learn.  

Fisk University was incorporated and registered on August 24, 1867, with a board of trustees that would consist of not less than three, nor more than nine persons who would be elected by the American Missionary Association. Fisk was established to provide education and training of “young men and women irrespective of color,” and to that end, the trustees were empowered to prescribe a course of study and to confer all such degrees and honors as are conferred by universities in the United States. Comparable institutions created for former slaves provided similar opportunities for interracial education. Historian W. E. B. Du Bois observed that the charter for Atlanta University opened its doors to any student who applied, of any race or color. Consequently, in 1887 when the state of Georgia objected to the presence of a few white students who were all children of teachers and professors, the institution gave up the small appropriation from the State rather than repudiate its principles. The man selected to supervise the A.M.A.’s missionary teachers at Fisk was John Ogden, who resigned as superintendent of education of the Freedmen’s Bureau to accept the position of principal. In April 1866, there were ten instructors assisting Ogden. The college department, including a three-year preparatory course, was fully organized in 1869, but there were no students until four were accepted in 1871. The number increased to eight in 1872 and nine in 1873. For years the college was the smallest department at Fisk. The number of students was small, but their program of studies was rigid. “A skeptical visitor who witnessed an examination of the college students in 1875 concluded that blacks were capable of mastering the most difficult studies in the best colleges. The freshmen were tested on Virgil’s Aeneid, geometry and botany. Sophomores stood an examination on Latin, Greek, and botany. Juniors labored over the same courses with additional work in German, natural philosophy, history, English and astronomy. Mental, moral, and political science were added for seniors. Additionally, all students received a lesson in the Bible once a week. In fact, the curriculum was similar to that of a majority of contemporary liberal arts colleges.”

On March 20, 1870, the Western Freedmens Aid Commission quit claimed to the A.M.A. its undivided one-half interest in the Nashville land in consideration of one dollar, and the title merged in the A.M.A. Unfortunately, the buildings were rapidly decaying and the school was struggling under a burdensome debt. George L. White, the Treasurer of
Fisk, suggested the organization of a company of students to sing “the plantation melodies” and go North on a singing campaign to obtain the money necessary for land and buildings. White headed North in October 1871, and the Jubilee Singers, as they were known, gave concerts in Cincinnati and other destinations on their way to Oberlin, Ohio, where the National Council of Congregational Churches was in session. The National Council received the singers with enthusiasm before they continued their tour in New York, where Reverend Henry Ward Beecher, of Plymouth Church in Brooklyn, was impressed with a notable concert at his church, although the newspaper called them “Beecher’s Nigger Minstrels.” The Jubilee Singers also sang *Go Down Moses* for President Ulysses S. Grant at the White House and the *Battle Hymn of the Republic* for an audience of 40,000 in Boston before returning after eight months, with $20,000 for the Fisk treasury.\(^{23}\)

Unfortunately, Fisk’s benevolent activities and religious emphasis did not allay white suspicion. Schools in Tennessee and throughout the South continued to be destroyed while white teachers were ostracized and abused. Additionally, suspicions from the black community led to tension as well. Perhaps because elite Negroes claimed Fisk as their college, at times Fisk University seemed to be alienated from the local Negro community.\(^{24}\)

Meanwhile, white leadership at Fisk began to change. John Ogden resigned as the leader of Fisk in 1870 to accept a similar position at Ohio State Normal School and was replaced by Adam K. Spence, who gave up a professorship of foreign languages at the University of Michigan to go to Fisk. Initially, Spence was not convinced that Negroes were equal in ability to whites, but he believed they should be given a chance to prove themselves.\(^{25}\) Apparently, in 1875, during the administration of Fisk President Erastus Cravath, similar trepidation concerning the ability of blacks was a concern. “Articulating the opinions of many black alumni and supporters of Howard University, John W. Cromwell, editor of *The Peoples Advocate*, one of the local black newspapers and a graduate of Howard’s Law School, made vehement attacks on the whites who controlled Howard in a series of articles in 1875. In his opening salvo he denounced Cravath, then a trustee of Howard, for dismissing a petition from a group of black Washingtonians who urged the appointment of African-American John Mercer Langston as permanent president of Howard. Cromwell expressed outrage at reports that Cravath not only opposed Langston’s selection but also scolded the petitioners for their temerity,” telling them, “You
colored men are failures in the management of enterprises and institutions.”26 Whether the story was true, and however Cravath felt concerning the efficacy of black leadership, he sincerely advocated a liberal education for former slaves, and attacked segregation in public accommodations. The Fisk president reacted angrily when a Nashville ticket agent refused to sell pullman berths to Jubilee Singers. Cravath telegraphed George Pullman, who rebuked the agent and ordered him to sell tickets to the students. Pullman cars, according to historian Joe M. Richardson, were officially nonsegregated for the next quarter-century. Despite the friction that seemed apparent between white administrators and some black supporters, Fisk always maintained an interracial character. In fact, it was not unusual for white faculty to send their children to school at Fisk. Additionally, many faculty members through the years were advocates of civil rights for Fisk students.27

Unfortunately, blacks throughout the South had to contend with paternalism at best and overt violence at worst. The Ku Klux Klan founded in Pulaski, Tennessee amid the ruined dreams of Southern aristocrats in 1866, became a violent organization that was purely racist but increasingly determined to get rid of Republican office holders and black voters. By 1876, the removal of federal troops from the South signaled a return to the overt oppression that blacks experienced during slavery. In fact, violence and systematic state sanctioned oppression became the norm for blacks throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.28

Despite the violence, Fisk continued to increase its academic standing and by 1885, Fisk University was described as “the most important and influential institution of its kind in the United States.” In fact, “important travelers through Nashville nearly always called at Fisk. Among those who visited between 1885 and 1900 were Theodore Roosevelt, Ohio Senator John Sherman, former President Rutherford B. Hayes, Admiral George Dewey, Frederick Douglass and many guests from foreign countries.”29

Fisk students considered themselves part of a talented tenth that was primed for positions of leadership among the race. According to historian Joe M. Richardson, “Fisk students were not content just to write about equal rights, they worked actively to retain or secure them. At a banquet in Louisville, Kentucky, the Jubilee Singers refused to perform until black members of the audience were permitted to sit where they pleased in the hall. Additionally, in 1888, about twenty Fiskites were called before a legislative committee on
elections on charges of illegal voting. A subsequent inquiry revealed all who voted did so legally and voted a straight Republican ticket.”

Racial tension concerning white leadership during this time simply foreshadowed future efforts by eager black students determined to emerge from their marginal status in society. During the administration of Dr. Fayettee McKenzie, (1915-1925) tension developed into conflict. Born on 31 July 1872 in Montrose, Pennsylvania, McKenzie was a Phi Beta Kappa graduate of Lehigh University in 1895. After earning his Ph.D. in 1908 from the University of Pennsylvania, McKenzie continued his study of American Indian relations with the white population. Although he had never been associated with black education, his work with another minority group seemed to assure his success. McKenzie quickly reinforced a strict moral code and black students naturally objected to the campus regimen. Discipline was tolerable in the late nineteenth century when it was thought to be prompted by Christian piety and was applied to white students as well as blacks. Yet the tradition of piety remained in force at black schools long after the leading white colleges had abandoned their concern for moral uplift and had begun to stress secular scholarship.

For example, males and females walking together, not touching, even at high noon, could be expelled. “After meals women remained in the dining room until the men were dismissed and in their dormitories. Not surprisingly, given the climate, dress regulations for women filled three pages of the catalog by 1920.” Unfortunately, McKenzie was hardly the man to calm the ambitions of concerned blacks. He was autocratic, austere, and aloof, and he made no special effort to gain the confidence of the students or to stimulate the involvement of the interested black community in Nashville.

Impervious to black concerns, McKenzie launched special efforts to court the white community that hailed the university’s conservative racial policy as a key to racial understanding. He fostered impressions that Fisk subscribed to a separation of the races, as Tuskegee had, and therefore prospered. Not only did powerful Nashville whites applaud McKenzie efforts, but they donated fifty thousand dollars to help clear Fisk University’s debts. McKenzie’s zeal seemed to pay dividends, as Fisk University became the first Negro College with a million-dollar endowment in 1924. Charles S. Johnson, future black president of the university, seemed very optimistic with regard to the institution amid seemingly improved race relations in the wake of Fisk’s reaching its fundraising goal when he observed,
What Harvard University accomplished in 1919, when it inaugurated its campaign for fourteen million dollars and rescued the movement for education out of the welter of post war distraction, Fisk University has taken a lead in accomplishing for Negro education, which was left conspicuously stranded by this same distraction. It is the first Negro college to enter the million-dollar class. Thus, it seems, that from the bewildering confusion of racial bigotries in ferment, there has been distilled a measurable improvement of sentiment. 36

Unfortunately for McKenzie, “student unrest during the winter of 1924-1925, culminating in a strike in February 1925, forced his resignation and important changes in the school. Black colleges were rigidly run institutions that were bound to create student unrest for many reasons. First, because young children attended the school officials thought it was necessary to create strict rules that were no longer logical for college-age students.” 37 Also, black colleges had to be particularly careful given their Southern geographic locations. White intransigence toward black education coupled with the emergence of student resistance to second-class status made conflict inevitable. Prominent graduates such as W.E.B. Du Bois attacked McKenzie’s leadership, stating, “I believe that President McKenzie is not the proper man for the place not because he is white but because he is a bad president.” McKenzie tried vainly to counter attacks by arranging an essay contest among students on why he was a competent force for good at Fisk, printing the winning essay in the Fisk News. Then McKenzie suggested that there was a passionate campaign to remove him because he was white, coupled with the desire by some to create a completely black faculty and university. Interestingly, the issue regarding the creation of a black university at Fisk surfaced again some forty years later. With little support from alumni and skittish philanthropists, McKenzie tendered his resignation on April 16, 1925 effective at the end of the year. 38 “Fisk never gained a strong financial base of support from Nashville’s colored aristocracy or its white plutocracy after the student revolt,” according to historian Bobby Lovett. Despite lack of local support, Fisk clearly represented the race. Most Fisk students were acutely aware of their surroundings early in the history of the school and they creatively voiced their opinions. Gradually, however, more concerted efforts were undertaken regarding social issues. For example, “student social concerns during the 1930s led the campus Denmark Vesey Forum to protest against lynching. When President Franklin D. Roosevelt visited the campus in 1934 to hear the Fisk Choir sing one of his favorite spirituals--“Aint Gonna Study War No More”--he was handed a petition signed by
250 students protesting the Scottsboro case in Alabama, the lynching of Claude Neal at Marianna, Florida and violence in general.\textsuperscript{39}

Despite his ouster, McKenzie had made significant gains for Fisk. Before 1919, the General Education Board and other foundations gave little to black colleges. Nearly all aid went to white schools with smaller amounts going to Tuskegee and Hampton. Despite student unrest, the bulk of increased aid from philanthropic foundations after 1919 went to private colleges and not public institutions, and McKenzie convinced them to give some of the money that went to black colleges to Fisk. The foundation gradually, due to McKenzie’s urging, gave more money to black liberal arts colleges. During an eight-year period, from 1924 to 1931, the General Educational Board appropriated nearly $25 million for black education or about three times the total spending, for black education of the previous two decades. However, this striking burst of educational spending represented nearly 40 percent of the GEB’s entire effort for black education from 1902 to 1960.\textsuperscript{40}

Thomas Elsa Jones replaced Fayette McKenzie as president of Fisk in 1926 and ultimately benefited from an increase in Negro secondary educational enrollment in Southern public schools of 600 percent. Under the Jones presidency, Fisk became the first black college to be accredited as class A by the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools. Apparently, if this association had not been so reluctant to rate black schools, Fisk probably would have received the A grading before 1930. Fisk continued to excel educationally as it acquired an exceptional library collection. For example, in 1932 Fisk spent more for books and periodicals than Atlanta University, Talladega, Morehouse and Spelman combined. Literary scholar Blyden Jackson praised Jones for “creating architectural showpieces on the Fisk campus with the addition of new fashionable American Gothic style chemistry and library structures that became the envy of the Negro college world.”\textsuperscript{41}

Despite any problems, Fisk was always a thriving interracial oasis surrounded by a desert of discrimination and segregation. When Dillard University was being organized in New Orleans, trustee Edgar Stern worried that appointing a white president would lead to an interracial faculty like Fisk. In fact, Stern recalled hearing that the wife of Fisk President Jones had danced with a black faculty member at a campus party. Even W.E.B. Du Bois expressed an integrationist rationale “worthy of Frederick Douglass,” according to historian David Lewis, when Du Bois observed that cultural contact of black and white teachers with
students was “one of the greatest sources of racial peace in the United States.” Certainly, Fisk seemed a perfect place for a sociologist to establish a base of operation dedicated to promoting equal rights. As president, Jones assiduously lured black talent to Fisk, including the gifted artist Aaron Douglas and sociologist Charles S. Johnson. In fact, Johnson quickly became as Blyden Jackson suggests, “the biggest man on Jones’s campus.” 42
Notes to Chapter I


3 Ibid., 3.


7 The Union Missionary Society, the Committee for West Indian Missions, and the Western Evangelical Missionary Society united to form the American Missionary Association as a protest against slavery in 1846. After the civil war, the association established schools and churches throughout the South. See also Augustus Beard, A Crusade of Brotherhood: A History of the American Missionary Association (Boston: Pilgrim Press, 1909); Fred Brownlee, New Day Ascending (Boston: Pilgrim Press, 1946); Clifton Johnson, The American Missionary Association, 1846-1861: A Study of Christian Abolitionism.” (Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina, 1958); Joe Richardson, Christian Reconstruction: The American Missionary Association and Southern Blacks, 1861-1890 (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1986).


9 John Hope Franklin Speech, 1965, “Inauguration of Herman Hodge Long Ninth President of Talladega College” Box 13 Folder 33, Race Relations Department United Church Board for Homeland Ministries Archives 1943-1970, Amistad Research Center, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana.


12 Ibid., 100.

14 “In the congested cities,” Fisk warned, “you will wear your lives away in a constant struggle to pay high rent for miserable dwellings and scanty allowances of food. . . .” Invoking almost the same images, black leaders, newspapers, and conventions repeated the same advice and affirmed the agrarian mystique to which most black and white Americans still adhered. See Leon F. Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long: The Aftermath of Slavery* (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), 316.


16 Ibid., 24.


22 Ibid., 35

Ward, _Dark Midnight When I Rise: The Story of the Jubilee Singers who introduced the world

24 Richardson, “Fisk University: The First Critical Years,” 31; Lovett, _The African-American
History of Nashville, Tennessee 1780-1930: Elites and Dilemmas_, 158; David Levering Lewis,
61.


26 Eric Anderson and Alfred A. Moss, Jr., _Dangerous Donations: Northern Philanthropy and

27 Richardson, _A History of Fisk University, 1865-1946_, 49.

28 Allen W. Trelease, _White Terror: The Ku Klux Klan Conspiracy and Southern Reconstruction

29 Richardson, _A History of Fisk University, 1865-1946_, 47.

30 Ibid., 48.

31 Ibid., 72.

32 Raymond Wolters, _The New Negro on Campus: Black College Rebellions of the 1920s

33 Richardson, _A History of Fisk University, 1865-1946_, 86.

34 Lester C. Lamon, _Black Tennesseans: 1900-1930_ (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee
Press, 1977), 278.

35 Lovett, _The African-American History of Nashville, Tennessee 1780-1930: Elites and
Dilemmas_, 164; Leslie Morgan Collins, _One Hundred Years of Fisk University Presidents: 1875-

226.

37 Richardson, _A History of Fisk University, 1865-1946_, 84.

38 Collins, _One Hundred Years of Fisk University Presidents: 1875-1975_, 80; See Chapter seven
regarding student unrest and demands for a “black university” in the 1960s.

39 Lovett, _The African-American History of Nashville, Tennessee 1780-1930: Elites and
Dilemmas_, 167; Richardson, _A History of Fisk University 1865-1946_, 129.
40 Franklin, and Moss From Slavery to Freedom: A History of Negro Americans, 365; Anderson and Moss Dangerous Donations, 95.

41 Richardson, A History of Fisk University 1865-1946, 118; Anderson and Moss, Dangerous Donations, 100; Richardson, A History of Fisk University 1865-1946, 113; Blyden Jackson, “A Postlude to a Renaissance,” The Southern Review 26 (October 1990): 747.

Charles S. Johnson was one of Fisk University’s most important and famous presidents. With Fisk University as his eventual base, Johnson spent his life educating the races about each other, while continuously promoting civil rights for African-Americans. By the time Johnson arrived at Fisk, though their methods may have differed, no Fiskite, including W.E.B. Du Bois, was more determined to influence the life of African-Americans.

Charles S. Johnson was born in Bristol, Virginia, July 24, 1893, the eldest son of the Reverend Charles Henry and Winifred Lee (Branch) Johnson. Three sisters, Lillie, Sarah, and Julia, and a brother, Maurice, followed. The middle name, Spurgeon, probably came from the well-known Baptist preacher Charles Haddon Spurgeon, 1834-92. According to Johnson, the most notable difference between his Baptist preacher father and the typical Negro minister in Southwest Virginia at the time “was in the quality and security of his education.” Reverend Johnson, although the son of a slave, was tutored privately by a Greek scholar and theologian. Winifred Johnson had the best that the poor public schools of Lynchburg, Virginia, offered. She had “an uncommon amount of intelligence and social grace, presumably inherited from her own mother, who had spent most of her life as a privileged servant in the homes of very old Virginia families,” according to her son. Apparently, Johnson failed to see his own visceral attitude regarding race and class when he suggested that his mother’s intelligence was unique. The small middle class of Bristol was fragile, but secure, and the Johnson home was a center of community activity due to his father’s respected position in black society. Books were always available which helped Charles supplement his Negro elementary school training. Bristol was Southern in its racial mores, but permitted white relationships with the Negro families of standing. Interracial relations ranged from “tolerant indifference to restrained cordiality,” according to Johnson. In fact, few seemed concerned that a poor white woman served the Johnson family as a
washerwoman. On Saturday afternoons, at the conclusion of her shopping, Mrs. Johnson often took young Charles to the soda fountain of her favorite drugstore for refreshments. They then took the trolley car home and sat wherever they pleased. Then abruptly, things changed. The drugstore owner politely informed them he could no longer serve them. Trolley car segregation was soon formally and rigidly enforced. The planned new school building for Negroes was placed at the edge of town next to a still smoldering city dump. A small boy suddenly confronted the racial reality of America at the dawn of the new century.¹

As a youngster, Johnson investigated needy applicants for Christmas baskets for one of the local charities which led him into amazing paths of discovery and awakening. This experience provided lasting insight and conviction regarding the human condition. According to Johnson, “It was simply that no man can be justly judged until you have looked at the world through his eyes. This became the core of all that I can recognize as a social philosophy.”²

Johnson left the rough frontier town of Bristol to attend Wayland Academy, then in 1913 enrolled at Virginia Union University in Richmond, Virginia. Johnson was extremely active at Virginia Union. He was president of the student council and editor-in-chief of the college journal. Despite his reputation as a shy, reserved man, he was on the college debating team and was a member of the college quartet. Johnson earned his A.B. degree in 1916 and entered the University of Chicago in 1917. He supported himself at Chicago with a series of jobs including stevedore, ditch digger, waiter, and night watchman. He studied sociology at Chicago under the famed sociologist Dr. Robert Park and was awarded a bachelor of philosophy degree in 1917.

At Chicago, Johnson developed a friendship with Park that continued to grow until the latter’s death at Fisk in 1944. Park, W. I. Thomas, Ellsworth Faris, and others were applying sociological methodology to the study of race in order to examine the phenomena of race from a broader perspective than the American experience. Unlike his mentor Robert Park, Johnson wrote many books on race relations. Park preferred the short, suggestive essay often weak on factual data, but strong on theory, while Johnson leaned toward long, thoroughly researched and heavily documented studies.³ Johnson never earned a masters or a doctorate from Chicago. Urgent demands on his time precluded further study in degree granting academic programs once he accepted his first professional position.⁴ Additionally, America’s entry into the First World War interrupted school when Johnson became an infantry soldier.

Charles Spurgeon Johnson arrived in France in 1918 after receiving approximately one month of military training and became a regimental sergeant major in the 803d Pioneer Infantry
of the American Expeditionary Forces. Although he was at the front in the Meuse-Argonne sector under direct fire for twenty-two consecutive days, he mentions his involvement casually in his spiritual autobiography. In typical fashion, Johnson simply stated, “no deep hatred of the Germans was generated in me at any time during the war. In fact, the whole experiment was, I fear, one of conformity within the narrow, fixed and hopelessly subordinate caste role assigned by the motherland, with suspended judgment on the ultimates.” Historian Richard Robbins suggests that Johnson did not care to dwell on the appalling contradiction of black soldiers fighting and dying at the front while enduring extreme segregation and discrimination at home and in France. Nevertheless, Johnson became an important racial intermediary for a country that had yet to realize its own creed.

After the war, Johnson returned to Chicago in 1919 just in time to witness a terrible riot. On July 27, Eugene Williams was viciously stoned to death while attempting to swim in Lake Michigan. William’s death sparked one of the largest race riots in American History. James Weldon Johnson, acknowledging the widespread violence in the country, designated the summer of 1919 as the “Red Summer.” While at Chicago in 1917, Charles had headed the Department of Research and Investigations for the Chicago Urban League, of which Park was president. At about the same time, he had helped Emmett J. Scott conduct a study of Afro-American migration for the Carnegie International Peace Foundation. For this service Scott had written him, “You have been of incalculable benefit to me.” This experience and Park’s support led to his appointment to a committee to investigate racial violence in Chicago. On August 20, 1919, Governor Frank O. Lowden appointed twelve members, six white and six black, to a commission to study the Chicago Riot. Graham Taylor, white, was named executive director, while Charles S. Johnson was appointed associate executive director.

The commission report, largely composed by Johnson, recommended several methods for dealing with racial problems. However, as Richard Robbins astutely observed, “These recommendations represent truth speaking to power within the system, they do not question the system itself.” Not surprisingly, Johnson learned to work within the restrictive system that constrained people of color. In a refined scholarly manner, he continued attacking racial oppression with a modulated anger that addressed issues of human dignity and democratic participation. He lived with the race-based exclusion of American society, while diplomatically attempting to enlighten and move America toward accepting its own creed.
While working for the Race Relations Commission in Chicago, Johnson met a young teacher from Milwaukee named Marie Antoinette Burgette and on November 6, 1920, Marie and Charles were married in her hometown. According to Johnson, she was “an unusually sensitive young woman, richly endowed mentally and spiritually, with a rare capacity for sensing and seeing the beautiful and the good in people.” Bright and talented, Marie came from a mixed background of Creole ancestry on her father’s side and Irish as well as Negro descent on her mother’s side. She took private piano and violin lessons during her high school years. The protégé of wealthy patrons, Marie attended the Wisconsin Conservatory of Speech and Fine Arts. A prominent member of the city’s library board helped her gain admission to the Milwaukee Library Training School, which had a general policy of excluding Negroes, and subsequently, she became the first of her race to work in the Milwaukee public library system.

Johnson met Marie after moving to Chicago to teach school. They had five children, although one daughter died at birth. Charles Spurgeon II, born in 1921, became a physician. Robert Burgette, born in 1922, grew up to carry on his father’s profession of sociologist of race relations and Patricia Marie, born in 1924, went to Fisk and married a doctor. The youngest son, Jeh Vincent, was born in 1931 and later received a degree in architecture from Columbia University. There were a number of grandchildren, to Johnson’s delight. Traveling often, he could visit family more than usual. His letters to his wife describing these family visits show a side of him very different from the formal taciturn social scientist that many had come to know.

In 1921, the National Urban League, located in New York, invited Johnson to become director of the new Department of Research and Investigation, funded by an $8,000 grant from the Carnegie Corporation with, for that time, a remarkable salary of $3,600. The National League on Urban Conditions Among Negroes, as it was called, formed on October 16, 1911. When the Urban League was finally incorporated in 1913 under the laws of New York, its most faithful supporters included John D. Rockefeller Jr., Julius Rosenwald, Booker T. Washington, Kelly Miller, and Robert Moton, future President of Tuskegee. “This amalgamation of social workers, middle and upper class whites, and moderate black leaders, gave the National Urban League an ideological framework that was acceptable to all but the most racist white Americans, as well as the most militant blacks,” according to historian Ralph L. Pearson. Fearful of the influx of Southern black migrants to urban cities forced reform minded whites and prominent blacks in New York City to respond to their growing numbers not unlike other reform organizations.
formed to aid immigrant groups during the Progressive Era. The league offered help to recent arrivals seeking housing, jobs and protection from exploitation. Among other causes, the league continued fighting for better housing, sanitary services, and job opportunities. Charles Johnson believed that Harlem, with its influx of migrants essentially created a human problem that would shape the destiny of the nation. In Johnson’s view,

> What is most often overlooked is the fact that migration on such a scale is really a cultural crisis, a social phenomenon associated with the growth of internal adjustment of the nation itself. It is not a racial phenomenon as such, but a population problem emerging out of the pull and tug of the very forces that are shaping our destiny as a nation.

Johnson’s mentor, Robert Park, observed that “opinions are individual, but the attitudes upon which they are based are collective.” Consequently, Johnson set out to mold, not change, the collective attitude of America by utilizing the simple methodology of providing factual descriptions and basic statistics concerning African-Americans for the Urban League.

The Urban League selected Johnson to edit its official magazine, titled *Opportunity*. Unlike the more confrontational W.E.B. Du Bois, Johnson chose to chip away quietly at the walls of racism through the pages of *Opportunity*. The Urban League was less caustic in style than the NAACP and it was perceived as a slightly more conservative organization. Charles S. Johnson was the perfect embodiment of that cooler image. “Urbane and sophisticated, he was a scholar and diplomat whose quiet efficiency and unthreatening professional manner won him the admiration of his black associates and the support of many influential whites.” Johnson kept discreetly out of much of the public debate on race relations and concentrated his energy on obtaining facts and promoting pride, artistic growth, and maturity through the pages of *Opportunity*. Johnson concluded that the one area in which African-Americans could obtain positive notice was the arts. Although the white world was slow in recognizing black artistic merit, many creations by black artists had been acclaimed even though the creator had remained in the background. Johnson hoped to use white recognition of black art to crack the walls of racism. His attempt to combat racism was subtle and simple. He hoped to create a true art based on the ideas of the past that would be accepted for its beauty and merit, regardless of the color of the creator, thus eroding the strength of prejudice. Characteristically, Johnson felt that “literature has always been a great liaison between the races, offering up out of the hidden depths of a spiritually aloof race the play of their emotions against life, the undeniably human touch which affirms brotherhood both in likeness and in differences.”
This plan was ideally suited for a man of Johnson’s reserved temperament. Despite Johnson’s slightly demure attitude, he maintained a strong and lasting presence among people with whom he came into contact. In her autobiography, Zora Neale Hurston described the manner of another person by using Charles S. Johnson as a model. “Davis was just the antithesis of Williams,” she said, “so shy, in the Charles S. Johnson manner, in spite of his erudition.”\(^{17}\) Later students of Dr. Johnson echoed this same sentiment. Arthur Berry, a young Fisk University student in 1946, recalled that Johnson “always seemed mild mannered and even tempered and when he met you on campus, his greeting was sincere, cordial and forthright.”\(^{18}\) Sylvia Green, also a Fisk student, remembered Johnson as a “dignified gentleman who was always impeccably dressed in a gray suit, while wearing a fedora type hat. With briefcase in hand,” according to Green, Johnson would “tip his hat as he passed by.”\(^{19}\) When Reverend Frank Persons regretted his reaction to an ignorant letter written by a white racist that provoked him to react in a visceral manner, he contrasted his own behavior with Johnson’s. Persons sadly confessed to Johnson, “I must admit that to sit in your presence and watch your calm, quiet, and undisturbed, but devastating replies to this sort of criticism makes me ashamed. . . .”\(^{20}\)

Johnson’s editorship of *Opportunity* Magazine coincided with an artistic and literary movement known as the Harlem Renaissance. Although many historians differ regarding the exact beginning of the so-called New Negro Movement or Renaissance, nearly all attribute its success in one way or another to Johnson. Writer Zora Neale Hurston noted that Johnson encouraged her to write and make the move to New York. “He wrote me a kind letter and said something about New York,” she recalled, “beginning to feel the urge to write, I wanted to be in New York. This move on the part of Johnson was the root of the so-called Negro Renaissance. It was his work, and only his hush-mouthed nature has caused it to be attributed to many others.”\(^{21}\) His wife, Marie provided the struggling writer with food and carfare and Hurston came to worship both Charles and Marie Johnson.\(^{22}\) Langston Hughes, another prominent Renaissance writer, echoed Hurston’s sentiment when he stated, “Mr. Johnson I believe, did more to encourage and develop Negro writers during the 1920s than anyone else in America.”\(^{23}\) It is within this cultural movement that Johnson attempted to ameliorate American racism.

In January 1923, *Opportunity* published its first issue, with the aim of presenting the “facts” of Negro life objectively. Located at 127 East 23\(^{rd}\) Street in New York City, *Opportunity* grew into a major magazine during the twenties and by 1927, moved to larger offices on Madison Avenue. The growth of the magazine and many other black periodicals during the
aftermath of World War I resulted, in part, from black economic improvement and increasing educational attainment. Also, returning black soldiers exhibited a new psychological outlook regarding their status in America. This new pride of African-Americans manifested itself in the struggle to obtain at home the democracy that had been fought for abroad. Additionally, the thirst for reliable knowledge for and about black people was fueled by the omnipresent scientific studies that portrayed blacks as lazy and mentally inferior to whites. Thus, the growth of black magazines that provided another view of blacks was inevitable.  

Ironically, Johnson observed that black life and aspirations represented ideals that were considered uniquely American, such as Jazz. “The amusing and yet profoundly significant paradox of the whole situation” according to Johnson, “is the fact that it is the Negroes that not only can best express the spirit of American life, but also who have created the very forms of expression.” Assuredly, Johnson continued, “The most effective instrument of improvisation is Negro. The themes are Negro and the temperament is Negro. And yet it is considered American life.” “What an immense, even if unconscious irony the Negroes have devised,” mused Johnson. “They, who of all Americans are most limited in self-expression, least considered and most denied, have forged the key to the interpretation of the American spirit.” 

Johnson refuted scientific racism, whether it involved the arts or life in general, and was particularly adept at shining as an intellectual. Johnson penned a most interesting response to a white southerner from Texas named Guy Johnson, who also received his masters degree under the tutelage of Robert Park at Chicago with a study of the Ku Klux Klan. Guy Johnson wrote an article for the *Journal of Social Forces*, asking whether or not hair straighteners and skin lighteners had become a permanent feature of Negro culture. Charles Johnson answered the evident example of self-hatred in an emotionally wrenching editorial by stating,

Divorcing the matter, however, from its more ridiculous implications, we have a situation, undoubtedly true, which reflects the tragic dual life of the Negro in this country. Modes and fashions to which they are exposed consult the tastes of the dominant majority. There are no special Negro styles, and the penalty of non-conformity here as elsewhere bears down with even greater severity than the bitter ridicule directed at an incongruous attempt at conformity. Right or wrong, if crinkly hair and shiny black features are the butt of Nordic ridicule, it can be understood why the commonality of Negroes will seek to change these features, and thus contribute to their chances for success in a country in which circumstances force them to live, philosophy be hanged. . . .it is all an unconscious protest against an inferior status, and this type of protest is not confined to Negroes...much of the custom is now current among women bobbing their hair. Whatever reasons given, such as ease in handling, neatness, health and the like, back of it all is a protest against the inferior status assigned
to them by man-and the desire to minimize the differences between the sexes, by becoming more like him. Woman does not want to be man-but she wants his freedom. . . .

Reserved as always but direct, Johnson seemed merely disappointed rather than angry when it appeared that intellectual opinion makers contributed toward racist attitudes. Johnson sadly noted, “The grossest offenders are our learned professors, scholars, writers of text books-crystalizers of sentiment for mankind.” There were also racial studies that proved that criminals could be detected by physical characteristics alone, such as thick lips and protruding eyes,” according to Johnson. Yet he calmly and clearly asserted, “the truth is, so far as anatomy goes, the faces of the Rogues Gallery can be matched by the faces of the policemen who arrest them.” However cautious Johnson may have been, he minced no words when attacking police misconduct against blacks:

A stupidity of which the police in some of our cities refuse to purge themselves is the supine notion that the way to prevent a riot is by moving the police force into the Negro residence areas. A few days ago, after a mob of Jewish loafers from a sacramental wineshop in Chicago’s Ghetto murdered an unoffending Negro, these guardians of the law, fearing trouble, moved en mass to the Second Ward, where the Negroes live. Queer reasoning this is, and demonstrably dangerous policy. The same tactics were employed during the Chicago Riot of 1919, in which thirty-eight persons were killed and seven hundred thirty-seven injured. It is incredible that the lesson could have been forgotten so soon. . . . these police could not tell five years ago and they cannot tell now.

Despite the violent atmosphere, black expectations rose in 1919 with the return of black fighting forces. Against this backdrop, the Harlem Renaissance, lasting roughly from 1919 to the eve of the stock market crash of 1929, took place ironically during a surge in violence towards blacks. From 1882 until 1919 there had been some 4,249 lynchings in America, of whom 3,004 were black. In 1919 alone there were 83 lynchings recorded, of whom 76 were black. Embarrassed by such events, whites such as Jessie Daniel Ames worked diligently through organizations such as the Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching to ensure that the numerous murders involving blacks would not be classified as lynchings. Realistically, there is really no way to know just how many lynchings took place in America. Individual newspapers scattered in small towns across America defined lynching differently, which meant that incidents of racial violence might well be larger than those documented.
Late in 1919, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People took the first steps toward securing the passage of a federal law against lynching. The association succeeded in getting Republican Representative Leonidas Carstarphen Dyer, of Missouri, to introduce in the House a bill to assure persons within the jurisdiction of every state the equal protection of the laws, and to punish the crime of lynching. Immediately, the representatives from Southern states began organizing to defeat the proposed bill. They spoke on the floor of the Congress in favor of mob rule and defied the federal government to interfere with the police powers of the states. Although the bill passed in the House of Representatives by a vote of 230-119, it failed in the Senate, led by “a solid phalanx of Southerners, aided by Henry Cabot Lodge, of Massachusetts, and other conservative Republicans who prevented the measure from coming to a vote.” In fact, the bill failed three times.\(^\text{34}\)

In the pages of *Opportunity*, Johnson highlighted the disturbing increase of lynchings across the country and the lack of fear exhibited by lynch mobs. Additionally, Johnson strongly supported efforts to create a federal law to prevent lynching and he duly noted that even the discussion of an anti-lynching bill caused lynchings to decrease.\(^\text{35}\) Consequently, adherence to fundamental principles of constitutional democracy was a continuous theme that Johnson stressed his entire life. He was deeply concerned about the moral fiber of a country that would allow such abuses. Johnson observed,

> We regard our system of law and our principals of legal justice as fundamental to our society and as forming a structure which involves much of social morality. I am concerned, naturally, with the unfortunate impact of differential justice when it strikes the poor and when it strikes unprotected minorities. But I am even more concerned with what the process and tolerance of it, does to the morals of the country.\(^\text{36}\)

For years, Johnson had attacked racism and promoted African-American arts and literature to the larger community, and in 1927 he positioned himself so as to forge African-Americans into the larger society once again. “The Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial authorized a $200,000 grant for the recruitment of several esteemed social scientists and an administrator for an overall program to be located at Fisk University, in Nashville, Tennessee. Johnson’s association with Leonard Outhwaite, of the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial, and Edwin Embree, of the Julius Rosenwald Fund, coupled with his research accomplishments, led to his appointment as the chairman of the newly formed social science department.”\(^\text{37}\) Johnson
would have to use his critical skills as a scientist and observer of people immediately upon his arrival south for a visit in 1927. Writing Jesse Thomas in June of 1927, Johnson said,

You will be interested to know that I reached Chattanooga safely and violated another tradition of the section by driving from one station to another in one of the yellow cabs and barely escaped a row with a soldier who delegated himself to prevent me from entering the gate to the trains until all of the white passengers had gone thru. The extraordinary thing about these situations is, that one never knows what expectation of conformity resides behind the scowl of white observers of Negroes. I note also that this solider gentleman forgot to speak to two particularly vicious looking Negroes who passed thru the gate ahead of me.  

Johnson resigned from *Opportunity* in September 1928, to become a professor of sociology and director of the department of Social Science at Fisk University now under the leadership of Dr. Thomas Elsa Jones.  

Jones was a missionary turned administrator who declared in his inaugural address that “The Negro race can never give up Fisk.” Jones engineered the university’s rating as a Class A college by the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools in addition to recruiting talented faculty. New research professors included Paul Radin, a Ph.D. from Yale in anthropology, Alain Leroy Locke, a Rhodes Scholar and Harvard Ph.D. in philosophy, St. Elmo Brady, one of five black PhDs. in chemistry in the United States, Elmer S. Imes, Ph.D., University of Michigan in physics, and Charles S. Johnson.  

Fisk prospered financially as well under President Jones leadership. “The income from endowment increased from roughly $8,800 to $14,000 during the first ten years and then jumped to $65,400 in 1929. Gifts for current expenses grew from $29,500 in 1914 and $90,400 in 1924 to $128,400 in 1929. The greatest increase in income during this period was in endowment, which grew from 16 per cent of the total income in 1914 to 22 per cent in 1929.”  

Johnson recommended that Fisk should select one area of research and that it should concentrate its study, research, and specialization upon it, rather than spreading the department too thin. As models he suggested the concentration by the University of Chicago on urban problems, the University of North Carolina on the New South, and the University of California on mental testing. Fisk, Johnson stated, was the most logical place at which to study the Negro and Race Relations in the United States.  

Johnson received numerous awards and appointments in recognition of his work. In the fall of 1929, President Hoover asked Johnson to serve as the American representative on the
International Commission of the League of Nations Inquiry on the existence of slavery and forced labor in the Republic of Liberia. From March to September of 1930, he was in Africa with his British colleagues assessing the unfortunate situation and later co-authored the published report. In 1930, Johnson won the William E. Harmon Gold Medal for distinguished achievement among blacks in the field of science and was a member of the National Committee on Children and Youth in 1931. Johnson served on President Hoover’s Negro Housing Commission in addition to publishing, *The Negro in American Civilization: A Study of Negro Life and Race Relations in the Light of Social Research*, which became the most commonly used textbook for a time in American sociology classes on race relations.  

In 1933, the Committee on Race Relations of the Philadelphia Society of Friends initiated the Swarthmore College Institute of Race Relations and Johnson was named Director of Studies. Institutes were held annually from 1933 through 1937 and Johnson was able to run this project during the summer months while continuing his faculty position at Fisk. This effort, coupled with his work with the Race Relations Institute at Swarthmore College and the upheaval of World War II, helped spur the creation of the later Race Relations Institute at Fisk. In 1934, Johnson was elected as the first black trustee of the Julius Rosenwald Fund, and in 1937, he received his most distinctive professional honor when the Sociological Society elected him as vice-president. Johnson followed this by becoming the first black man to speak before a statewide meeting of Missouri social workers. In 1940, Johnson served as chairman of the executive committee for the Southern Committee on the Study of Lynching for the Southern Regional Council.

In June of 1945, Johnson went to Haiti, as the director of a Fisk faculty group who spent the summer and part of the fall studying Haitian life and culture. When Johnson returned, William Benton, Assistant Secretary of State appointed him to the U. S. Advisory Commission on Japanese Education. Johnson met with the President of the University of Hiroshima and a former Minister of Education in an effort to help rebuild the Japanese educational system in the wake of the devastation caused by the atomic bomb. “The recommendations on decentralization, democratic administration, curriculum, and academic freedom did not overturn Japanese education but were grafted to it.” Johnson seemed concerned as always, with the social and cultural context of people. An embarrassed Johnson, writing some years later confessed that his “instinctive reaction regarding American democracy was to go on the defensive.” He could not explain away the persistence of racial segregation, nor could he explain the alliance of Northern
and Southern political leaders as they often blocked any civil rights legislation. Despite Johnson’s failure to fully explain away democratic shortcomings to his hosts, he remained ever optimistic regarding race relations. Johnson would continue his diplomatic tenure when The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization appointed him as a delegate to UNESCO First General Conference in Paris in November 1946, just when Fisk named a new president.  

Trustee efforts to obtain presidential leadership of historically black colleges often included Charles S. Johnson. The merger of institutions that formed Dillard University in New Orleans prompted the board of trustees to look for a president and Johnson was one suggestion. However, white philanthropists were concerned with losing a black academic to administrative pursuits. Edwin Embree, of the Rosenwald Fund, thought that no black could be spared from research and teaching. Embree wrote, “Johnson was one of the really great. He is a scholar and a man of resource and ability, but I think it would be unfortunate to take such a man out of scholarship and put him into an administrative post.”

“Although most Fisk faculty members were required to route their project proposals through President Jones, Johnson corresponded directly with philanthropists as evidenced by the sheer volume of his correspondence in the General Education Board archives,” according to historian Marybeth Gasman. “Johnson was able to build a kind of fiefdom within the university structure. Unfortunately, this proved to be strength and a weakness. As long as Johnson was at the helm, the department flourished on foundation money. Yet when Johnson faded from the scene, the department he built did not have a structural foundation in place to last beyond his life span at the same level. Although Johnson made research available for other social scientists to utilize, many of the projects were controlled by outside finances and without Johnson to provide the finances, funding eventually faltered or was moved to other institutions.”

White philanthropists had long favored Booker T. Washington and his outwardly slow conservative approach toward racial progress and Johnson seemed to fit this mold. According to historian August Meier, “Johnson was a great admirer of Booker T. Washington and on reflection the two men were comparable in many ways.” In April of 1928, Johnson wrote an article praising Washington as a great man who embodied the survival elements of the Negro race. Johnson biographer Patrick Gilpin suggests that this was a strategic move by Johnson to praise the hero of white philanthropists before embarking on his journey to Fisk. Indeed,
“Chancellor Harvey Branscomb, who became president of all-white Vanderbilt University in Nashville during 1946, was careful to mollify the fears of his board members regarding race. He ended one speech with a eulogy to Booker T. Washington, applauding his policy of encouraging those blacks who tried to lead their race along the slow path of hard work, educational advancement, and moral improvement. Branscomb considered Charles S. Johnson such a leader, one who would support moderates and resist radical and revolutionary radicals.”  

Historian Richard Robbins suggests that Johnson was a “conciliatory realist.” In fact, Johnson became a liberal advocate for change working within the necessary world of interracial cooperation with white social scientists without abandoning his core principle of racial justice. Therefore Johnson could utilize the best of the Booker T. Washington method and the direct style of Du Bois without compromising his own sensibilities. Charles S. Johnson’s intellect and diplomatic skills were eventually recognized by trustees interested in finding a talented replacement for the Fisk presidency.”
Notes to Chapter II


2 Johnson, “A spiritual Autobiography.”


6 Robbins, Sidelines Activist, 33.

7 Gilpin, “Charles S. Johnson: An Intellectual Biography,” 10; Ibid., 19; Ibid., 18; Robbins, Sidelines Activists, 34.

8 Robbins, Sidelines Activist, 34.


10 Robbins, Sidelines Activist, 37.

11 Ibid., 37.


17 Zora Neale Hurston, Dust Tracks on a Road, ed., Robert Hemenway (2nd ed; Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984), 166.


19 Sylvia Green Berry to Keith W. Berry 6 March 1991.

20 Reverend Frank Persons to Charles S. Johnson, 29 December 1944, Box 238 Race Relations Department, American Missionary Association Papers, Amistad Research Center, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana.

21 Hurston, Dust Tracks on a Road, 168.

22 Ibid., 168.


Ibid., 99.


Johnson, “A Spiritual Autobiography.”


Thomas Elsa Jones, *Progress at Fisk University: A Summary of Recent Years* (Nashville: Fisk University, 1930), 1.


Johnson, Charles S. Johnson Papers Index; Robbins, Sidelines Activist, 136; Charles S. Johnson, “America’s Changing Racial Pattern,” Race Relations Papers, Box 48 folder 10, Amistad Research Center, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana.

Edwin R. Embree to Edger Stern, 2 January 1931, Box 191 folder 8, Julius Rosenwald Fund Papers, Amistad Research Center, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana.


Paul Conkin, Gone With the Ivy: A Biography of Vanderbilt University (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1985), 541.

Robbins, Sidelines Activist, 28.
CHAPTER III

*Charles S. Johnson, Fisk and the Post War Era*

Before becoming president of Fisk, Charles S. Johnson began his tenure as head of the social sciences department with a plan to attack racism and discrimination. As noted earlier, Johnson wanted Fisk to specialize in race relations with the first phase centering on the city of Nashville. The second phase included selected urban and rural communities in the state while the last phase applied the same model across the entire South. Additionally, Johnson created a Fisk data base that served as a repository for information regarding African-Americans. The data base included emotional experiences, life histories, in addition to government statistical publications concerning blacks. Between 1928 and 1940 the Fisk social science faculty published twenty-three books and scores of articles explaining blacks to whites and suggesting ways to improve black life. Financially, Johnson was able to obtain large amounts of grant money for Fisk. In 1929, the Social Science Research Council granted $12,000 to sociologist E. Franklin Frazier to study the black family, but the grant had to be approved by Johnson first and he was to supervise the study. A few months later the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Foundation gave $20,000 for the fiscal year 1929-30. Also, the Rosenwald Fund financed many of Johnson’s studies. Between 1928 and 1935 it gave approximately $920,175 to Fisk and Meharry Medical College.¹

Johnson actively sought talented students to study at Fisk for the master’s degree program in addition to recruiting doctoral students from other institutions such as the University of Michigan to spend a year at Fisk prior to completing their degrees. Furthermore, Johnson had tremendous success in obtaining the services of talented and interracial faculty. During the almost two decades as chairman of Social Sciences at Fisk, Johnson’s department trained many of the future leaders and policymakers of the latter day civil rights movement according to historians Patrick Gilpin and Marybeth Gasman.²
Fisk University provided the infrastructure for Johnson and his effort to force America to allow blacks full participation in American democracy. Johnson’s life was filled with organizational attempts to wear down racism and segregation through education. He worked with the Commission on Interracial Cooperation, the Southern Conference for Human Welfare, the Southern Regional Council and the American Council on Race Relations among many other organizations.  

Some militant blacks later saw Johnson as weak for working with Southern whites, but it took great courage. “Charles S. Johnson was black and Southern during perilous times, and to stake out a position at variance with the canons of segregation and white supremacy, required a mixture of conservatism and tactful independence that few non-Southerners could understand or appreciate,” according to John Egerton. “Patience, diplomacy and flank covering caution,” observed Egerton, “were essential to survival.”

Previously, the horror of the First World War created the impetus for change in order to forestall bloodshed at home. Acute anxiety over the uncontrolled violence and rumors of worse conflicts to come spurred a small group of prominent white Southerners, including Willis Weatherford and a thirty-five year old Methodist minister named Will Alexander, to meet and discuss the crisis. In time the Commission on Interracial Cooperation was formed in 1919 as a response to the upsurge in violence after the First World War. Will Alexander directed the organization for sixteen years and became the first acting president of a new black institution eventually named Dillard University in New Orleans. Though the CIC was an outspoken foe of the Klan, lynch mobs, and various forms of intolerance, it did not urge and would not endorse a federal statute to outlaw lynching, nor did it challenge in any way the entrenched laws and customs of segregation. In fact, no black staff member ever worked in the Atlanta office of the commission, although Johnson worked closely with CIC chapters in Nashville and Chapel Hill. Eventually, the CIC evolved into the Southern Regional Council, with Johnson, Howard Odum and others continuing to hash out careful plans that would lessen the impact of racial tension in America. When the organization finally made a statement to work against discrimination in December 1951, the President of the University of Virginia, who happened to be the former Governor of Virginia, Colgate W. Darden Jr., sent a check covering two years of unpaid dues along with his letter of resignation. Johnson’s involvement became more ceremonial and by 1953 he was no longer attending meetings. In April of 1935, Francis Pickens Miller of Virginia, working under the auspices of a national public interest group called the Foreign Policy
Association, invited about three dozen prominent white male citizens to Atlanta. Miller intended to set up a committee to explore the region’s problems. Within a year, Miller and his companions had formally established the Southern Policy Committee and managed to bring in Charles S. Johnson and a white woman named Lucy Randolph Mason, after which a few of the white men promptly resigned in protest. Predictably, delegates could not agree how the organization should develop.\(^6\)

Not only did Johnson work through white organizations to achieve equality, he tried to work with the local black community as well. Beginning in the fall of 1937, Johnson expanded the usefulness of Fisk to the local community by creating the Fisk University Settlement. The settlement offered recreation and social activities, a People’s College to provide practical education for adults, and a Children’s Institute to furnish pre-school education for economically challenged youngsters. “The People’s College offered courses in business, economics, history, civics, journalism, chorus work, current literature, dramatics, and advanced reading and mathematics. Handicrafts and workshops classes were given and early childhood clinics were held. Part-time employees included a health officer, psychiatrist, psychologist, dentist, and a dietitian.” By the 1950s, the Children’s School administered under the Department of Education offered the only opportunity for elementary education on a non-segregated basis in Nashville. By 1952, there were roughly forty families that had children attending the Fisk Children’s School on 1607 Phillips Street.\(^7\)

In 1942, more than seventy-five prominent black professionals from throughout the South were invited to the Durham meeting at North Carolina College for Negroes in October 1942. Prominent southern black leaders were selectively chosen primarily by educator Gordon Blaine Hancock of Virginia Union University to create a document stating the aims of the African-American community that well meaning whites could help implement. Although northern blacks were excluded in order to avoid the taint of “northern radicalism,” the absence of southerner W.E.B. Du Bois elicited tremendous criticism from many northern black publications. Seven committees were formed to take up issues and as typical, Charles S. Johnson was chosen to head the committee responsible for drafting a final conference statement. Although Johnson noted that “we are fundamentally opposed to the principle and practice of compulsory segregation in our American society, whether of races or classes or creeds, however, we regard it as both sensible and timely to address ourselves to the current problems. . . .\(^\text{7}\)” this was typical Johnson,
quietly and gracefully prodding his contemporaries, while covering his tracks on the path toward racial equality.  

Characteristically, Johnson stressed working within a democratic framework and aligned the committee with the best intentions of America. Then, Johnson launched systematically and directly to the heart of inequities in political and civil rights, industry and labor, education, agriculture, military service and social welfare and health. Given the era, the signers of the Durham Manifesto were bold and direct in their request for equal treatment of African-Americans, yet the final product divided the black community. Historian Carter G. Woodson referred to the Durham spokesmen as “lackeys and slaves” who offered no program toward liberty and freedom. Du Bois commended the signers and stated that he would have signed the document himself, although he conceded that he would have written the document differently. Johnson’s synthesis of the obstacles facing African-American safety and advancement were clear despite disagreement among observers regarding the manifesto’s tone and substance.

In keeping with his race relations efforts, Johnson also worked with the American Council on Race Relations, which was headquartered in Chicago, Illinois. The aim of this organization was the full participation of all citizens in all aspects of American life, inclusive of equal rights and equal opportunity. As a board member, Johnson worked with an impressive array of individuals, such as Mary McLeod Bethune, Pearl Buck, Ralph J. Bunche, Richard Wright, Walter White and many others. As with many interracial organizations at this time, financial difficulties were the norm. In fact, by 1945, the organization was $35,000 in debt.

The Southern Conference for Human Welfare ended by 1948 (Johnson was a member of the board until his Fisk presidency in 1947) and as the decade of the 1950s ended, the Southern Regional Council and many other interracial organizations found themselves increasingly marginal. The middle road that had been so long advocated was becoming irrelevant as the growing civil rights revolution directly confronted the coalition of interest groups. “With the gauntlet laid down by the Brown decision, membership dwindled and many seemingly progressive whites were no longer active. Howard Odum, who died just six months after Brown, thought the decision an unwise attempt to hurry social change. Will Alexander, though finally committed to desegregation, had retired to his farm in North Carolina,” according to Richard Robbins. Contemporary critics accused Johnson of being an accommodationist and some recent historians suggest that Johnson’s methodology failed to meet black needs. “Johnson cultivated race pride, but only to a point, and then he created for himself the dilemma of black nationalism.
versus assimilation,” according to historian Ralph Pearson. “He saw no way between those two polar positions, and so, recoiling from nationalism because he feared increased racial isolation and alienation, he called on Negroes to meet white standards so that they might be completely integrated into American society.” Speaking for race and region, Johnson felt that “criticism from an outside source is never palatable and is deeply resented.” Confidently, Johnson maintained optimism as early as 1944 that the South would move toward democracy; yet, he doubted that the region believed its own racial postulates and he correctly prophesied future racial conflict.  

Considerable achievements while a Fisk faculty member were evident as Johnson built his department and its reputation. “Johnson’s greatest contribution as a sociologist involved studies of the South. *Shadow of the Plantation* (1934), *Growing Up in the Black Belt* (1941), and *Patterns of Negro Segregation* (1943), are representative of some of his best work. Over the years, Johnson had selected certain representative counties in the South for detailed study. With each new grant or project, Johnson continuously sent researchers to conduct more intensive studies until they amassed an authoritative catalogue of information regarding the southern region.”  

*Shadow of the Plantation* was the first major study from the Fisk data bank that attempted realistically to portray the life of a rural Negro community located in Macon County, Alabama, under the influence of a plantation economy. By the mid 1930s, the American Youth Commission conducted a general survey of American youth. In order to ensure accurate information about blacks, Johnson and Charles H. Thompson of Howard University assumed the task of drafting a proposal for the inclusion of black youth in the study, and *Growing Up in the Black Belt* was the result of their efforts. In the spring of 1937, the Carnegie Corporation contracted Swedish economist Gunnar Myrdal to direct a comprehensive study of the Negro in the United States. Charles S. Johnson and his staff prepared a memorandum on segregation at the request of Myrdal which was later published as *Patterns of Negro Segregation*. Johnson’s work concentrated on the rural South, the urban South, border areas, and the urban North.  

Naturally administrative responsibilities prevented Johnson from concentrating completely on race relations activity. With the departure of President Jones in 1946, Fisk began searching for a new leader and considerable time was given to discussions of the qualities that a president of Fisk University should possess. Fisk trustees met in the Fifth Avenue New York offices of Mr. W.H. Dannot Pell on April 10, 1946, to decide upon the future of Fisk. Not
surprisingly, it was agreed that the first characteristic the president must possess was that he be a sincere Christian. Additionally, it was decided that the new president be a well prepared man academically, not necessarily a scholar, but one who understood and appreciated what scholarship meant. By implication it was agreed that the president should be a married man and that “his wife should fit into the entire scene and be an admirable hostess.” Surprisingly, the ability to raise money was the last item listed. Trustees agreed that regardless of the president’s race, Fisk staff should continue to be biracial in light of the success of integrated faculties at other American Missionary Association schools in the South. Quite frankly, the committee recognized that the time had finally come to select a black president. Although some whites were being considered, the list of quality African-American educators was impressive.

For example, Dr. Rayford Logan and Dr. Benjamin Mays were examined seriously. Although they were strong candidates, the narrowed list of candidates included Charles S. Johnson and his main competitor Dr. Charles Wesley. Wesley attended public schools in his hometown of Louisville, Kentucky, and then earned a B.A. at Fisk University in 1911, an M.A. in economics at Yale University in 1913, and a Ph.D. from Harvard in 1925. Wesley’s doctorate in history was the third awarded by Harvard to an African-American.17

“The battle of the board, lasting months, was intense, unseemly, and highly partisan along racial lines because many white supporters wanted Johnson while Du Bois and a few of the alumni were extremely combative and determined to promote Wesley. Nevertheless, Du Bois graciously acquiesced when the battle was lost.”18 Charles S. Johnson was selected by the board of trustees on October 29, 1946, and assumed duties as president on July 1, 1947. Many were pleased with Johnson’s selection. Mrs. Olive Anderson writing shortly after Johnson’s promotion wrote, “Last night I read a recent copy of Time, and learned that Fisk has honored herself by having you as its new president. Please let me be one of the friends to express my great pleasure in this and my great admiration to you two fine folks.” She continued in a vein that suited Johnson’s lifelong pursuit of interracial democracy by stating,

The privilege of knowing you was one of my nicest experiences while in America this time and even though our work is in the opposite ends of the earth, I like to think that we are friends and are working at the same job, building brotherhood and understanding, that moral foundation for the great society that our great Dr. Park used to talk so much about. . . .20

Johnson laid out his plan for the future of Fisk at an address in 1947, honoring the
president-elect at the Hotel Pennsylvania in New York, whereupon he stated his “belief in
democracy in education and in life.” He continued by shrewdly quoting Du Bois and
philosopher John Dewey regarding the role of education. Johnson counseled, “Herein lies the
tragedy of the age. Not that men are poor--all men know something of poverty; not that men are
wicked--who is good? Not that men are ignorant--what is truth? Nay, but that men know so
little of men.” Johnson followed this quotation from Du Bois by suggesting that a college was a
“living part of the community” and he optimistically believed that students should be prepared
for a changing society that was destined to become democratic. According to Johnson, “That
means that the educational process itself must be an experience in democratic participation.”

“During Johnson’s presidency, Fisk built five major buildings and doubled its educational
budget while adding over a million dollars to its endowment. The faculty took on an
international flavor with the addition of numerous scholars while obtaining substantial
professional recognition for programs that enhanced the school’s image.”

However, not all faculty were enamored with Johnson’s administrative direction. There
were complaints that Johnson was away too much, distant and sometimes haughty. Historian
August Meier, who taught at Fisk, and served as a research assistant to Johnson said that “Fisk
did present a seeming paradox: a bright faculty with low morale.” Often, Johnson was lax
regarding day to day details and did not sufficiently honor departmental autonomy and especially
the need for a cooperative relationship with chairpersons. Meier believed that Johnson was a
poor administrator who was reluctant to delegate authority. “Although he was away half the
time on important duties connected with his various boards and committees,” wrote Meier, “he
insisted on making virtually all decisions, even on matters of detail.” Evidently, Meier’s strong
personality collided with Johnson’s leadership style.

Often, black college presidents have been accused of running their campus environments
like plantations. Personal idiosyncrasies aside, all black college leadership operated in a racial
atmosphere that created artificial pressures that simply did not exist for white college presidents.
The black chief executive often served as a mediator between the college and the threatening
reality of America. Consequently, many presidents found it necessary to consolidate and
maintain personal control over the entire organization. Sociologist James Blackwell described
black leadership as developing a “vest pocket” mentality that mimicked white administrations,
which led toward the tendency to exaggerate behavior. Johnson, like so many before, was forced
to operate within this racial paradigm. However famous Johnson was in New York and Chicago,
he did not have the necessarily important bond with the local white establishment in Nashville that went automatically to Vanderbilt. Johnson disliked the job of holding out a tin cup for gifts and he struggled to raise money to provide Fisk with superior research funds, teachers, equipment, and larger endowments. Writing years later during his presidency of Fisk, Johnson explained to his wife that, “…Two things I must say or never neglect: me and you; as intellectual employment, amidst this mad effort at money raising I get only a nominal satisfaction out of the later. . . .”

The cataclysmic change regarding race relations that Johnson had long envisioned began when planes shattered a quiet Sunday morning and dropped bombs on ships anchored in the calm waters of Pearl Harbor with devastating effect. It was increasingly evident that American Negroes expected that this war would provide the democracy that had eluded them for so long.

The mounting pressure for democracy at home was beginning to manifest itself domestically. Just a little over a year and a half before America’s entry into the war, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People won the *Canty v. Alabama* decision that outlawed forced confessions of prisoners. In late 1941, civil rights attorney Thurgood Marshall continued his fight to overturn the all-white Democratic primary in Texas. After years of receiving less pay, a lone black teacher named Harold Thomas filed suit in 1941 against the city school board of Nashville, Tennessee. Z. Alexander Looby and the local and national NAACP aided Thomas in his case. Thurgood Marshall and Looby represented Thomas before a Nashville judge. After a quiet and uneventful trial, the judge ruled in favor of Thomas and ordered the school board to provide equal salaries, and the board did so in September 1942. Concerned white newspaper editors, such as Virginius Dabney of the *Times Dispatch* in Richmond, Virginia, accused the NAACP of inciting riots in the South, to which NAACP leader Roy Wilkins penned an angry editorial. Wilkins caustically observed that the NAACP did not cause attacks on black soldiers in the South. Despite white opposition, the NAACP nearly tripled the number of its local chapters and increased its membership dramatically between 1940 and 1946. The growth of the NAACP, the Urban League, and other black interest groups enabled leaders to push racial questions more regularly into the mainstream of official discussions and decisions. The famed “brown bomber” Joe Louis expressed perhaps an accurate sentiment when he said, “There ain’t nothing wrong with us that Mr. Hitler can fix.” As America closed ranks, the fear of continued violence by lower class blacks and of an even
greater period of violence after the war, like that following World War I, pushed the need for interracial cooperation that Charles Johnson had advocated all along.

Charles Johnson and other intellectuals were keenly aware that a war of such magnitude would have far reaching consequences upon the racial paradigm of America and the world at large. Howard University literature professor, Arthur P. Davis, speaking to students at Virginia Union University in 1942 professed that, “there will be no return to normalcy. For good or ill, the new order will be different.” Davis continued, “I want you to realize above all else that color is one of the major factors in this war and whatever the outcome, the colored peoples of Japan, China, India, and South America will have something to say about your status here in America and you about theirs.” Educator Leander Boykin felt that the Negro College in America would be in a unique position in the post war era and must be ready to meet the demand of readjustment that would surely follow the war. Charles Johnson felt that “total war is a cataclysmic national event that shakes and loosens many traditions from their deep moorings. . . .”

Evidently, the foundation of traditional American education was transformed by the war. The educational changes sweeping the country forced a mass production method of instruction that caused Johnson to reflect upon the price paid by such pressure. Johnson stated:

The methods and technology of education have multiplied so extensively that the schools have almost ceased to exist in the original sense of that term and have instead become laboratories in which teachers, operating under the direction of experts, are engaged in trying some new apparatus or experimenting with some new methods of teaching or speeding up and making more efficient the educational process, as they are carried on under the artificial conditions that are imposed by the classroom and the necessities of mass education. This mass production method has permitted the schools frequently to make fairly effective use of teachers of inferior mentality. At the same time, the rationalization and standardization of the process have discouraged initiative in the more competent ones. 

The war stimulated racial militancy, which in turn led to increased interracial violence that culminated in the bloody summer of 1943. “Negro leaders then retreated from mass movements and direct action in favor of aid from white liberals for their congressional and court battles. While many of the goals of the early war years remained, the mood and tactics became increasingly conservative. Negroes certainly feared appearing unpatriotic. Paradoxically, the wartime violence summoned forth the modern civil rights movement, enlisting in the struggle scores of liberal organizations and many whites previously blind or indifferent to American
racism. However, this mobilization of whites served to smother the embryonic black movement for equality by too frequently suggesting the acceptance of racial peace over the reality of racial justice.”

Edgar B. Stern, a New Orleans trustee of Dillard University, banker, and member of the Rosenwald Fund, cautioned Johnson near the end of the war not to move too quickly in attacking segregation to which Johnson replied:

No one expects the custom to be dissolved within the near future. . . . I am more concerned about the philosophy than the present fact, even though the fact has been uncomfortable for me personally all too often. . . . I go right on living in a segregated system instead of trying to leave it; but not believing in the principle of segregation as the ultimate American democracy, and willing to help dissolve it as rapidly as it can be dissolved.

President Roosevelt tried to maintain a low profile when it came to racial issues so he would not antagonize the southern wing of his party, but it was also clear that it was not a personal priority of American leadership in general. It was not until Roosevelt’s fourth presidential victory that he even mentioned race in his inaugural address.

“Early in 1941 Johnson observed that the Bureau of Labor Statistics estimated that between April 1941 and April 1942, approximately 1,400,000 additional workers would be required for new war industries. Yet during the third quarter of 1941, when placements through the U.S. Employment Service reached its highest peak, Negroes and other non-whites composed only 3 percent of the placements in 20 large war industries and they were less than 3 percent of the referrals for pre-employment training courses. In one city, two large shipbuilding concerns had nation-wide requests for shipyard workers, in spite of the fact that the U.S. Employment Service reported 6,000 Negro workers available in the active file for the Employment Service in that city.” Understandably, Johnson recognized that economics was becoming a looming facet of civil rights. The economic exigency during the war was evident as Fisk held its sixty-ninth graduation exercises in May 1943, where the commencement address was delivered by Dr. W.W. Charters, Director of the Bureau of Training, War Manpower Commission, of Washington, D.C. Accordingly, mounting pressure by black leaders forced American leadership to respond to the economic demands of African-Americans.

Asa Philip Randolph, President of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters challenged the President to do more to provide opportunities for blacks in wartime industries as America prepared for war. Randolph threatened to lead a march on Washington to demand action by the President of the United States; however, Mrs. Roosevelt, and Walter White of the N.A.A.C.P. and
others opposed this attempted march. Johnson too might have opposed the march, but his papers, according to recent biographer Richard Robbins, contain no record of his personal opinion. Nevertheless, it is difficult to imagine Johnson advocating such an overt attempt although most certainly he would understand why the sentiment for such a march developed.  

By July 1941, five members, including the chairman, had been chosen for the Fair Employment Practices Commission. Although Charles S. Johnson was mentioned for a committee position, he was not among the ones finally chosen. The board’s representation, however, included labor, blacks, a southerner and an industrialist of Jewish background who allegedly spoke for business and ethnic groups.

“The FEPC sent Congressman Richard Russell, of Georgia, and his Southern colleagues into a sputtering rage” according to historian Robert Mann. The prospects of the federal government dictating hiring policy to private businesses alarmed Russell “who declared the FEPC to be the most dangerous force in existence in the United States.” Despite the executive order creating the committee, defense contracts could not be voided because of discrimination. According to Assistant Secretary Robert Paterson, War Department contracts had clauses giving the government the right of termination only for default of deliveries.

Race relations could have improved markedly with the creation of a potent FEPC that was intent upon justice. Despite the absence of governmental zeal, Johnson’s recognition of the underlying economic power of civil rights was an area that he concentrated upon from his home base of Nashville’s Fisk University. Johnson observed that “social and economic mobility brought about by the war upset old racial patterns and accepted norms, while industrialization of the South certainly helped bring about complex changes in society.” Although Johnson was keenly aware that the war provided momentum toward addressing civil rights, many leaders in Nashville failed to understand how the war was rapidly changing the future of the world.

Economic fears fanned by racism heightened tensions during the war. The Social Sciences Institute at Fisk University reported that 242 racial battles had occurred that year in forty-seven cities. As usual, Johnson continued to address racial issues that were plaguing the country by quietly meeting with interracial groups, as he did in Nashville at the Hermitage Hotel in 1942. Unfortunately, the interracial coalition of Catholics and Jews sitting on the FEPC remained unenthusiastic supporters of the commission that Johnson so forcefully supported, and many resented being grouped together with blacks. Paradoxically, the financial support of Jewish Americans for other civil rights organizations became increasingly important in later
years. “For President Roosevelt however, equal opportunity was less important than the desire to give Negroes a continuous forum for blowing off steam,” according to historian Kenneth O’Reilly, “so there would be unity between the races.”

Despite the efforts toward improved relations, Nashville and American society in general remained segregated. Johnson observed that “segregation in its forms and discrimination in its expressions involve all aspects of the society in which they operate.” The United States armed forces segregated blacks or excluded them altogether. The American Red Cross segregated blood. Northern as well as Southern politicians perpetuated racism. “Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson, a New Yorker with degrees from Harvard and Yale, blamed racial tensions on the deliberate effort of certain radical leaders of the colored race to use the war for obtaining race equality and interracial marriages.”

Nashville was certainly no different than the rest of America. In a 1939 study prepared for Swedish sociologist Gunnar Myrdal, Johnson compiled a listing of patterns of segregation in Nashville. “From parks to bus transportation, separation of the races existed by policy or de facto segregation. Hotels and restaurants in the central business district did not serve Negroes. There were separate water fountains in the five and ten-cent stores. Negroes were excluded from the central library and branch libraries except one branch provided for Negroes. Two Negro parks comprising not more than 50 acres existed, while whites had more than 3,000 acres. In many stores, especially more exclusive ones such as Rich, Schwartz and Joseph or Tinsley and Armstrong, there was no discrimination against Negroes of the economic class that could afford to patronize them.” Seemingly, the economic ascendancy of Negroes could ease race relations to a degree, until the larger society felt threatened again. Invariably, Johnson felt that black economic mobility was vertical and therefore did not directly challenge or concern the larger society. “In terms of the social values, Negroes at the lower levels, infused with the idea of vertical mobility, do not look across the color line,” according to Johnson, “as much as they do toward the upper level within it.” Therefore, racial interaction for most whites with blacks was abstract, with the continued casual discrimination that many blacks came to expect. For example, in 1942, a massive minstrel show at Jones Elementary School in Nashville, used approximately 400 young smiling white children painted in blackface to pose for the paper under the heading “Blackface Cakewalk at Jones Minstrel.” Even cartoons in the local papers routinely degraded African-Americans. One cartoon by Tom Little and Tom Sims titled “Sunflower Street” highlighted very black children with enlarged lips and other caricatured features as they
engaged in light banter with broken English. Overcoming racial discrimination and paternalism had to be difficult given the direct and subliminal messages that America continually perpetuated upon its populace. Accordingly, Johnson observed that “discrimination in Nashville did not represent arbitrary behavior on the part of one group regulating its contacts with another. The adjustment processes we call segregation and discrimination are complex phenomena of a dynamic character,” explained Johnson, “regulating the interaction of groups in the society in terms of values held to be significant by the society.”

Significantly, the war years seemed to provide wider parameters for the discussion of racial realities. However, many people seemed to feel that social change should develop vertically but not horizontally across racial lines, as Johnson desired. In a 1942 letter to the Nashville Tennessean Felix Stinson noted that when he recently rode on a crowded bus, “all the seats including those reserved for members of the colored race were filled with white people . . . .” As the bus unloaded, Negroes continued to stand despite empty seats in the black section next to whites. Stinson observed that it was discrimination toward blacks and wondered if “Jim Crow could be something that we could do without?” Stinson quickly pointed out that “I am not discussing social equality,” but he did recognize that “the Jim Crow law causes needless confusion and race hatred that we can ill afford.”

Writing with a professional detachment back in 1939, Johnson noticed that conflict was the product of American values. He stated,

The Negro element of the population is continually attempting to express itself in terms of certain values, while the white population is continually attempting to restrict this expression in terms of other values. Both sets of values are part of the American culture and their conflict represents what Professor Lynd characterizes as disjunction in the culture. Restrictions on the achievements of certain values the Negro people regard as desirable, which restrictions are recognized as being imposed because of racial identification, are defined as discrimination. Discrimination is recognized when restrictions are imposed which block the attainment of values considered desirable.

When black veterans came home from World War II their expectations had been raised similarly to that of veterans after World War I with regard to the desire for full participation in American democracy. “Soon the first cracks began to appear in the wall of segregation in Nashville. The first black patrolman was added to the police force in 1948, and in the early 1950s, Coyness L. Ennix, an attorney, was the first black to be appointed to the city school board. Two black lawyers, Z. Alexander Looby and Robert Lillard, won election to the city council in 1951.” The campus of Fisk was not immune to the dynamic changes either. Arthur
Berry, a Fisk freshman recalled a transformation developing immediately following the war when he observed,

I came to Fisk as a veteran from World War II and so things had begun to change in America in general relative to race and color and that affected the Fisk culture too. The other incident I remember was the activity that took place relative to the selection of Miss Fisk during my freshman year. Up to 1946 Miss Fisk had always been a fair complexioned student, but the year I came to Fisk a number of veterans of World War II came also. One of the candidates the veterans supported was a beautiful but very dark skinned student. With hard campaigning by students and especially veterans the student, Annette West from Tuskegee, Alabama won the election. It was rumored that the administration and some students wanted a recount or even a new election. In the end the vote was allowed to stand.\textsuperscript{37}

Racial transitions whether internal or external, would continue until the vestiges of segregation and discrimination in America receded. World War II and its aftermath accelerated the timetable of black America’s movement toward democracy. For instance, “black city employees in Nashville protested racist job differentiation in 1944, and black physicians sued the city’s municipal hospital in 1944, barring them from practicing there. Not surprisingly, black veterans refused to march in a segregated V-J Day parade in 1945. Curiously, The Nashville Observer, the city’s weekly Jewish newspaper remained conspicuously silent when these events happened. In fact, The Observer discussed racial discrimination only four times between 1939 and 1949,” according to historian Robert Spinney. “On three of those occasions, the same editorial was reprinted from 1943.” Nevertheless, Johnson held faith that various races would entertain positive reaction toward social justice and he was particularly optimistic concerning the Christian church that financially supported his efforts. “Churches over the South are giving new and increasing study to the problem of race relations and are joining with other groups in efforts to modify the more pressing injustices,” wrote Johnson. However, Johnson seemed overly optimistic when he declared, “Southern youth seem more disposed to view racial situations in the light of Christian and democratic principals rather than in the twilight of tradition.”\textsuperscript{48} Perhaps Johnson’s public audience needed optimistic assurances that race relations were improving with the help of the church. However, in his spiritual autobiography Johnson observed that generally, “the church had been too much a part of the hierarchy of the social order that sanctioned current conventions regarding race.”\textsuperscript{49}
Johnson’s optimism and visibility concerning race relations meant that he would continuously serve on boards, conduct studies, and entertain questions concerning race relations for the rest of his life. He felt that the Negro minority should support campaigns against the growth of anti-Semitism and against the undemocratic treatment of Japanese American citizens. “This would not only win new friends and allies,” wrote Johnson, “but it would help preserve in our national tradition the American spirit of fair play.”

Johnson’s faithful devotion to American democracy as it slowly progressed seemed to mirror the continued advancement of blacks. Unfortunately, black advancement often fueled the fears of some whites regarding interracial relationships, which seemed to permeate the thinking of many Americans during this era. Any type of interracial contact, some whites feared could potentially clear the way for desegregation in other areas of modern life such as housing. In fact, it seemed as if blacks might be allowed to move into the neighborhoods of white America. In two Washington cases appealed to the Supreme Court in 1948, *Hurd v. Hodge* and *Urciolo v. Hodge*, the petitioners drafted a consolidated brief of 132 pages to outlaw restrictive covenants in housing. The authors of the brief acknowledged the aid of the American Council on Race Relations, the Julius Rosenwald Fund, Robert C. Weaver and Charles S. Johnson among other prominent social scientists in preparing the document.

Social contact whether in housing or relationships remained problematic for many whites and blacks. However, prominent blacks such as W.E.B. Du Bois provided periodic defenses of racial intermarriage seemingly as a defense against black inferiority, and less publicly, Johnson defended interracial marriages intellectually as well. These sentiments existed despite the fact that the U.S. Information Agency as late as 1957 noted that twenty-nine states--all those of the South and many in the Southwest-- prohibited interracial marriages. After reading an article in *Time Magazine* describing Johnson’s work, Gladys Baker, of Nova Scotia, wrote Johnson in 1946 of her family’s concern over the pending marriage of her niece to a black man. Johnson explained in a letter after his recent return from Paris as a delegate to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, that there were two problems. One was sociological and the other involved the character and the reputation of the parties involved. More directly, Johnson concluded, “There is no biological reason why there should not be such marriages.”

Sensing the enormity of Johnson’s efforts regarding interracial relations, Langston Hughes wrote Johnson, “I was certainly delighted and surprise [sic] to receive your card from Paris which came just at Christmas. It was mighty nice of you to think of me way over there with problems of this troubled world on your mind.”
“By 1949, Johnson had acquired an international reputation. Apparently, Harvie Branscomb, chancellor of Vanderbilt University, took that into consideration when he talked to Charles A. Thomson, executive secretary of UNESCO’s national commission, in Washington, about the possibility of having Nashville named the host city for the United States National Commission for UNESCO meeting to be held in February or early March 1949. When told of the nondiscrimination policy, Branscomb balked, despite the fact that Johnson had made a speech at Vanderbilt a year ago. Unfortunately, Nashville continued to yield to the pressure of segregation.”

The pressure to maintain a segregated society was heightened by anxieties related to the Cold War. Increased tension between the United States and “Godless” Communist Russia caused considerable concern for America and the general public as fear of Communism grew into a so called Cold War. The ability to place black demands for equality within a framework of Communist subversion gave some Americans the excuse they needed to deny full democracy to darker citizens. Periodic defenses of loyalty became common as the House Un-American Activities Committee sought to root out communist or communist sympathizers in American society. As Fisk President, Johnson was forced to defend the institution before the House Un-American Activities Committee. On Thursday, July 14, 1949, Charles S. Johnson testified before the Committee and swore under oath that he had never been a member of the Communist Party. Then he was allowed to read a prepared statement. Interestingly, Johnson was asked to state his views regarding the loyalty of American Negroes. Johnson acknowledged that it would be presumptuous for him to speak for Negroes generally but he ventured an opinion. Johnson was surprisingly blunt regarding the absurdity of the assumption that Negroes were not loyal. “In one sense,” offered Johnson, “it is like asking Tennesseans, or Presbyterians, or foreign born citizens, or American women, or persons with freckles [whether they] are loyal.” It was obviously annoying for Johnson to defend Negro loyalty, but as usual Johnson established his disappointment and was characteristically direct in attacking discrimination under the guise of a detached professional sociologist. “Wanting the elimination of inequalities and racial discrimination is not wanting to subvert the Government,” explained Johnson. When asked whether he knew of efforts to “impregnate the minds of the younger students,” Johnson unequivocally stated, “I can’t say I have found very much evidence of it, although there are efforts, which I approve, to make Negro youth aware of and discontented with a level of
citizenship which is not up to our best standards nationally.” Although Johnson was constantly described as shy and reserved, when given the opportunity, he stated his positions on racial matters in eloquent and direct terms. It would be interesting to speculate whether Johnson might, had he lived longer, have sanctioned the confrontational style of student protests during the 1960s, although his style and temperament suggest otherwise. However, Johnson would surely understand the inevitable outcome of unmet desires. Johnson’s testimony eased the committee’s trepidation to the point that they allowed his comments and at least one committee member suggested that Johnson gave a “new concept to all of us of the people in your group.” Coinciding with this political atmosphere, the Fisk University Bulletin of 1950, for the first time mentioned the changing racial climate in America as an aim of the university.  

As Johnson traveled throughout the country giving speeches on race relations and attending AMA board meetings during the 1940s, he was seen by some as the patriarch of a model family. Aside from emotional sentiments for his wife, Johnson also kept her abreast of what was happening professionally with Fisk. In a January 1953 letter, Johnson excitedly wrote, “First let me say that the first $300,000 on endowment is now safely secured. It cannot be announced until April.” However, many letters to his wife are filled with the loneliness brought on by constant travel. “Well, here I am again,” writes Johnson, “and because I am lonely and miss being with you, and feel like some one out in the open sea...” The next day Johnson ended his letter writing, “I am tired half sick and utterly lonely... good night and love Charles.” Ever the romantic, Johnson confesses, “My dear little lonesome flower: This old withering germanium is lonesome too, and seems all that keeps him standing in the ground is the hope of getting his lovely orchid back to his keeping and in his sight.”

Johnson maintained his hectic schedule in May 1954 by working as a consultant to the NAACP regarding the desegregation of schools. In May 1954, the Brown versus the Board of Education legal decision argued by Thurgood Marshall, was prepared by a phalanx of lawyers, psychologists, historians and sociologists that changed forever the direction of American education and society at large. It was decided by a unanimous Supreme Court led by Chief Justice Earl Warren, that segregated schools were inherently unequal and that they should be desegregated with all deliberate speed.

“Then, by the end of May 1955, the momentum stopped. Just fifty-four weeks after the Supreme Court had taken a giant stride toward the demise of Jim Crow it stepped backward. Its implementation decision on the Brown ruling rejected the NAACP’s plea to order instant and
total school desegregation. The justices decided to adopt a slow approach advocated by the Justice Department and the attorneys general of the Southern states. The Court assigned the responsibility for drawing up the plans for desegregation to local school authorities and local federal judges to determine the pace. Opinion polls in the 1950s indicated that Tennessee’s white population overwhelmingly favored segregation in the public school system. In fact, a poll conducted in 1956 estimated that just below one quarter of the state’s whites supported the Brown decision. Charles Johnson continued his efforts to ameliorate racial conditions by traveling to other states to help with the implementation of the Brown decision. In 1955, Johnson attended a conference in Atlanta, Georgia, where he was photographed seated around a table of smiling white men working gradually to implement the court order. Interestingly, Johnson was not smiling and appeared to be a pensive academician confronted with an enormous task. Johnson spoke of the decision as the “maturing of American democracy.” And he certainly understood with a bit of understatement that “it is the fruition of a trend that has grown over many years.”

Johnson remarked later that “the decision itself, was really less sociological than ideological, because it placed the nation’s law, for the first time, stoutly and unequivocally, on the side of equality.” However, Johnson understood the trepidation emanating from the black community regarding integration. Despite short term employment concerns Johnson suggested the closure or merger of weaker black colleges. Additionally, Johnson felt that the increase in students would provide black colleges, if properly prepared, with continued legitimacy. In some cases, Johnson felt that segregation had provided “a protective wall that produced for some, a wailing wall of empty resignation.” Johnson recognized that some black teachers opposed integration because of the hazard to their own jobs. He understood that the “hazard, however, rests very largely with the inadequacy of their preparation.” Other black educators concurred. Fred Patterson, head of the United Negro College Fund, theorized that race should not be a factor in determining the entrance of a student; however, he believed that historically black colleges would continue to play a strong role in American education.  

Paradoxically, desegregation and the eventual closing of all black schools in the South caused many black educators to lose their jobs. Ultimately, hundreds of black principals, black athletic coaches, supervisory personnel, and classroom teachers were demoted, dismissed outright, denied new contracts, or pressured into resigning as black and white schools
consolidated. Black students in newly integrated school systems were often suspended, expelled, and placed in the lowest educational tracks.  

However, Thurgood Marshall seemed extremely optimistic after the *Brown* decision that the country would move quickly to break down barriers to integration. Speaking at Fisk University’s Race Relations Institute in 1955, Marshall stated that, “Our side of the picture will increasingly be coming before the public. There, the democratic forces will react favorably toward it, and there is no doubt of its favorable outcome.” Many white liberals, however, were not so convinced of the efficacy of the decision. Harry Ashmore, editor of *The Arkansas Gazette* claimed to be a “gradualist.” “I only suggest,” he confessed, “that what we are dealing with finally is a state of mind, which is, and is likely to continue to be, beyond the reach of any court order.”

Charles S. Johnson spent the better part of his life trying to persuade white liberals to practice the democratic ideals they professed to live by. If Johnson could sway liberals, then they could entice the rest of America to accept true democracy inclusive of people of color. One of the many white liberals that worked closely with Johnson was Professor Howard Odum of the University of North Carolina. “Odum was born on a family farm of modest means in Georgia. He graduated from Emory College in 1904 and earned a master’s degree in English and classics at the University of Mississippi in 1906. In 1910, Odum wrote a thesis on the social and mental traits of the Negro after which he received a doctorate in sociology at Columbia, where Franklin Giddings and Franz Boas influenced him. After seven years on the faculty at the University of Georgia, Odum went to Chapel Hill in 1920, where he remained the rest of his life.” Howard Odum, as chairman of the sociology department at the University of North Carolina, focused on the regional idea, whereby the focus would shift from race to the problems of labor, agriculture, industry, and health issues affecting the entire South. “By the 1930s,” according to Richard Robbins, “there were only two social science research centers of national reputation in the South, Odum’s at North Carolina and Johnson’s at Fisk.”

Odum and Johnson were philosophical and tactical moderates who tried to persuade those on either side to join them in the middle and work cooperatively for the good of all. “On many issues Odum and Johnson could find common ground. But for all their wisdom and experience as sociologists, as policy makers and sensitive human beings, they could not see what to do about the burden of segregation.” In Odum’s view segregation was not subject to debate. Indeed, Odum, as president of the American Sociological Society in 1930, noted that “the Negro masses
were shiftless, untidy, and indolent…dishonest and untruthful.” Harvard, to the dismay of historian Allen Ballard, “saw fit to grant Odum an honorary L.L.D. in 1939.” In fairness, Columbia University bestowed an honorary degree upon Johnson in 1947, as did Harvard in 1948. Unfortunately, most liberal whites were paternalistic at best and racist at worst. The constant rationalization of their views was even perpetuated by Johnson himself from time to time in the same vein as Booker T. Washington. In 1945, Johnson praised Odum as a “prime mover in the South’s boldest and most constructive movements toward democracy, [for] deservedly receiving the Bernay’s Award for Race Relations for the year.” Indeed, Johnson’s motives were always measured, whether he intended to be especially frank or diplomatically cautious. 68

Johnson established programs that would enhance African-Americans as they prepared for entry into the mainstream of American life. Johnson understood that Fisk University’s southern location created a unique environment in which to educate its students. Fisk students came from all over the nation and as they graduated they returned to work in careers across the nation and the world. Therefore, Johnson correctly observed that “For Fisk University, education is not a thing detached and apart from the life of the people and the community.” 69

For example, earlier in 1943, the program in African and Caribbean studies was instituted with Rosenwald funding. Johnson added two Africanist specialists, Mark Hanna Watkins and Lorenzo Turner to the Interdepartmental Curriculum in African Studies in 1944, with related courses on Mexico and the Caribbean built into the program. Preparation for this program had been developing at the college for some time. During the seventy-fifth Anniversary of Fisk, a symposium was assembled that covered various countries, races and ethnic groups. Some of the papers presented included Culture and Education in the Midwestern Highlands of Guatemala by Robert Redfield; The Pan-African Problem of Culture Contact, by Bronislaw Malinowski; The West African Bush School, by Mark Hanna Watkins; The Educational Process and The Brazilian Negro by Donald Pierson; and Education for Survival: The Jews, by Louis Wirth. 70

One of the most effective programs for desegregation that Johnson created was the Basic College in the spring of 1951. Johnson formally proposed the Basic College idea to the faculty, recommending that the university select a group of outstanding tenth and eleventh grade high school students each year and immediately provide them with intensive academic training in order to reach distinctly high standards in their later college work. The idea was implemented in the fall of 1951 after the Fund for the Advancement of Education made a grant of $120,000 to
enable Fisk to aid new teachers and scholarships for the program. The grant was made under the Fund’s program for Early Admission to College, sponsored in 12 colleges including Columbia, Yale, Oberlin, and the Universities of Chicago and Wisconsin. That Fisk received Early Admission funds like predominantly white colleges was highlighted in Johnson’s report to the trustees and served to advance his notion of inclusion which placed blacks on par with their white counterparts. No doubt, equal treatment of blacks in an integrated society would be the eventual goal.  

The training Fisk provided through this program helped prepare students to integrate colleges and society as a whole. For example, a set of scores from the 1953 General Education Test highlighted that two-thirds of the Basic College students scored in the top third according to national sophomore norms. Additionally, Basic College students took the University of Chicago admission examination and ranked among the upper thirty percent of all who had taken the test. The white press and other institutions took note and recognized the efforts of Fisk. In 1954, the Chicago Tribune praised Fisk by stating, “Fisk probably did as much as any other institution to dramatize Negro higher education.” Yale University paid tribute as well by modeling its curriculum after the Basic College Program at Fisk.

Preston King, Ph.D. London School of Economics, as one of the first Basic College participants recalled that “We were-in a sense-pretentious. We were expected to show off.” He continues, “we were expected to make comments and ask questions, and we did. Whether we were actually more intelligent than other average college students I cannot really say. . . .” King’s modesty aside, Johnson’s program did foster an environment of support and expectation. During 1956, the first year in which a large number of Basic College students graduated, they took away half of all honors offered even though they constituted only 16% of the graduating class. In fact, six out of eight Phi Beta Kappas had come into Fisk under the program.

There were a number of students who benefited from the Early Entrance Program established by the Basic College, including poet Nikki Giovanni, and historian David Levering Lewis. The prestige offered to the entire college appealed to Johnson. In fact, he was particularly pleased that two white students joined the college in 1953. Although they were not a part of the program, they did possess scholarships from the Worthing Foundation in Texas that afforded them the privilege of attending any college they saw fit. Around 1961, after Johnson’s death, the program dissolved. Interestingly, King suggested that the Basic College may have
hurt the overall structure of the college because it eliminated the cohesive intellectual heart of the University, which they themselves represented.\footnote{73}

In 1953, Fisk University was the first black college to receive a chapter of Phi Beta Kappa. Dr. Goodrich C. White, president of the United Chapters of Phi Beta Kappa and president of Emory University in Atlanta, conducted the formal installation ceremonies on the campus in the presence of students, members of the interracial faculty and representatives of other colleges and universities in the area. Dr. Alonzo G. Moron, president of Hampton Institute said, “This recognition of high scholarship at Fisk University is a tribute to Dr. Johnson’s leadership and the faculty at Fisk.” Johnson announced that two Phi Beta Kappa keys would be presented at that year’s convocation to Dr. Fred W. Alsup, a physician, and historian Dr. John Hope Franklin. The acceptance of Fisk as an equal partner in educational excellence was an achievement that Johnson desired for Fisk if for no other reason than to prove why blacks should be accepted as full citizens worthy of democracy. Johnson spent the better part of his life trying to achieve the goal of an equal partnership with America.\footnote{74}

To Gilpin, Johnson seemed much more militant at the end of his career. Actually, Johnson had been very direct in the past, which might be construed as militant. He saw the Brown decision as a crowning achievement of democratic ideals, yet the continued racial resistance eroded his famed patience. Some of his friends thought he seemed unusually depressed. “Gone was the enthusiasm of the 1920s, the patience of the 1930s, the sympathetic understanding of the 1940s, and the premature optimism of the early 1950s. As the years moved on, Johnson’s migraine headaches worsened and by the mid 1950s his nervousness became more obvious as he chain-smoked Fatima cigarettes.” \footnote{75}

On October 27, 1956, while traveling by train to attend a meeting of the Fisk Board of Trustees, Johnson left the train at a stop in Louisville, Kentucky and died of a heart attack at the age of sixty-three. Johnson lay in state at the Heritage House, the Fisk presidential residence, as his wife Marie made arrangements.

In an untitled and undated speech Johnson put forth an eight-point creed that he swore to follow throughout his life regarding his fellow man. The last two points are illustrative of Johnson’s public and private struggles. Point seven suggests that he would not “hesitate to take a normal next step dictated by the highest sense of right and decency and fairness, through fear that it may complicate race relations or run counter to some special philosophy of race relations.” Johnson was a prudent scholar seeking a “normal next step” that would allow him to shrewdly
exhibit the timing and patience necessary to achieve his goals. Point eight, was perhaps the most illuminating of the private struggles Johnson faced as he continued to address his lifelong task. He wrote, “Finally, If I cannot divest myself of racial or personal prejudices, I will refrain from inflicting them upon those of my friends and acquaintances, or even strangers, who are without them. If I cannot bring myself to help a member of a weaker group, I will at least refrain from setting up obstacles to his helping himself.” Charles S. Johnson was praised throughout his life for his detached professional demeanor, yet he too struggled with the reality of life.76

Ethel Ray, a brilliant, beautiful woman from Minnesota who was Johnson’s secretary, looked back many years later on Johnson’s management style and concluded that “he could be quite ruthless, and maybe, as some people say. . . he maneuvered people like chess on a board.” Fred Brownlee who had known Johnson for years thought Johnson was a great man. Writing faculty member Lillian Vorhees, Brownlee reflected, “Time tends to slough off the petty things about great men while the stature of their greatness grows with time. I’m glad I was so near to an understanding and appreciation of Charles’ greatness, and really am sorry I came too close in touch with that which was not great.” 77
Notes to Chapter III


4 Ibid., 285.


6 Egerton, Speak Now Against the Day: The Generation Before the Civil Rights Movement in the South, 175.

7 Joe Richardson, A History of Fisk University, 1865-1946 (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1980), 126; American Missionary Association Archives Addendum Series A, President’s Reports to Trustees: 1900-1948, Box 169 folder 10, Amistad Research Center, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana.


9 Johnson, To Stem this Tide, 131.


11 “American Council on Race Relations” Charles S. Johnson Papers Box 68 folder 4, Fisk University Special Collection, Nashville, Tennessee; “American Council on Race Relations: Present Members of the Board” 14 June 1944, Charles S. Johnson Papers Box 68 folder 3, Fisk University Special Collection, Nashville, Tennessee; “American Council on Race Relations:


14 Ibid., 129-133.

15 “Fisk University Trustee Minutes and Agendas 1923-1953,” Box 167 folder 13 American Missionary Association Archives Addendum Series A, Amistad Research Center, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana; Johnson joined the Congregational Christian Church within the year of his arrival in Nashville, Charles S. Johnson Papers Index, “Biographical Notes,” Amistad Research Center, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana.

16 Ibid.

17 Logan was a Phi Beta Kappa graduate from Williams College in 1917. He received a master’s degree in 1932 and a Ph.D. from Harvard in 1936 and was a professor of history at Howard University when he was being considered for the Fisk presidency. Dr. Benjamin Mays received a bachelor’s degree from Bates College in Maine in 1920. He then attended the University of Chicago’s Divinity School earning a master’s degree in 1925 and a Ph.D. ten years later. In 1934, Mays assumed the deanship of Howard University’s school of religion where he revitalized a moribund program. Later, Mays would become president of Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia. See Kwame Anthony Appiah and Henry Louis Gates, Jr., ed., Africana: The Encyclopedia of the African and African American Experience (New York: Civitas Books, 1999).

18 Robbins, Sidelines Activist, 139.

19 Charles S. Johnson Papers Index, Amistad Research Center, New Orleans, Louisiana.

20 Olive L. Anderson to Charles S. Johnson 14 December 1946, Box 144 folder 2, Charles S. Johnson Papers, Amistad Research Center, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana.


23 Meier, A White Scholar and the Black Community, 15.
24 Robbins, *Sidelines Activist*, 162.


27 Charles S. Johnson to Marie Johnson 9 February 1953, Charles S. Johnson Papers, Box 144 folder 6, Amistad Research Center, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana.


34 Roosevelt states, “Our Constitution of 1787 was not a perfect instrument. . . . it is not perfect yet. But it provided a firm base upon which all manner of men, of all races and colors and creeds, could build our solid structure of democracy.” *Inaugural Addresses of the Presidents of the United States from George Washington 1789 to George Bush 1989* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1989), 284.

35 Johnson and Associates, *To Stem this Tide*, 1; *Crisis* 50 (July 1943): 195.
36 Robbins, Sidelines Activist, 108


42 Egerton, Speak Now Against the Day, 324.


44 Nashville Tennessean 23 May 1942.

45 Johnson, “Forms of Segregation and Discrimination in Nashville.”


47 Arthur R. Berry to Keith W. Berry, 17 July 2000.


50 Charles S. Johnson, “The Next Decade in Race Relations,” Race Relations Department Papers Box 13 folder 7, Amistad Research Center, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana.


53 Langston Hughes to Charles S. Johnson 4 January 1947, Box 5 folder 17, Fisk University Library, Nashville, Tennessee.


57 Charles S. Johnson to Marie Johnson 30 January 1953, Charles S. Johnson Papers Box 144 folder 6, Amistad Research Center, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana.

58 Charles S. Johnson to Marie Johnson 31 January 1953, Charles S. Johnson Papers Box 144 folder 6, Amistad Research Center, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana.

59 Charles S. Johnson to Marie Johnson 1 February 1953, Charles S. Johnson Papers Box 144 folder 6, Amistad Research Center, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana.

60 Charles S. Johnson to Marie Johnson 1 July 1953, Charles S. Johnson Papers Box 144 folder 7, Amistad Research Center, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana.

61 Defender, Race Relations Department Addendum October 30, 1954 Box 255, Amistad Research Center, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana.


63 “Group Discusses Means to Implement Ruling,” Charles S. Johnson Papers Clippings File, Box 144 folder 10, Amistad Research Center, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana.

64 Charles S. Johnson, “Some Significant Social and Educational Implications of the U.S. Supreme Courts Decision,” Race Relations Department United Church Board for Homeland Ministries Archives 1943-1970, Amistad Research Center Box 13 folder 10, Tulane University,


67 Robbins, Sidelines, 75; Ibid., 76; Gavins, The Perils and Prospects of Southern Black Leadership, 142; Robbins, Sidelines Activist, 75.


69 Charles S. Johnson, “The Policy of Fisk University in Race Relations to the South,” American Missionary Association Addendum Series A, Box 175 folder 2, Amistad Research Center, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana.

70 Robbins, Sidelines Activist, 78; Ibid., 122; Johnson, ed., Education and the Cultural Process: Papers Presented at symposium commemorating the seventy-fifth Anniversary of the founding of Fisk University April 29-May 4, 1941, ii.

71 “Presidents Report to Trustees,” 16 October 1951, American Missionary Association Addendum Series A Box 175 folder 2, Amistad Research Center, New Orleans, Louisiana; “President’s Report to Trustees,” 24 April 1953, American Missionary Association Series A Box 169 folder 12.


74 “Fisk Gets Chapter of Phi Beta Kappa,” American Missionary Association Addendum Series A, Clippings File, Box 175 folder 2, Amistad Research Center, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana.

76 “Untitled Speech,” Charles S. Johnson Papers, Box 144 folder 1 Amistad Research Center, New Orleans, Louisiana.

CHAPTER IV

Seeds of Hope: Fisk University and the Race Relations Department

“The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line, -the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea.” W.E.B. DuBois-1903

“We will have moved on many fronts, but I hope we will not be like that brave knight of old who jumped on his horse and rode off in all directions.” 1 Charles S. Johnson-1942

During World War II, there was a convergence of hope and fear regarding the war’s aftermath, culminating in the creation of a Race Relations Department located on the campus of Fisk University. Suddenly, demand for manpower propelled millions of people to migrate to industrial centers, thus exacerbating racial tension that already existed. The conditions of war increased racial anxiety and precipitated actual conflicts across the nation. The fear that war would be followed by even greater racial strife reminiscent of the aftermath of World War I led the American Missionary Association to establish a Race Relations Department at Fisk University in 1942. On April 20, 1942, the American Missionary Association leadership decided that as soon as feasible, the Association should concentrate its attention on the field of race relations, particularly in the “Negro-White area.” Additionally, “as funds became available, the Association would develop a non-institutional type of pioneering work that would send competent representatives into various communities to work by such methods, as the local situation required.”2

By 1945 an American Missionary Association budget report observed that “As we face the post-war world, we tremble at what may happen in race relations when the boys are again demobilized and Negroes again begin to lose their jobs more rapidly than white men.” 3

There were numerous earlier attempts, despite some trepidation, to create racial forums that would foster greater dialogue between the races, however, the yield was mixed. For example, black educator Gordon Blaine Hancock taught a class in race relations at Virginia
Union University and thoroughly impressed a visiting white widow named Mary Rachel Torrance. She donated $10,000 and established the Francis J. Torrance School of Race Relations in 1931. Its objectives were to examine race questions, raise black consciousness, develop leadership, promote good will, and improve character and job efficiency. The program operated essentially as a special program within the Department of Economics and Sociology. Three hundred and eight students took advantage of the course offerings and four faculty members participated, two of them white. The school also sponsored interracial dialogues that brought prominent whites and blacks to the campus. Will Alexander, director of the Commission on Interracial Cooperation, along with W. E. B. Du Bois, Walter White, and Charles S. Johnson, typified the visiting lecturers. Although the experiment lingered until 1934, campus politics, along with waning financial support brought about the forum’s demise.  

At the 1942 Durham, North Carolina, meeting designed to address racial issues, AMA leadership agreed to approach Charles S. Johnson about becoming a Secretary of the American Missionary Association, with the task of leading a Race Relations Division. Given his publications, contacts and experience, Johnson was an obvious choice to Fred Brownlee, General Secretary of the AMA, who once described Johnson as “the best qualified man in the United States in the realm of race and race relations.” Following the Durham meeting, the Julius Rosenwald Fund of Chicago and Fisk University expressed a desire to cooperate with the AMA. The Executive Committee of the Board of Home Missions, an arm of the AMA, approved Johnson as an Associate Secretary of the American Missionary Association Division in the field of Negro-White relations in America, on September 21, 1942. In order to ensure Johnson’s participation, he was relieved of his teaching duties at Fisk but allowed to continue acting as Chairman of the Department of Social Sciences while functioning as the Director of the Race Relations Department. Johnson’s headquarters were located in Nashville, Tennessee, with additional offices in New York and Chicago.

An agreement between Fred Brownlee, President Jones of Fisk University and Edwin Embree, of the Julius Rosenwald Fund was announced to the Associated Negro Press by Johnson in December 1942, concerning the cooperative use of his services in the field of race relations. This cabal of foundation leaders, including President Jones of Fisk, decided that Johnson should be employed as the Director of Race Relations for the American Missionary Association effective January 1, 1943 at an annual salary of $2,500, paid by the AMA, but not including
compensation by the Rosenwald Fund and Fisk. Additionally, the AMA paid all of Johnson’s housing costs in New York and Chicago.⁷

Johnson agreed that the Fisk Department of Social Sciences would turn over whatever studies had been developed there in order to extend the influence of the Association’s effort to ameliorate racial conditions. Although the initial budget was only $7,400, Johnson suggested a need for three field people for common ground work with salaries averaging at least $2,700 and a flexible budget structure capable of meeting emergencies. Consultants would work without salary but travel and other necessary expenses would be provided.⁸

Johnson wanted to use consultants who would be “close enough to the work to be called individually or in small groups to give advice,” apparently eschewing “high-powered individuals who would assemble occasionally at great expense.” However, Johnson’s list of invited persons was not devoid of power and some influence. The list of possible consultants included Howard Odum and Guy Johnson, of the University of North Carolina, and Louis Wirth, of the University of Chicago. Additionally, Liston Pope, of Yale University Divinity School, and John Dollard, of Yale University Institute of Human Relations, were listed. Likewise, Ruth Benedict, of Columbia University, Ronald Young of the University of Pennsylvania, Harold Lasswell, of the Library of Congress, and Horace Mann Bond, of Fort Valley State College were among the many names featured.⁹ Perhaps the most glaring omission in Johnson’s carefully assembled list of consultants and advisors was Fisk graduate and well-known intellectual W.E.B. Du Bois. The Race Relations Department under Johnson’s careful leadership coupled with the infrastructure of Fisk University provided an environment that put Nashville at the epicenter of race relation studies. Indeed, Fisk University and the newly created department became grateful partners poised to attack the protean issues of race and race relations.

Juxtaposed to this group of academic field workers and synthesizers of information was the Race Relations Advisory Committee which was designed to provide additional support for the Race Relations Department. This special committee was not to exceed eighteen persons and was created to cooperate with the director and staff of the AMA Department of Race Relations in conducting the work of the organization, subject to the approval of the AMA Divisional committee. The Council for Social Action, an agency of the Congregational Church, nominated six members of the committee, the AMA division nominated six, and together, the twelve chosen then elected the remaining six. The initial group of six served for a term of three years, the next six for two years, and the final six for a year. The Advisory Committee was created to help
formulate program policy and emphasis, however, its major role was that of giving support to the work of the staff in carrying out the program of the Race Relations Department. The AMA division responsible for the Race Relations Institute provided 87 percent of the budget while the Council for Social Action provided 13 percent. Eventually, higher profile individuals, such as a garrulous young senator named Hubert Humphrey, was appointed to the committee but the make up of the committee remained overwhelmingly composed of academicians.  

Staffing of the Race Relations Department in the midst of an academic year created some organizational problems, but, Johnson carefully selected his personnel. Sociologist Ira DeA. Reid was hired as an associate director, while Horace Mann Bond, formerly a Fisk professor and current President of Fort Valley State College in Georgia, was retained as a collaborator on special projects. The Reverend Harold M. Kingsley was hired as a part-time common ground worker as was doctoral candidate Frank Dorey, of the Divinity School of the University of Chicago. Dorey’s wife Eunice was hired as a field assistant and clerical worker. Charles Lawrence was employed as a full-time research and editorial worker while a doctoral candidate at Columbia University. Anne Reynolds Wesley was hired as a secretary and librarian. Herman Long, a doctoral candidate at the University of Michigan was employed as a full-time ground worker. Long, had been a staff member of the Social Sciences Department at Fisk and had engaged in studies carried out by that department and was uniquely qualified for the growing responsibility of the Race Relations Department. Students from the Social Science Institute at Fisk were also utilized on a number of occasions.

The Race Relations Department commissioned many studies and programs. For example, the Rosenwald Fund sponsored a study of racial tension areas throughout the United States made by the Institute of Social Studies at Fisk University under Johnson’s direction, entitled *To Stem This Tide* in 1943. Anecdotal stories of racial abuse such as the brutal beating and arrest of black opera singer Roland Hayes enhanced Johnson’s generally dry analytical writing style. The book was a sweeping attempt to highlight racial tension areas in housing, industry, transportation and politics, in addition to the treatment of Negro soldiers and morale issues. Given the department’s distribution network, Johnson’s stature in race relation work did not go unnoticed. Writing for *Advance Magazine*, John Knox described Johnson as “one of the few—Negro or White—who could think dispassionately about race relations.”

Fisk University’s Institute of Social Sciences under Johnson’s guidance had already rendered service to the Tennessee Valley Authority, the United States Department of Labor, the
Louisiana State Department of Education, and various other city, state and federal departments. However, Fisk was not able to finance the institute adequately. Moreover, competitive financial constraints from other academic departments made funding even more difficult. Therefore, the financial union of Rosenwald and AMA support for Johnson’s autonomy over the Institute’s race relations enterprises was a perfect fit. Additionally, the Rosenwald Fund and AMA needed Johnson’s resume and infrastructure in order to justify race relations expenditures. In early January 1943, Fred Brownlee observed that it “might have taken us perhaps fifteen or twenty years to be where we are now if we had to start from scratch.”

The global context of World War II provided the impetus for greater collaborative efforts to address racial issues, not unlike attempts Johnson and the Social Science Department at Fisk had been undertaking for some time. Echoing the observations of Du Bois roughly forty years later, Brownlee emphasized in 1943, that “our most difficult problem in America and the world is racial.” Brownlee even prophesied the inevitability of a race war similar to one that founding fathers such as Thomas Jefferson had predicted over one hundred and fifty years earlier if the racial situation in America was not addressed. In 1944 Edwin Embree, of the Julius Rosenwald Fund, echoed this sentiment while speaking before a National Conference of Social Workers in Cleveland. Embree suggested that whites would be smashed into a nonentity in the New World order if black inequality were not addressed. Accordingly, Brownlee and the AMA seemed determined to rid America of its “sin of caste” before it was too late. Moreover, Brownlee, Embree and Johnson recognized the inherently undemocratic vestiges of American society, such as segregation, and made efforts to supplant this and other forms of racial injustice with true democracy. Ironically, the very need for yet another interracial committee was a sign to Johnson that problems were becoming worse because he recognized that such committees should not be necessary.

In keeping with the Christian principals of the Congregational Church and the Department of Race Relations, Brownlee was determined that Johnson’s leadership must accomplish many things. First, church members should be enlightened as to the racial situation in America. Secondly, support for communities facing racial problems was needed. Accordingly, consultation efforts were designed to play a major role in the Race Relations Department with ground workers serving as liaisons to communities in conflict. For example, consultants served on race relations committees throughout the country in addition to advising federal authorities regarding the placement of houses in large industrial areas suffering acute housing shortages.
Furthermore, deliberations with federal and local authorities concerning labor problems served as a major component of race relation efforts as were attempts to assist judicial departments and school districts.\textsuperscript{15}

By August of 1943, the Rosenwald Fund and the Race Relations Division of the American Missionary Association and the American Council of Race Relations assumed the underwriting of a portion of the publication costs for an ongoing summary of race relations in the United States. The Social Science Institute at Fisk University, under Johnson’s direction, published a \textit{Monthly Summary of Events and Trends in Race Relations}. The summary existed from August 1943 until 1948. Unfortunately, due to financial constraints, it was not always issued monthly, as was originally planned, but with varying frequency, with several numbers often combined in one issue. By January 1947, the \textit{Monthly Summary} was no longer free, as subscription costs just to cover part of the printing were $2.00. In the early years, the \textit{Monthly Summary} reached nearly 8,000 subscribers and peaked with a circulation of over 15,000.\textsuperscript{16}

The \textit{Monthly Summary} was designed primarily as an information service for people interested in or working directly with the current problems of race in America. It was based upon news reports from about 250 daily and weekly papers, 200 monthly and weekly magazines, direct field reports from 30 strategic areas, and occasional special studies. During the most active period, the Rosenwald Fund paid forty-three field reporters throughout the United States regular stipends, averaging about $135 a month. Since the Detroit riot in June 1943, the \textit{Monthly Summary} reported the Social Science Institute’s notation that over two hundred organizations had been established with programs directed toward relieving racial tensions and promoting the general improvement of race relations in the United States. In fact, out of 163 action committees active in race relations from June 1943 to 1945, the majority concentrated on educating the public regarding racial issues.\textsuperscript{17}

The Race Relations Department developed a structured program designed to provide support for America as it grappled with the meaning of democracy at home. The efforts undertaken by the department were focused and organized in a manner reflective of its leadership. Johnson was aware of the enormity of the task at hand and cautioned observers not to expect miracles, particularly since they were dealing with slow moving traditions of human nature. “America had resisted the high principles of Christian democracy since the founding of the nation and only another world war, reeking of hatred and prejudice, moved the nation toward freedom’s destiny.”\textsuperscript{18}
By November of 1943, Johnson broadly outlined the program aims of the department as the following:

1) To define the problem areas in race relations soundly, and in such a manner as to make programs of action comprehensively possible.
2) To develop, out of the best known experiences in the field, courses of constructive action, in special areas, that can be usefully employed by agencies and persons in other areas.
3) To develop soundly resourceful persons capable of meeting and dealing with new situations in an acceptable manner.
4) To develop materials for public education in race and race relations, utilizing the most effective channels of communication—the press, the radio, visual devices, and the school curriculum.
5) To work in areas of racial tension, with the view to utilizing local resources to avert or prevent overt racial clashes.
6) To plan systematically for the community handling of anticipated racial problems resulting from general economic or social or political emergencies.
7) To develop new areas of racial appreciation, understanding and common responsibility.
8) To aid in developing programs of racial democracy within the church, in labor organizations, and within youth groups.
9) To develop within the institutional structure of the school, programs of democratic understanding and practice, as one of the essential functions of public education.

Johnson and his staff were tested almost immediately as race riots occurred in early spring, just as the program was getting into operation. Johnson sent staff members to Mobile, Alabama, Detroit, Michigan, and Beaumont, Texas, where rioting had occurred, in order to study factors that led to the outbreaks. Herman Long and Clifton Jones made reconnaissance surveys in thirteen other areas threatened with racial outbreaks. Careful community programs were designed specifically for local efforts to relieve tension. In Atlanta, for example, key local officials such as industrialists and labor leaders worked with local officials to formulate a plan for interpreting the position of blacks in emergency situations. In Cleveland, Ohio, the program involved working with local and federal officials helping to accommodate blacks facing acute housing shortages thus helping to remove one area of conflict. The fieldwork by ground workers became the basis for the study described earlier entitled To Stem This Tide edited by Johnson.

Staff consultants for the race relation department led to additional fieldwork efforts designed to highlight economic issues in the black community. Johnson himself noted that “more than anything else Negroes have needed jobs, and the restriction or denial of the right to work has seemed the most irrational and unjust of all American institutional practices.” Therefore, John Hope II, who had been teaching economics at Morehouse College, joined the Race Relations Department after the war and worked as an industrial consultant. Hope’s work done with the United Packinghouse Workers led to rank and file studies in numerous cities. The results led to labor management attempts to eliminate discrimination while segregated facilities
were reduced. During the 1940s Hope worked in Omaha, Nebraska, to develop a study for Packinghouse Workers-CIO. In March 1952, Herman Long said *Business Week* recognized the excellent results of the packinghouse workers union project carried out by John Hope II and the Race Relations staff. Efforts to promulgate the importance of strong supportive unions were addressed previously in 1948, for a publication entitled *What’s the Union worth to you/ What are you worth to it?* Ultimately, Johnson and the race relation staff knew that economic opportunity and stability provided the foundation for racial advancements on other fronts.  

The department developed numerous special projects and publications for use by organizations and cities across the country. For example, pamphlets and manuals, such as *A Manual of Good Practice in Race Relations* and *A Handbook of Racial Etiquette*, were designed to foster better race relations. Additionally, it gave editorial support to numerous outside organizations, such as the Methodist Church and the Pacifist Research Bureau, in an effort to disseminate information about blacks to lessen the fear that years of misinformation had fostered in the minds of the white American public. Accordingly, there were many suggestions regarding the re-education of the public. For example, the development of small, inexpensive and simply written primers on race relations for use in the rural South provided beneficial ways of reaching the poorly educated and misinformed. A study of advertisers who used acceptable Negro illustrations was also suggested so that others might attempt the same. In other words, the Race Relations Department was not only interested in providing factual information, but it also attempted to create a marketing effort to encourage better race relations. This had been Johnson’s two-fold effort since his early days as editor of *Opportunity Magazine*. To this end, there were institutes and seminars on race and race relations given around the country. For example, at the University of California, there were four sessions of two-hour presentations regarding the urban adjustment of minority populations that enrolled fifty-three students. Other seminars were presented at Iowa State University, the University of Iowa, Chicago Theological Seminary and the San Francisco Public School System with additional public addresses to various organizations around the country.  

Numerous additional attempts, whether public addresses or publications, all served the same function. Amazingly simple and straightforward pamphlets were written to provide clear-cut proposals as to what individuals could do to eliminate racial problems. *Segregation; Integration: Promise-Process-Problems* and *If Your Next Neighbors are Negroes* were all pamphlets designed to stimulate a positive racial atmosphere. *If Your Next Neighbors are
Negroes went through at least four printings with approximately 20,000 copies put into distribution in various communities throughout the country. By 1953, the department had distributed more than 100,000 pamphlets and related materials concerning race.23

The first mass education effort by the department was an exhibit on “The Races of Mankind,” created by a group of anthropologists in order to correct false concepts of race and nationality. The exhibition stemmed from earlier research completed by Professor Ruth Benedict and Dr. Gene Weltfish, of the Department of Anthropology, Columbia University. Given the context of fighting a global war, the United States Army purchased 55,000 copies for distribution among students of its orientation course. However, the House Military Affairs subcommittee, headed by Representative Carl Thomas Durham, of North Carolina, denounced the pamphlet for containing false statements that could lead to disruptions. Additionally, the military subcommittee disliked the publication because it was sold by Communist bookstores. Ordway Tead, chairman of the Public Affairs Committee, Inc. that published the pamphlet, defended the authors in the New York Times and mentioned that numerous organizations and colleges had purchased the work in large quantities. Initially the “Cranbrook Exhibit on the Races of Mankind,” based on the pamphlet, was designed as a traveling show, but expenses caused organizers to create posters depicting the actual display in order to achieve wider circulation. Over a five-year period, the Race Relations Department distributed almost 15,000 sets of posters, with many going directly to classroom teachers. Another mass educational approach involved the development of interracial Christmas cards and calendars. Approximately, 50,000 cards and 3,500 calendars were distributed to the public to promote sentiments of brotherhood. The department’s mass education efforts were instrumental in creating bodies of information that could be utilized by those seeking solutions to racial problems.24

In October 1946, the board of trustees of Fisk selected Charles S. Johnson to become the next president of the university and Johnson chose Herman Long as the Associate Director of the Race Relations Department in June 1947. Long, who had served as staff supervisor in 1944, quickly assumed the Director’s role in July 1947, and increasingly Johnson relied on Long who frequented trouble spots around the country. Johnson maintained a significant role in planning and addressing annual institutes.25

Despite increased visibility for the department, financial resources remained tenuous. Although the initial budget was only $7,400, by 1945 it had increased to $33,580. An additional
increase of $7,920 was appropriated to finance needed programs for 1945-46. The department had a budget of $58,000 in 1949-50 and a staff of thirteen. Compared to other race relation organizations, the department’s budget was modest at best. By contrast, the Bureau for Intercultural Education had a total budget of $188,543, while the Commission on Community Inter-relations of the American Jewish Congress had a budget of roughly $100,000. The National Urban League and the American Council on Race Relations had total budgets of $159,118.37 and $135,000 respectively. 26

The Race Relations Department implemented several groundbreaking techniques and programs designed to address community concerns. Arguably the most effective technique employed was the community self-survey. The self-survey was an attempt to involve the entire community in a program of self-help regarding racial issues. Johnson and other department leaders understood that strategic approaches toward the race issue were necessary. Moreover, Johnson believed that “it was evident that the race factor alone could not be readily isolated and dealt with. It is part of a total pattern.” 27

Therefore, the self-survey approach involved the entire department working to help local authorities resolve racial issues and future disparities by addressing problems such as housing, employment, education and economics. The department found it necessary to understand spheres of power among the community hierarchy before it could move forward to determine solutions. For example, organizational power existing within the white and minority communities was examined. Additionally, the classifications of communities in terms of size and region, accompanying the examination of city, state and local ordinances was initiated. The socioeconomic distribution of racial, religious and ethnic groups was also determined. Moreover, understanding participation patterns in terms of church attendance and organizational membership was deemed equally important. 28 Herman Long went to Burlington, Iowa, in 1943 to conduct the interracial training program for the Burlington Self-Survey in Human Relations personally, and ultimately the Self-Survey became recognized as a potent force to combat racism and discrimination. 29

In 1944, San Francisco became the first major city to employ the Race Relations staff to provide technical assistance for concerned civic leaders. Apparently, wartime population increases had tripled the Negro population of the city, while lingering resentment regarding the mass evacuation of Japanese-Americans fermented. Fearing trouble, civic leaders, with the help of the Race Relations staff, implemented a community self-survey and produced
recommendations that created the Mayor’s Committee on Unity to implement reform. A study resulting from information gathered by the Race Relations staff resulted in the publication of *The Negro War Worker in San Francisco: a Local Self-Survey*. As a result of this study, black teachers were employed for the first time, and the first black principal in the city was appointed for the 1947 school term. The enlargement of employment opportunities for black policemen and social workers increased, while the San Francisco Telephone Company began to hire blacks as well. Additionally, an Urban League chapter was created to facilitate continued employment gains for blacks. Although the Race Relations Department was designed not to compete with other race relation or civil rights organizations, the Urban League was cautious initially regarding the designs of the American Missionary Association. It was noted in a 1945 budget report that “for some reason the American Missionary Association was never asked to support the Urban League.” However, the Urban League’s trepidation eventually diminished, no doubt in part because of the San Francisco experience. In 1962, Herman Long wrote Whitney Young Jr., the Executive Director of the National Urban League to offer his assistance and said,

> Thanks a great deal for your good words about the two articles which I sent you recently. I remember quite well your mentioning the plan which you have in the back of your mind of offering a consultative service to communities which have no local Urban Leagues. In the event that this idea shapes up more definitely as an actual program, I will be glad to have the opportunity to talk with you about it. I am fairly sure that we should be able to do something cooperatively.

The American Council on Race Relations utilized the self-survey method in Minnesota, in what historian Timothy Thurber described as the “council’s most ambitious and expensive undertaking.” L. Howard Bennett, of the American Council on Race Relations, learned of the self-survey technique from fellow board member Charles S. Johnson and suggested that Minneapolis utilize the survey technique in the spring of 1946.

At the time of the proposed self-survey, the mayor of Minneapolis was a young man named Hubert Humphrey. Born in Wallace, South Dakota, in 1911 in a room over a drugstore, young Humphrey eventually moved with his family fifty miles away to Doland, South Dakota, where he spent the remaining years of his childhood in what seemed like a Norman Rockwell setting. In fact, Historian Winthrop Griffith describes the bucolic setting of Doland as uncomplicated, decent and pure, with an absence of conflict, rare theft and no racism. Many small towns across America engendered similar mythic notions of a utopian society based upon a paucity of diversity. According to Griffith, there was one Jewish family and no Negroes in
Doland to speak of during Humphrey’s childhood. Naturally therefore, Hubert Humphrey had never been exposed to black Americans until he attended graduate school in Louisiana and was shocked by a virulent racist world unknown to him.  

Humphrey returned to Minnesota after graduate school and became director of the Twin Cities Workers Education Program and eventually galvanized enough support to be elected Mayor of Minneapolis in 1945. Almost immediately, Humphrey met with representatives of numerous human rights organizations in order to create a human rights council. Charles Johnson and the Race Relations Department at Fisk played a prominent role in providing data and assistance for Humphrey’s efforts.

The decision to utilize the self-survey in Minneapolis met with early opposition from some Jewish leaders. The Race Relations Department was occasionally criticized for not meeting the needs of various groups but the department’s primary focus was to integrate people of African descent into American society. Nevertheless, Charles Johnson urged the American Council on Race Relations to include Jews in the study, and the Minnesota Jewish Council contributed $25,000 to the survey. The black-white dichotomy seemed more intractable. Humphrey noted on one occasion as mayor, a traffic policeman handing out a ticket called the violator a dirty Jew and Humphrey suspended him for fifteen days without pay. Humphrey admitted, “I tried with far less success to stop the verbal abuse of Negroes.”

The Minneapolis self-study from 1946-1948, revealed discrimination in industry and labor in addition to housing and hospitals. Only two blacks, a clerk and a lunchroom worker were employed in the Minneapolis school system. As a direct result of the survey, black teachers were employed for the first time. The survey also expanded the use of Jewish teachers, who felt some degree of exclusion. Hospital services were opened in the city. Two black nurses were employed. Additionally, the Real Estate Board of Minneapolis cooperated in opening several residential areas in the city without distinction to color. The Race Relations Department continued to monitor developments in Minneapolis on a yearly basis. However tepid these results seemed, the self-survey helped push the city in a positive direction. Understandably appreciative, Mayor Humphrey said the “self-survey had been well planned and executed in addition to attracting great attention around the country.”

The self-survey also resulted in the creation of a Fair Employment Practices Commission in Minneapolis, based upon the national version created by executive order in 1941. The FEPC was designed to provide jobs for blacks in wartime industry while simultaneously pacifying them
until war’s end regarding the denial of civil rights. Although Congress emasculated the national commission the Race Relation’s Department’s self-survey helped spur the creation of a fairly effective commission in Minneapolis. Mayor Humphrey created a five-member Fair Employment Practices Commission which was confirmed by the city council on May 9, 1947. However, the City Council did not create a budget for the agency for the remainder of the year. Therefore, the Mayor’s Council on Human Relations maintained staff services. Given the input of numerous civil rights groups, the city ordinance creating the local FEPC seemed to have more authority than its national counterpart, albeit still limited. The Race Relations Department proudly proclaimed that Minneapolis had become the first city to pass an ordinance comparable to the FEPC. A relieved Mayor Humphrey proclaimed that “our Minneapolis survey showed what can happen entirely without enforcement procedures, when aroused individual consciences become the aroused conscience of a community.”

The self-survey technique was utilized in many other cities including Kalamazoo, Michigan, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and Baltimore, Maryland. Apparently, many cities desperately needed the services of the department. For example, writing from Detroit fieldworker Grace Jones informed Long that the city was in dire need of Race Relations Department services. She mentioned that one local school had planned a “black faced comedy act that had to be scraped. [sic]” Jones spent six months in Detroit from 1944-45 where the superintendent of schools, Warren E. Bow viewed her as “a very helpful person” and asked that she return to assist in developing a program of intercultural education. She returned and consulted with at least 58 of Detroit’s 250 schools.

The success of the Self-Survey was copied. Writing to Fred Brownlee in October of 1948, Herman Long proclaimed,

You will be interested to know that a national organization called the National Council for Civil Rights is calling a planning conference on the use of the Self-Study in New York. . . .the importance of this development lies in the fact that this is recognition of the importance of this technique developed by our program for work in Race Relations and Civil Rights. . . .

In 1950, Charles S. Johnson acknowledged that the community self-survey had “been recognized as a social invention of the Race Relations Department.” Evidently, Long and Johnson felt the self-survey technique was quite important even before the department’s notoriety grew.
The Race Relations Department seemed to encourage the collaborative effort of various
groups with similar missions of social betterment. For example, The Maryland Commission on
Interracial Problems and Relations and the Baltimore Commission on Human Relations were
created by special legislation to promote better understanding of all races, “especially the
Negro.” In 1953 both commissions invited the Race Relations Department to conduct a self-
survey in Baltimore. Ultimately, some 68 organizations and 500 volunteers were utilized to reach
roughly 7,000 people. 41

A myriad of interviews and surveys were conducted including housing and real estate
administrators, teachers, business and industry executives, welfare agency workers, doctors,
hospitality executives and civic organizations among others. The surveys were administered
from October 1953 until June 1954 and had the support of Baltimore Mayor Thomas
D’Alesandro Jr. and Maryland Governor Theodore R. McKeldin. Cover letters by both
politicians served notice to community participants that this was an important endeavor that
would not mention the names of any responding individual or company in the final report. 42

Of the companies that responded to the surveys, it was found that there remained a wide
discrepancy in the level of employment opportunities available to the average white and black
worker. Large companies of between 1,000 and 10,000 people were surveyed, but the medium
number of employees per firm was between 25 and 30, while some companies were even
smaller. While not every establishment barred blacks, some found it necessary to reiterate their
patriotism. Mark Fenster, President of the Paraliner Company replied that he only had three
employees who happened to be white, but he would have no objection to hiring people of any
race. Further, he emphatically responded in capital letters that “WE WOULD NOT
KNOWLINGLY HIRE COMMUNISTS.” 43

The Baltimore effort hastened desegregation in the public schools and gave impetus to
similar policies regarding public housing. For example, in 1954, Baltimore housing administrator
Edgar M. Ewing received guidance from the Race Relations Department and happily advised
Long “that the Commission unanimously resolved to desegregate the entire low rent program.”
Robert Weaver, the Deputy Commissioner for the New York State Division of Housing, was
quite impressed with Long’s efforts in the Baltimore self-survey. Weaver had recently seen a
CBS Television Public Affairs program entitled The Search, which first broadcast the Race
Relations Department efforts on March 20, 1955. “I listened with interest and great satisfaction
to the television show starring Dr. Long in the Community Self-Survey on yesterday,” wrote
Weaver. “I think it was an excellent show done with dignity and fine taste and yet carrying with it something of propaganda for those on the side of the angels.”

Ultimately, the department’s success in Baltimore was chronicled in a 1955 final report entitled, An American City in Transition. The relevant data was successfully obtained but much work remained according to the Department’s own findings. For example, 91 percent of all public accommodations in Baltimore remained segregated and excluded blacks. Politically, Mayor D’Alesandro, father of future Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi, lost renomination in the Democratic primary in 1958.

Despite the entrenched nature of racism in America, the Race Relations Department met with some success in many cities by moving the country toward its ideals. Recognition of the efficacy of the programs established by the Race Relations Department led The National Conference of Christians and Jews to present its national award to Minneapolis for being a city with the most improved human relations. Although numerous cities and organizations utilized the self-survey, the relationship between Mayor Humphrey and his administration with the Race Relations Department proved probably most beneficial to the department as Humphrey became even more politically prominent.

The Race Relations department studies were as effective as the community self survey. The end of segregation on interstate travel was a direct result of the efforts of the Race Relations Department. Between November 1949 and June 1950 two teams of investigators made 46 trips on 27 different trains and 19 interstate railroads documenting discrimination and how it was imposed. Two hundred ninety black passengers were interviewed and Long eventually published his findings in 1952 as Segregation in Interstate Railway Coach Travel, but he had aggressively used preliminary information to influence legislation. At his request, Long sent Senator Hubert Humphrey, a memorandum on segregated inter-state public travel in 1949 that helped clarify the issue. Moreover, Long even suggested wording of proposed bills to end segregated travel in addition to giving tactical advice on how best to achieve the desired goals. By 1952, a confident letter from Long to Philip Widenhouse, of the American Missionary Association stated,

You will be interested to know that Senator Humphrey had introduced a bill in the Senate recently, proposing the abolition of segregation practices in interstate trains as he indicated he would do at our initial conference. I have promised him a copy of our findings for use by the committee who is considering it.
Though Senator Humphrey’s bill failed to pass, the Interstate Commerce Commission banned segregation on public interstate transportation and in waiting rooms in 1955. The Race Relations Report on segregation was used in the trial hearing and the NAACP counsel gave much of the credit to the Race Relations Department.48

Race Relations Department efforts against segregated housing also bore fruit. The study of racially restrictive covenants by Johnson and Herman Long entitled *People vs. Property* contributed significantly to the 1948 Supreme Court decision in *Shelly v. Kraemer*, declaring restrictive covenants unconstitutional. The department made a study of racially restrictive covenants in Chicago, St. Louis and Cleveland to discover the extent of the practice. The results were published by Johnson and Herman Long as *People vs. Property*.49 Ten copies of *People vs. Property* were sent to NAACP counsel, Charles H. Houston who argued the cases that led to the Shelly decision. According to historian Joe Richardson, Houston acknowledged receipt of the books and added, “I can’t tell you how important it is.” Houston prepared a special brief based on Long’s findings, and sent each judge a copy of the book. Ultimately, the Race Relations Department became one of the most important endeavors designed to educate and influence people with the power to affect change.50

Unfortunately, by the late 1960s, the Race Relations Department staff dwindled to two full-time workers, including the director and one part time research coordinator. However, the department broadened its approach and maintained its importance by becoming a depository for documents relating to the African-American experience.51 Although the department ceased utilizing the self-survey by the 1960s, other efforts, such as the famed Race Relations Institutes, proved efficacious in addressing racial tension in America.52
Notes to Chapter IV

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CHAPTER V

A Candle in the Darkness: The Race Relations Institutes of Fisk University, 1944-1970

The Race Relations Division of the American Missionary Association, led by Charles S. Johnson, established an Annual Institute of Race Relations at Fisk University in the summer of 1944. Under Johnson’s leadership, Fisk became a center for research and field investigation in the entire area of race relations, while the institutes served as an extension of his noble efforts. The purpose of the institute was to provide practical intensive study of problems associated with race while providing methods for dealing objectively with such issues. The annual institutes lasted until 1969, with Fisk University providing the stage for addressing America’s most pressing dilemma. 1

Experienced persons in various fields, such as educators, social and religious workers, labor and civic leaders, journalists and advanced students, were among the various invitees to the conferences. Interracial conferences of one to three days were fairly common, but the Race Relations Department planned to create forums that would span several weeks. The first Institute of Race Relations was held on the campus of Fisk University in the Social Science Hall in 1944 from July 3 through the 21 and featured 137 persons representing three racial groups. There were 81 whites, 55 blacks and 1 Japanese American. Regionally, the membership had 97 persons from the South, 36 from the North and East and 4 from the West. The largest numbers of attendees were educators numbering thirty-two, and college students numbering twenty-nine. Nineteen civic leaders and thirteen social workers constituted the next largest number of participants. 2

Johnson believed that noisy frontal attacks on prejudice would not bring great progress, but getting the facts and breaking down the problem into manageable parts was the method by which meaningful race relations would develop. Therefore, Johnson’s approach toward the institute was to provide a framework and establish significant dialogue with leading experts in
various fields. This seemingly conservative approach toward race relations was patient, methodical and characteristically vintage Johnson.

Josie Sellers Horne coordinated the institute and resident faculty and consultants guided the numerous seminars. Presenters as diverse as poet Countee Cullen, and Willard Townsend, President of the United Transport Service Employees of America (CIO) were involved in the proceedings. Attendees at these institutes included students, social workers, educators, state employees and interested persons from around the country. The first few years the institutes averaged 90 lectures by leading scholars and specialists, with later programs averaging about 40 lectures. These interracial forums held at Fisk were considered groundbreaking events, in that they represented the first race relations institute ever held in the South. The Nashville Tennessean admitted that the “institute represents one of the most constructive efforts the South has known for an intensive study of the problems in human relationships arising from racial differences.” Not all of the local press was enamoured with Johnson’s effort. Some local press accounts denounced the enterprise as being organized by outside agitators and a diabolical plot to undermine Western civilization and white culture. The national press, including the New York Times, was far more favorable.3

The overall positive reception of the Institute created even more demands for Johnson’s time and expertise. A frustrated Alexander Liveright, of the American Council on Race Relations, wrote Johnson in September regarding his desire to meet with him. “I am still concerned about the fact that it is impossible for us to get together,” wrote Liveright, “as I am most anxious to get an opportunity to really sit down with you and get your ideas on the over-all Council operations.” The Race Relations Department under Johnson’s guidance continued to lend itself within budget constraints to supporting positive developments that concerned race. 4

The second annual Race Relations Institute held on July 2-21, 1945 on the Fisk campus cost $55.00 for the three-week conference, with an opening session in the Fisk Memorial Chapel. The first week was devoted to general lectures on race relations, followed by seminars in the field of community relations and programs during the first week. The findings of psychology, anthropology and psychiatry about the nature of racial prejudice were reviewed in an effort to determine the conditions under which prejudice develops. In addition to formal lectures and seminars, panel round tables and cross-topical round table discussion were utilized to provide maximum intellectual exchange. 5
During the second week the program included discussions of the role of federal agencies in determining racial policies, labor and employment issues, local housing, community adjustment of black migrants to urban areas, and the adjustment of returning black veterans. The third week examined the role of the press and education in race relations, in addition to trends and prospects for the postwar southern economy. The dual school system in the South and other aspects of educational improvement were also investigated. Johnson observed that “last year’s Institute emphasized prejudice and how it might be dissolved, while this year’s effort concentrated on removing discrimination and segregation because it interferes with our common national interest and development.” Future institutes led by Johnson and Herman Long continued general discussions concerning racial issues, but also directly addressed ways to implement program conclusions.  

The issues examined by the institute within the global context of the aftermath of World War II created greater urgency and optimism among program participants. A white woman named Marguerite Lane of Albany, New York, wrote Fred Brownlee, of the American Missionary Association, regarding her experience at the second Institute. “Personally it gave me some satisfaction to have this Institute lend support to my belief that better interracial relations are essential to good international relations,” wrote Lane four weeks after the gathering. Moreover, in comparison to other racial conferences that she had attended, the AMA conference was most impressive to her because of the sheer number of competent and thoughtful black and white participants. More importantly, Lane thought she benefited from the social and intellectual contact with blacks that the conference afforded, which was nearly impossible in the larger society outside the amiable confines of Fisk.  

Although Fisk had carved out an educational niche for itself in the local community, not everyone was pleased with the creation of the Race Relations Institute. According to historian Richard Robbins, at the end of the second institute, James Stahlman, editor of the Nashville Banner, angered by the interracial nature of the Institute, pressured President Thomas E. Jones, of Fisk, to end the institutes. In fact, the Banner editor tried to link program participants with Communist activists. If the fear of Communism were not enough, Stahlman apparently thought the racial angle surely proved that Fisk and the institutes were evil. According to an extensive article in the Banner, the fact that a speaker at the second institute had positive sentiments concerning the Reconstruction period immediately following the American Civil War was evidence enough of the institute’s danger. According to Johnson aide Bonita Valien, this was
one of the few times Johnson lost his cool. Johnson made it clear that he would invite whomever he wanted or he would not remain at Fisk. Stahlman’s efforts to unseat Johnson failed and the institutes continued. In fact, “Johnson’s tact and growing international reputation made him a difficult target for white detractors,” according to historian Robert Spinney, and future institutes caused little concern among local whites.  

The third Annual Institute of Race Relations was held from July 1-20, 1946, with 130 people representing roughly twenty states attending. Another 65 participants were engaged as lecturers, consultants and discussion leaders. The first week of the institute established a foundation of fact and moral principle according to Johnson as Edwin Embree presented a panoramic view of mankind in what historian Robert Spinney described as a “shrill denunciation of white bigotry.” Dr. Eric Williams addressed interconnected problems concerning race and the Caribbean while other lectures discussed the social and economic conditions fostering racial prejudices in America.

The second week dealt with specific aspects of racism, such as restrictive covenants. Robert Taylor, DeHart Hubbard and Corinne Robinson, all representing the federal housing authority, presented the difficulties and restrictions faced by blacks. Herman Long presented specific figures on the extent and affects of restrictive covenants. Additionally, the institute addressed labor issues, veterans, the role of the black press, education, and community planning efforts of other race relation organizations. Finally, it highlighted the role of political, economic and social factors as they related to the South. Voting rights for blacks in the South was emphasized often, while preparation of the black workforce for future integration was highlighted as well.

Although many attendees were from organizations, there were unaffiliated individuals who were genuinely interested in trying to improve race relations. A white businessman from Pine Bluff, Arkansas, Paul Clanton, who attended the 1946 institute hoping to improve race relations in his city, found it a daunting task. He stated,

I must admit I feel a bit lost. . . . I realize that most of it was my own fault, because I’m just an average businessman, and most of the others were educators. I was looking for something tangible that I might come home with and begin to put in use. I’ve learned to smile and understand when I am called a nigger lover. I’ve learned that most Negro friends who are some of Arkansas leaders, do have faith and confidence in my sincerity; but I really haven’t made much headway with my own friends and associates.
Merely providing a forum for racial interaction initially may have been just as important as conference conclusions.\textsuperscript{11}

The fourth institute in 1947 followed the same format as previous conferences. The general theoretical and historical framework was established with anthropological data and interpretations presented by Ina Brown and Gene Weltfish. Additionally, the hypothesis of various psychologists attending the institute suggested that prejudice was a treatable social illness. Impressive presentations by frequent participant NAACP Attorney Charles Houston and other legal scholars provided information about civil and political rights, while Reverend Peyton Williams stressed the role of the church as the guardian of the Judaeo-Christian ethic and democracy. Additionally, economics, and organized labor, and issues concerning Asian American and Mexican workers were all highlighted during the institute.\textsuperscript{12}

Johnson’s expanding reputation and duties as Fisk president created an opportunity for Herman Long to assume a larger role as Director of the Race Relations Institute in 1947. Long was born in Birmingham, Alabama, the fourth of eight children, and later moved with his mother and siblings to Chicago. For eleven years he lived in Chicago and graduated from Wendell Phillips High School before returning to Birmingham to be with his father. Long attended Talladega College, in Alabama, and became a popular athlete on campus majoring in philosophy and psychology before graduating in 1935 with honors. By 1936, Long received his M.A. from Hartford Seminary and in September 1939 he began working toward a doctorate at the University of Michigan. By December 1948 it was obvious that his work spared him little time to concentrate on his studies, and Long was compelled to apply for an extension in order to continue working toward his degree. As director, Long negotiated many solutions to racial problems throughout the country in addition to publishing and finding time to complete his doctorate in psychology at Michigan in 1949.\textsuperscript{13}

By 1948 it was evident that Fisk had become a center of race relation studies throughout the country. For example, the Civil Rights Committee chairman for the New Jersey State Council declared that “we are well aware of the tremendous job that the Race Relations Department has successfully been doing over the years.” Additionally there were many inquiries concerning job opportunities at Fisk from aspiring social scientists and educators regardless of race. Frank Fager, a young white graduate of Coe College in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, also studied at the University of Minnesota before studying advanced sociology at Fisk in the summer of 1948,
whereupon he contacted Fred Brownlee regarding employment because Fisk apparently was an important destination. 14

During the close election of 1948, Humphrey and the Democrats courted the expanding northern black vote. In fact, Harry Truman, the eventual Democratic nominee, became the first presidential candidate in modern times to campaign in Harlem. Not surprisingly, the issue of black voting power was a much discussed topic at numerous race relation institutes and Humphrey, buoyed by political urgency, gave a forthright speech regarding the civil rights of blacks. At the Democratic national convention Humphrey proclaimed,

To those who say that we are rushing this issue of civil rights, I say to them we are 172 years late. To those who say that this civil rights program is an infringement on state’s rights, I say this, the time has arrived in America for the Democratic Party to get out of the shadows of state’s rights and to walk forthrightly into the bright sunshine of human rights. 15

Humphrey won a United States Senate seat in 1948 and became a potentially potent ally of the Race Relation Department and African-Americans. The Race Relations Department had helped frame Humphrey’s attempts toward national racial reconciliation. Helen Kenyon, Moderator of the General Council of the Congregational Christian Church, wrote Charles Johnson regarding Humphrey’s speech and proudly observed, “My dear Charles, As I listened to Mayor Humphrey of Minneapolis give his fine Civil Rights speech and resolution, my thoughts went immediately to my colleagues at Fisk. Oh this young man thought I, I know where you got some of your good training. . . .” Senator Humphrey was already on the Race Relations Institute Advisory Committee and in 1950 was reelected for a three-year term. 16

Although he was now president of Fisk, Johnson continued to provide the opening address to the Institute and place its function into context. In 1949, Johnson began to place the struggle for black equality into the context of human rights and broadened his approach to include minorities on the world scene during the sixth annual institute of race relations.

The 1949 conference was entitled “Implementing Civil Rights,” and was locally, one of the more controversial institutes due to the shocking appearance of Nashville vice Mayor Ben West. West’s speech, entitled “Progressive Government in a Southern City” stunned local whites apparently because he addressed issues concerning blacks and added an air of legitimacy to the institute. His opening statement chastised the white South for not treating all citizens democratically. In describing Southern cities he stated, “By Southern city we could mean any
city where certain types of attitudes and practices, undemocratic and un-American, are found to exist with the framework of municipal government itself.” West later explained, “We find the lot of the Negro one of long neglect” and suggested that the city find funds to address the situation. Politically, West participated in changing Nashville’s municipal elections to allow representatives from single member districts. This eventually led to the election of two blacks, Z. Alexander Looby and Robert Lillard, to the city council in 1951, the first blacks elected to the council since 1911.  

The institutes were able to stay current regarding legal issues for years, as NAACP legal counsel Charles Hamilton Houston was a frequent participant. After his death in April 1950, his protégé Thurgood Marshall, carried on the tradition as an institute participant for the next ten years. Reverend Galen Weaver, secretary for racial and cultural affairs in the United Church of Christ writing to Hilary Bissell concerning the Race Relations Institute of 1950, said that Marshall made a “strong impression at the Fisk Institute.” Marshall was a dynamic, informative speaker who developed a close working relationship with Herman Long. In fact, at one time during the 1950s Long was chairman of the Radio Committee of the Nashville NAACP. Moreover, Long supported the Board of Home Missions of the Congregational Christian Church’s effort to donate $2,500 to the NAACP in recognition of the work that Marshall and his staff were doing.  

The Ninth annual Race Relations Institute in June 1952 stressed the universality of racial oppression with the theme “Human Relations in World Crisis.” Thirty-seven lecturers and over one hundred community leaders from thirty-three states participated. Upon their arrival, participants were given an Institute Blue Book that provided important phone numbers and information about the local area. The Blue Book highlighted that cabs took both colored and white passengers, although local laws segregated bus transportation. An attempt to lessen the demeaning racial reality was provided by a whimsically written note that a bus ride was a “sociologist’s field trip.” In spite of segregation, Fisk provided coffee for the interracial gathering every morning and afternoon tea every Wednesday and Friday at the international student center. The institute scheduled daily morning sessions for its members and five evening sessions for the general public. Among the many speakers was historian Henry Steele Commager, professor of history at Columbia University, who made the first public presentation entitled, “The Responsibility of Freedom.” Full participation in the Institute provided added value for students because they were allowed to garner three semester hours of credit.
The Tenth Annual Institute June 29-July 11, 1953, had more than one hundred people attending with thirty lecturers and consultants providing insight on racial issues. Attendees from across the country and as far away as Canada, Germany, India and Australia participated in the seminars and lectures. High profile academicians again set the stage for discussions. For example, Dr. Clyde Kluckhohn, a noted anthropologist from Harvard University and winner of the $10,000 Whittlesey award for his book *Mirror of Man*, provided textual background for numerous discussions and presentations.\(^{20}\)

Not only were participants able to glean information from the abundant presentations, but a tremendous number of resources were provided as well. A twenty-page handout entitled “Selected Pamphlets and Periodicals” was prepared for the institute and included various articles on a variety of issues from housing to legal questions concerning employment. Additionally, a bibliography was distributed which included a full twenty-one pages of books with authors and titles on topics that included anthropology, civil rights, intercultural education, religion, Jews, and other minorities. It was difficult to leave an institute without some tangible accumulation of reputable information that could be utilized in local communities.\(^{21}\)

Forty-two days after the Supreme Court’s monumental 1954 *Brown* decision that outlawed segregation in public education, the Eleventh Annual Institute of Race Relations was held, and Johnson gave the opening speech entitled “The Future is Here.” “There would be no need for this Institute,” declared Johnson, “if a judgment, an affirmation, a pronouncement could enact, or activate itself.” Future institutes often discussed school desegregation and earlier both Johnson and Long provided background material for the *Brown* decision. Interest in the institute was quite high because of the recent Supreme Court decision. Thirty-one school superintendents and administrators from many Southern states attended half-day sessions at Fisk. Given the national and international impact of the *Brown* decision, both Long and Johnson seemed to relish the opportunity to frame American discussions of race in broader terms than school integration. Regarding the decision, Long concluded, “This gives us a very timely departure for our Race Relations Institute discussions and the planning which our Interracial Committee will do in regards to the future program of our Race Relations Department.”\(^{22}\) Ultimately, Johnson’s prescient speech cast a critical eye toward the gradualism of America when he stated,

There has been no urgent need to take more than casual interest in other peoples of the world, or to build structures of friendship through understanding with peoples that we did not know, or disturb our own fortuitously developed social structures in the
interest of consistency with any philosophy, or for purposes of national expediency. 23

Apparently, Johnson felt that national events were forcing America to engage other cultures and people around the world. Accordingly, a South-wide Inter-organizational Conference was held at Fisk University in January 1955 to address the implications of the Brown decision. The department of social sciences, under the direction of Dr. Preston Valien and Herman Long of the Race Relations Department, assumed primary responsibility for planning and conducting the conference. As president of the college, Johnson felt the conference was necessary but “embarrassing” because they were essentially discussing concepts that should already be in place. 24

The summer 1955, Annual Institute took place with one hundred fifty-two participants from thirty-four states. Fully two-thirds were from the South and several organizations, such as the American Association of University Women and the Black Teachers Association, were in attendance. Additionally, many inter-group agencies, such as the staff of the Southern Regional Council and state staffs set up under Ford Foundation grants participated. A frustrated Johnson delivered the introductory address entitled, “Equity and Eventualism,” in which he intoned that the “southern states [displayed] a dismaying schizophrenia of inaction.” Characteristically, however, Johnson continued by sketching a detailed view of geopolitical change and economic issues with a scholarly detachment. J. R. Larkins, consultant on Negro Work for the North Carolina Department of Public Welfare, was impressed with the institute and even more so with Johnson’s lecture. In fact, Larkins requested two copies of Johnson’s “scholarly and statesman like presentation on the current status of race relations in the United States and the world” from institute director Herman Long. Community organizers, such as Joseph Morales Jr., of Puerto Rico also wrote Long to praise him for creating a meaningful experience. 25

Despite his academic and administrative duties, Long did not allow institute demands to slow his local community outreach. As in most southern cities, Nashville banned blacks from playing at city run golf courses. Consequently, Long and Paul Hayes sought to integrate the three local golf courses at McCabe, Percy Warner and Shelby parks in 1952 with the help of attorney Z. Alexander Looby. Judge Robert N. Wilkin, District Court of the U.S. for the Middle District of Tennessee decided against them. The plaintiffs appealed and in February 1954, federal judge Elmer D. Davies ordered that blacks be allowed to play one of the three public courses until a nine hole course for them was completed. The black golfers continued to fight for
equal access. In September 1955, Long led efforts to enroll black children in Glenn Elementary School in Nashville. Long acted as representative for the parents and the local NAACP branch when he took five children with him, but unfortunately, he was rebuffed by Principal Mary Brent. Long’s growing reputation caused him to be in constant demand. The Mayor of St. Louis praised him for making a presentation there for the recent Human Rights Day Institute. However, not all were impressed with Long’s efforts. After Long wrote an article for the Nashville Tennessean about desegregation he received an angry letter suggesting that the Supreme Court did not render a decision based on law and that the ruling was a Communist plot. The letter addressed to Long read,

I have a copy of the constitution of the United States and nowhere does it imply that White and Negro must attend schools together. It is a dirty communist trick. This movement was sponsored in Russia for the specific purpose to destroy America…All the pink pimps, pin head pimps, Egg Heads, Bubble Heads, Stary Eyed do gooder and Desegregation Buzzard[s] are goin to learn that they cannot push Negroes down we White Americans throats and we won’t have any integration regardless of what Russia Asia or Africa thinks.

Obviously, institute leaders felt a need to continue the discussions in order to counter the constant barrage of negative sentiments concerning the role of blacks in America. Therefore, the efforts of Long and Johnson continued. In fact, Long’s exuberance caused him incorrectly to state that the bulk of attendees at the 1956 meeting were “for the first time,” from the South, while forgetting that the first institute had a largely southern composition.

Despite the popularity of the institutes, Johnson and Long were criticized for the paucity of discussions involving minority groups besides blacks. Historian Benjamin Quarles supported the institutes, but believed that the institute should be subtitled “Institute on Race Relations with special attention to Negro-white relations in the United States.” Apparently, Quarles was concerned about the minority problem in Europe, Asia and elsewhere in the world. Additionally, more controversial black leaders, such as W. E. B. Du Bois, Adam Clayton Powell Jr. and A. Philip Randolph did not address institutes during Johnson’s tenure as president. Johnson was even criticized for not discussing the plight of poor whites in light of his concern for the “communality of oppression.” Gilpin felt that, “Johnson could not be all things to all men.”

In reality, Johnson tried with varying degrees of success to address the problems of many groups facing oppression through the Race Relations Department described in the previous
chapter. *The Monthly Summary* contained information concerning a variety of ethnic groups. Johnson paid special attention to Jews, Mexican-Americans, Japanese-Americans and Native Americans. Additionally, he developed programs to study Africa and the Caribbean. Patrick Gilpin, Johnson’s biographer claimed that Johnson had a special interest in Indians and Spanish speaking Americans. Moreover, the 1956 institute devoted a considerable amount of time to the status of Native Americans. However, the Race Relations Department had been created to deal with the problems of black Americans and that was Johnson’s major concern.

Although Du Bois and A. Philip Randolph did not address the Institutes, Long and Johnson did not deliberately exclude activist black leaders. A young Martin Luther King, Jr. spoke during the final week of Johnson’s last institute in 1956 regarding the Montgomery Bus Boycott, then entering its ninth month. According to historian David Garrow, as King arrived to board his train in Montgomery for the trip northward to Nashville for the annual institute, the police barred him from entering the main waiting room that was designated for whites only. After debating the issue for upwards of five minutes, King and his party were allowed to pass through the waiting room without pausing, with an ominous warning not to try this again.

A few historians have interpreted the institutes as ephemeral exercises. Historian Katrina Marie Sanders suggested that there is no “evidence that shows the Institute’s philosophy and actions contributed to larger changes in social policy.” However, discussions at various institutes provided the groundwork for actual litigation regarding restrictive covenants and segregated transportation. Attorneys Charles H. Houston and Thurgood Marshall of the NAACP broadened their thinking by returning to the institutes every year as a means of providing information and intellectually discussing ways of successfully achieving their goals. Staff members of various local and state organizations participated at institute discussions as part of in-service training, including staffs from the Chicago Mayor’s Committee, the Detroit Mayor’s Committee, the Connecticut Interracial Commission, the New Jersey State Commission Against Discrimination among others. Additionally, the dissemination of reliable information regarding blacks, given the paucity of information concerning the African-American community in local press coverage across America, must have been helpful. Apparently, Johnson felt that bringing people together to discuss race relations and exchange ideas was valuable. Some of the institute’s efforts toward racial reconciliation led to small but meaningful gestures. A 1951 presidential report detailing gifts received by Fisk observed that Mrs. Charles A. Butler donated
her husband’s books as a result of a recommendation made by attendees of a past Race Relations Institute. Indeed, it is difficult to measure the success that racial interaction has upon people.\textsuperscript{32}

Increasingly, the race relations institutes academic approach began to give way to more direct methods of achieving equality. By the 1960s, racial progression was on a collision course with American ideals, as outspoken direct action seemed necessary to awaken a slumbering democracy. Herman Long supported the local sit-in efforts in Nashville. In fact, Long lectured to the United States National Student Association which led a special Southern Student Leadership Seminar at Fisk in August 1960 for fifteen to twenty of the most influential leaders of the sit-in movement. An early institute participant, Mary Porter Evarts, of Columbia, Tennessee, was so impressed that she sent Long $200 for the Nashville Christian Leadership Council for work in the sit-in movement.\textsuperscript{33}

Long continued working on many fronts to achieve racial equality. After meeting with a group of black enlisted men concerning a segregated school at Stewart Air Force Base in Tennessee, the Race Relations Department informed the Department of Defense which promptly desegregated the school “with justice to all and no injustice to any. . . .” A few months afterward, the Executive Director of the Urban League of Louisville, Kentucky, contacted Long to inquire about the development of a human rights commission in Louisville and an overworked Long wrote Charles Steele of the Urban League, too late to help in the initial effort, offering advice concerning the composition of Nashville’s Human Rights Commission.\textsuperscript{34}

Long became more visible in the wake of Johnson’s death as a desired speaker and advisor. Lou Silberman, Hillel Professor of Jewish Literature and Thought at Vanderbilt University, arranged for Long to speak before the Community Relations Council concerning the Next Steps in the Negro Protest Movement. Understandably, other race relation entities desired Long’s services. The Michigan Fair Employment Practices Commission offered Long the position of Executive Director in 1962. For two weeks, Long contemplated leaving Fisk but in the end decided that he had too much work and no clear successor. However, in July 1963, the trustees of Long’s Alma mater, Talladega College, offered him the presidency of the college and Long enthusiastically accepted the position. Eventually, Long’s hectic work schedule took its toll on the popular president and in August 1976, he passed away. Vivian Henderson, who worked with Long at Fisk, attested to Long’s impact upon race relations by writing, “In spite of the fact that you are stubborn as hell, you have been a tower of strength in this land. Your participation in race relations was crucial in some of the most difficult times this nation faced.”\textsuperscript{35}
Unfortunately, the difficult times were not over for African-Americans or the nation. As racial developments became seemingly more complex, Vivian Henderson became the Acting Director of the Race Relations Department in 1965. Born in Bristol, Tennessee, Henderson received advanced degrees in economics from the University of Iowa and began working at Fisk in 1952 after stints at Prairie View A & M and North Carolina College.  

During the Race Relations Department’s transitional period, it became necessary to assess the institutes. At the conclusion of the annual institute in 1965, the regional secretary for the United Church of Christ Council for Christian Social Action, L. Alexander Harper, was asked to evaluate the institute that year. Although Harper admitted that he was not being as candid as he would like, his critique was devastating. Harper believed that the institute was a grand idea in 1945, but it had now lost its relevance and uniqueness. Although the lecture format had not changed in twenty years, more importantly, according to Harper was the “disturbing conservatism about the pace, urgency and methods of the revolution for racial justice which underlies countless decisions in the planning of this Institute.” Sadly, in fact, Harper stated that “one would hardly know the civil rights movement were around!” In short, Harper suggested that the institutes had become routine rituals conducted by uninspired staff for the accumulation of a few newspaper clippings. Previously, the institute provided information that countered the abundance of misinformation while staff members had the clout to work behind the scenes to support programs and legislation that were sorely needed. By the 1960s, however, America was even more aware of the racial problems and now the institute needed to adjust to the rapidly changing pace and direction of the civil rights movement. Quite frankly, the institutes never regained the influence they wielded during Charles S. Johnson’s tenure.

When Henderson accepted the presidency of Clark College, in Atlanta, Georgia, Clifton H. Johnson became the director of the Race Relations Institute in 1966. Born in Griffin, Georgia, in 1921, Johnson obtained a doctorate in history from the University of North Carolina and eventually became the first white director of the Race Relations Institute. After Johnson received a fellowship to work in the American Missionary Association Archives, Charles S. Johnson gave him room and board to complete his research. By 1965, although the AMA desired a black director of the institute, according to Clifton Johnson, they could not afford anyone as qualified and willing to serve and he assumed his new position in September 1966.

While the institutes continued throughout the 1960s, it was difficult to keep pace with the civil rights movement. The Nashville Tennessean observed that major civil rights leaders were
noticeably absent from the twenty-third annual institute in 1966, although Herman Long returned to give the keynote address. Realistically, the institute could afford to pay only 75 dollars plus expenses, and civil rights speakers were now beginning to command much larger sums. However, there remained a role for the institute to play. As high schools, colleges and universities around the country begin to implement black studies courses, the Race Relations Department tried to provide direction. For instance, Matt Meier, of the University of Santa Clara, wanted to introduce a black history course and looked to the institute for guidance. Additional requests for information relating to black studies were received from around the country by the institute.  

During the last two institutes, there were fewer major civil rights leaders participating, and it was not until 1968 that the prominent labor and civil rights leader A. Philip Randolph spoke at an institute. He implored his audience not to use violence to achieve civil rights goals, although he admitted that upheaval raised consciousness. During the last institute in June 1969, the Executive Director of the NAACP, Roy Wilkins, presided over the Charles S. Johnson Memorial Award Presentation Program. Additionally, Fannie Lou Hamer, Vice Chairman of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, was a conference participant speaking about racial issues in Mississippi.  

The famed Race Relations Department concluded its last institute in 1969 and charted a new direction with the help of Director Clifton Johnson. Previously, as a faculty member at LeMoyne College, in Memphis, Johnson was granted a leave of absence in 1961 to arrange and catalogue the American Missionary Association Archives at Fisk. After twenty-one months the effort was complete and the archives were opened to research scholars as the Amistad Research Center (ARC). The unexpected growth of the archives, coupled with continuing financial need for the center, became the impetus for closing the Race Relations Department in 1969. The American Missionary Association allowed the ARC to incorporate so government funds could be raised without the conflict of supporting a church institution. A board of directors was chosen and archive material was housed in New Orleans at Dillard University in 1970.  

The contribution of Charles Johnson’s institutes toward improved race relations provided a solid foundation for racial reconciliation. According to historians Patrick Gilpin and Marybeth Gasman, “the institutes marked the zenith of Johnson’s career as a race relations diplomat in the South.” Longtime Fisk faculty member and resident historian Leslie Collins suggested that the Race Relations Institute was in short, “Charles S. Johnson’s candle in the seeming darkness of
the long night of racial strife....” Although the Race Relations Department was closed, the vast
treasure trove of archival documents continued to illuminate the path of brotherhood.\textsuperscript{41}
Notes to Chapter V


2 Monthly Summary 2 (August-September 1944): 57; Crisis 7 (July 1944): 214.

3 Katrina Marie Sanders, “Building Racial Tolerance Through Education: The Fisk University Race Relations Institute, 1944-1969” (Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1997), 102; Monthly Summary 1 (April 1944): 30; “Race and Race Relations,” 24 August 1943, Rockefeller Archives, General Education Board Records, Reel 6, Amistad Research Center, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana; General Secretary Correspondence, AMA addendum Box 326 Amistad Research Center, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana; Nashville Tennessean 6 July 1944.

4 Alexander Liveright to Charles S. Johnson, 26 September 1944, Charles S. Johnson Papers, Box 68 folder 1, Amistad Research Center, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana; Charles S. Johnson to Cyril K. Glynn, 24 October 1944, Race Relations Department, Box 1 folder 5, Amistad Research Center, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana; Charles S. Johnson to Paul Davies, 30 October 1944, Race Relations Department, Box 1 folder 5.

5 “Race and Race Relations,” 24 August 1943, Rockefeller Archives, General Education Board Records, Reel 6, Amistad Research Center, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana.

6 Ibid.

7 Marguerite H. Lane to Fred L. Brownlee, 16 August 1945, American Missionary Association Archives Addendum Series A, Box 167 folder 6, Amistad Research Center, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana.


11 Paul M. Clanton to Herman H. Long, 14 March 1949, Box 239, Race Relations Department.

13 Maxine D. Jones and Joe M. Richardson, Talladega College: The First Century (Tuscaloosa, Alabama: The University of Alabama Press, 1990), 188; Herman H. Long to R. A. Sawyer, 21 December 1948, Race Relations Department Box 1 folder 4; “Brief Biographical Sketch-Herman Long,” Southern Christian Leadership Conference Papers, Box 152 folder 10, Martin Luther King Jr. Center, Atlanta, Georgia.

14 Arthur Chapin to Charles S. Johnson, 22 April 1948, Box 8 folder 2, Race Relations Department; Marguerite H. Lane to Fred L. Brownlee, 16 August 1945, American Missionary Association Archives Addendum Series A, Box 167 folder 6.


16 Ibid., 7; Helen Kenyon to Charles S. Johnson, Charles S. Johnson Papers, Box 144 folder 2, Amistad Research Center, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana; Herman H. Long to Fred L. Brownlee, 4 January 1950, Box 240, Race Relations Department, AMA Addendum.


18 Galen Weaver to Hillary Bissell, 3 July 1950, Box 240, Race Relations Department; “Radio Committee of Nashville,” 19 February 1953, Race Relations Department Box 8 folder 6; New York Times (New York), 6 September 1965; Herman Long to Thurgood Marshall, 16 December 1958, Box 23 folder 14, Race Relations Department.

19 The Nashville Banner 30 June 1952; “Focus Upon Human Relations in World Crisis,” Box 48 folder 16, Race Relations Department; “Human Relations in World Crisis,” Box 48 folder 25, Race Relations Department; “Institute Blue Book: A Guide to the Campus and Environs,” Race Relations Department, Box 48 folder 6.

20 “Presidents Report to the Trustees,” 24 April 1953, American Missionary Papers Addendum, Box 169 folder 12.

21 “Selected Bibliography,” Nelson and Marian D. Fuson Papers, Box 1 folder 12, Vanderbilt Special Collections, Vanderbilt University, Nashville Tennessee; “Selected Pamphlets and Periodicals,” Nelson and Marian D. Fuson Papers, Box 1 folder 13, Vanderbilt Special Collections, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tennessee.


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Herman H. Long to Philip Widenhouse 14 June 1955, Box 241, Race Relations Department; American Missionary Association Division Committee Minutes, 27 September 1955, Box 363, Amistad Research Center; Charles S. Johnson, “Equity and Eventualism,” Herman Long Papers Box 1 folder 10, Amistad Research Center; J. R. Larkins to Herman H. Long, 18 July 1955, Herman Long Papers, Box 1 folder 10, Amistad Research Center; Joseph Morales Jr. to Herman H. Long, 20 July 1955, Amistad Research Center.

Nashville Tennessean 30 January 1954; Joe M. Richardson, “Race Relations Department,” unpublished paper; Race Relations Department 2 September 1955, Box 23 folder 19; Raymond Tucker to Herman H. Long, 18 December 1956, Box 2 folder 14, Race Relations Department.

M. L. Nelson to Herman H. Long, 11 March 1956, Box 2 folder 11, Race Relations Department.

Herman H. Long to Sarah R. Murdy, 4 March 1957, Box 3 folder 1, Race Relations Department.


David Garrow, Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King Jr., and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (New York: Quill, 1986), 79; Richard Robbins, Sidelines Activist, 123.


Harland Randolph and Timothy to Herman H. Long 5 July 1961, Box 4 folder 12, Race Relations Department; Herman H. Long to Mary Evarts and Reverend Kelly Miller Smith 13 July 1960, Box 4 folder 3, Race Relations Department.
34 James C. Evans to Harold C. Fleming, 18 January 1960, Box 4 folder 1, Race Relations Department; Charles T. Steele to Herman H. Long, 8 March 1960, Box 130 folder 13, Race Relations Department; Herman H. Long to Charles T. Steele, 25 March 1960, Box 130 folder 13 Race Relations Department.

35 Lou H. Silberman to Herman H. Long, 12 February 1962, Box 5 folder 2, Race Relations Department; Louis Rosenzweig to Herman H. Long, 1 May 1962, Box 5 folder 4, Race Relations Department; Herman H. Long to Louis Rosenzweig, 8 May 1962, Box 5 folder 4, Race Relations Department; Maxine D. Jones and Joe M. Richardson, Talladega College: The First Century, 188; Ibid., 209; Vivian W. Henderson to Herman H. Long, 22 September 1972, Box 5 folder 1, Herman Long Papers.

36 “Vivian Wilson Henderson Resume,” Box 152 folder 10, Southern Christian Leadership Conference Papers, Martin Luther King Jr. Center, Atlanta Georgia.

37 L. Alexander Harper to Wesley A. Hotchkiss, 2 August 1965, Box 110 folder 20 Tougaloo College Papers, Amistad Research Center, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana.

38 Director of Higher Education AMA Committee minutes, 29 October 1968, Box 364, Amistad Research Center, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana; Interview with Clifton Johnson by Author, 18 December 1997.

39 The Nashville Tennessean, 27 June 1966; Matt S. Meier to Clifton H. Johnson, 18 October 1968, Box 78 folder 12, Race Relations Department; Frances Whittle to Clifton H. Johnson, 8 November 1968, Box 78 folder 12, Race Relations Department; Sister Ann Edward to Clifton H. Johnson 27 July 1968, Box 78 folder 12, Race Relations Department.


41 Clifton H. Johnson, “A Report to the Division of Higher Education and The American Missionary Association,” General Secretary Correspondence, AMA Addendum, Box 364, Amistad Research Center, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana; Gilpin and Gasman, Charles S. Johnson: Leadership Beyond the Veil in the Age of Jim Crow, 200; Collins, One Hundred Years of Fisk University Presidents: 1875-1975, 129.
African-American expectations of racial equality accelerated with the conclusion of World War II and Fisk University seemed destined to help meet the challenge with an excellent interracial faculty and superior students. Black colleges were viewed later by some black scholars as conservative bastions that employed an equally conservative faculty and Fisk was seemingly no different. In fact, most black college administrators were cautious about antagonizing their white benefactors and often maintained a conservative faculty environment.\(^2\)

During the late 1920s and early 1930s Fisk administrators began to assert their independence although with some trepidation. For example, Fisk risked hiring sociologist E. Franklin Frazier who was ousted from Tuskegee and later Morehouse for exhibiting a lack of deference to white associates. Although Frazier’s appointment in 1927 was due largely to pressure from W. E. B. Du Bois and the threat of negative publicity, Fisk took the chance and acquired a promising scholar.\(^3\) Moreover, Fisk courted other stellar academic prospects with alacrity. For example, the board of trustees at Fisk authorized the construction of a summer home in Maine for writer James Weldon Johnson in 1931. Johnson was unanimously chosen to hold the Adam K. Spence Chair of Creative Literature and Writing at an impressive salary of five-thousand dollars with a supplemental stipend of five hundred dollars for travel that same year. However, there were limitations regarding employing potentially outspoken faculty. President Thomas Jones of Fisk tentatively courted the flamboyant writer Zora Neale Hurston in 1934, but demurred regarding her employment until he received the endorsement of James Weldon Johnson. Despite Johnson’s positive observations, uneasiness over Zora’s flamboyance
and past civil rights activism through her artistic productions, according to her chief biographer Robert Hemenway, sealed Zora’s fate. She was not hired.4

Regardless, the Fisk faculty by the 1940s was an interracial and cosmopolitan group. The faculty included: Bingham Dai, a Chinese-American M. D. whose interest was psychiatry; Eli S. Marks, Jewish, fresh out of Columbia University, who served as a statistician; Addison Cutler, white and blond who was an economist; Jitsuichi Masuoka, Japanese-American and a sociologist to name a few.5 Indeed, many faculty members and students often waxed wistfully about their formative years at Fisk. Blyden Jackson who taught from 1945 to 1954 reminisced, “that they were for me, as happy a time as any I have known.” A student from the class of 1950, named Arthur Berry, recalled “One of the most impressive things I remember about Fisk was the professional and intellectual climate the campus afforded. Professors came to class neatly and appropriately dressed and on time, and I felt, always informed and well prepared to stimulate students to learn.” Even faculty that clashed with the administration admired aspects of their experience. August Meier reflected in a series of essays concerning black colleges that during his years at Fisk, “I have never witnessed college students so frequently visiting faculty in their homes, and indeed I judge that at few, if any schools have students interacted so intensively with faculty.”6 Blyden Jackson concurred recalling that, “in the 1940s virtually all of the Fisk faculty lived in houses owned by the university which girdled the campus so closely that getting to a class or office required only a few minutes. Even unmarried faculty lived around the campus in lodgings rented to them by the university.”7

Faculty had such close proximity to Fisk students that the classroom would inevitably include the world around them and civil rights became more than an academic challenge. In December 1953, Professor Meier and several Fisk students arrived in Louisville, Kentucky, where they had to change trains. The flagman admitted all white passengers to a coach but refused to admit Meier and his students. After an argument train officials treated Meier and the students rudely. Meier and four students on April 23, 1954 signed an affidavit charging Louisville and Nashville Railroad officials with misconduct.8

Not surprisingly, many Fisk faculty actively participated in efforts to improve the human condition in Nashville and the larger society. Unfortunately, there were often personal and professional risks associated with these endeavors. Often, Fisk hired exceptional faculty whenever available despite uncertainty associated with previous employment. An example was
Lee Lorch, a mathematics instructor who exhibited great fortitude in assisting Fisk students as they developed academically.

Lee Lorch was born in New York City in 1915 and graduated from Cornell University in 1935. He did graduate work at the University of Cincinnati where he obtained his doctorate in mathematics in 1941. Lorch taught at the City College of New York and Pennsylvania State College before being dismissed from both institutions in 1949 and 1950 respectively due to his civil rights activity. Apparently, Lorch incurred the wrath of his employers by attempting to end segregation in a Metropolitan Life Insurance Company apartment development known as “Stuyvesant Town” in New York City. Lorch erred by allowing a black family to lease his apartment.  

Johnson offered Lorch a teaching position at Fisk in September 1950 and in the early years of his appointment Lorch excelled and was promoted to professor and eventually chairman of the mathematics department, although the question of tenure was deferred until 1955. Lorch was undoubtedly a talented mathematician and teacher as several of his more than thirty-five papers were published while he was at Fisk. Of the students who were in his department for at least two of the five years he was at Fisk, he influenced one-fourth of them to pursue and earn the master’s degree in pure mathematics. Moreover, one tenth of the students continued to the doctorate.

The duties of teachers, researchers and staff members at Fisk often exceeded their academic titles. For Lorch, Fisk became the base for his timely activism regarding the full participation of his students in the academic life of America. In April 1951, Lorch, as department chairman, along with faculty members Evelyn Boyd, H. M. Holloway and Walter Brown all signed a letter written to the Mathematical Association of America seeking to ban discriminatory organization meetings and to codify anti-discriminatory measures in its by-laws. Fisk seemed supportive of the effort as the publicity department created a press release regarding the message.

However, growing tension created by the Cold War climate between Communist Russia and the United States often hampered individual freedom and produced guarded responses by Fisk officials regarding the protection of civil liberties. Elite white colleges and universities had to remain careful also. A California Institute of Technology chemistry professor and Nobel Prize winner Linus Pauling was forced to resign because of McCarthy era investigations. In 1949, Fisk physics Professor Giovanni Rossi Lomanitz was called before the House Un-American
Activities Committee and denied any connection with espionage but would not respond to questions about his membership in the Communist Party. Fisk did not re-appoint Lomanitz and in October of 1951, President Johnson was forced to claim that there were no Communist on the staff of Fisk University.  

Unfortunately, in the public’s mind communism was often linked to civil rights activity. According to historian Harvard Sitkoff, the fear of McCarthyism was so great during the 1950s that blacks failed to leverage the Korean War to force racial reform like blacks did during World War II. Despite the political climate, Lorch continued to confront segregation and racism and in March 1954, he was thrust into another inimical situation over a simple meal. Lorch and a black man, Asbury Howard, were on a plane together when it landed in Atlanta, Georgia, where they decided to have lunch at the Dobbs House in the airport. Lorch being white could be served in the main part of the restaurant, but Howard would have to sit in a rear section behind a screen. In light of the recent Supreme Court decision outlawing segregation on interstate travel in 1950, Lorch and Howard complained to the management to no avail. Lorch and Howard wrote to the Atlanta Branch of the NAACP and Lorch tried again unsuccessfully, in April to dine at the establishment with a black colleague and once more Lorch wrote the Atlanta NAACP to complain.  

In the fall of 1954 following the Brown v. Board Education decision, Lorch attempted to enroll his daughter in Nashville’s all black Pearl Elementary School and a few days later he was summoned to testify in Dayton, Ohio, before the House Un-American Activities Committee. Lorch was summoned on September 7 to appear on September 15 and complained bitterly that he could not find counsel by the time of his appearance. He was forced to proceed without the benefit of legal counsel in a city that to the best of his recollection he had never visited.  

The subcommittee of the Committee on Un-American Activities never explained why Lee Lorch was summoned to testify before that body, but it seemed that his civil rights advocacy made him a target of the government simply because he was called before the committee to explain his past. In fact, Lorch managed to state for the record that “the oppression of the Negro people was a disgrace to the entire country.” However, when asked repeatedly by the committee whether he was a Communist, Lorch answered “no” but with vehement protest regarding the constitutionality of the question. Accordingly, Lorch invoked the First Amendment in response to a withering barrage of questions posed by the committee and was cited for contempt of Congress.
The real or perceived fear of Communist infiltration during the Cold War created a guilt by association mentality as the federal government trolled American society in search of spies. In October 1954, Lorch asked for clarification of his status as a faculty member at Fisk. Johnson informed Lorch that he was to appear before the board of trustees in New York City. On November 19, 1954, with one member dissenting, the executive committee voted not to renew Lorch’s appointment. Lorch petitioned President Johnson and the executive committee of Fisk to be heard, but he was not granted a hearing and on April 29, 1955, the Fisk board of trustees voted to approve the action of the executive committee. Dr. Lorch left Fisk in 1955 to assume a post at Philander-Smith College in Arkansas. During this time he and his wife Grace actively participated in the explosive Little Rock school integration case. Lorch’s wife Grace saved a young black girl from a mob of adults and when the college’s funding was jeopardized the Lorch family moved again. It was not until November 27, 1957, that Judge Lester Cecil of the Federal District Court in Dayton, Ohio, finally dismissed the previous contempt charges against Lorch.  

Lorch and his family eventually chose to leave the United States in 1959 to teach at the University of Alberta before moving to York University in 1968. In 1959, the American Association of University Professors found the late Charles S. Johnson and the board of trustees at Fisk guilty of denying Lorch’s academic freedom and due process. Additionally, in the wake of President Johnson’s death in 1956, the interim board felt it necessary to remove Gertrude Rempfer whose staunch support of Lorch as head of the physics department assured that her contract would not be renewed in 1958.  

Ironically, Fisk allowed a former student James W. Ford from the class of 1918 to speak at the college in 1940 although he joined the Communist Party in 1926. Fisk officials at that time were understandably proud of their defense of free speech and reputation of independence. Apparently, by the 1950s, Fisk’s reputation for academic freedom and liberalism were unable to combat the power of ignorance and fear.  

Naturally black, as well as white colleges remained cautious during the McCarthy era. With notable exceptions, such as the sit-ins at Fisk and other colleges, most institutions and their students pursued upward mobility rather than activism. Previously, Leander Boykin expressed a pessimistic assessment of black college students in 1943, while recognizing their potential when he wrote,  

While turning out mentally alert students, the Negro college has graduated far too many students who are unaware of the social, economic, and political processes going on among and around them, and the people of their
environment and the world at large. They are without adequate knowledge of the requirements of the society in which they must live and work. They are ignorant of possible social and economic consequences likely to result from the aftermath of a war-torn world... the Negro college seems to be a sleeping giant with latent potentialities and possibilities.19

Despite the need for more activism, black students were economically circumscribed and often had little time for demonstrations. They were concerned with acquiring an education that was received in frequently poor colleges often long on religion and discipline and miserably short on facilities. As Fisk enhanced its reputation, faculty and student increases led to more economically stable students who were generally from northern cities with better high school preparation.20 One perspicacious southerner named Johnnetta Cole felt the environment Fisk created bordered on the inane. Cole who later became a distinguished anthropologist and college president recalled the unique economic class structure that developed at Fisk in the 1950s. As a freshman in the 1950s, Cole suggested Fisk was rife with “bougie young women who sat around boasting about their fathers’ medical and legal practices, their mother’s fur coats, and speculating on which medical student they were going to marry.” Cole later wrote, “I was distinctly turned off by what seemed like endless discussions about money.” 21

“Not surprisingly, most students exhibited almost no campus activism during the period immediately after the Brown decision because optimism was normal. In fact, David Levering Lewis, a 1956 Fisk graduate and later a distinguished historian, remembered that in the months and years after the Supreme Court decision, there was a belief that things were going to change and new opportunities for young black college graduates would grow exponentially.”22

Evidently, black collegians would simply become students that would be accepted by the larger community much like intellectuals at white institutions. An article in Esquire Magazine entitled The Ivy League Negro by William Kelley echoed this sentiment. He wrote,

An academic community, especially one like Harvard, which attaches so much importance to intellectuality that it sometimes seems the ideal situation would be one in which only disembodied ideas and minds went to class, a place where a Negro can forget almost entirely about his skin, his Negro consciousness. . . . At Harvard, this part of his mind is soon lulled to sleep. He does not need it. He only has time enough to think of himself as an individual student, going to class, studying for examinations, waiting for his marks.23

A growing number of students at historically black colleges eventually realized that they had no such luxury to think of themselves as just students although many tried.
Although Johnnetta Cole believed too many students thought of money, there were campus activists. David Lewis earned a reputation as a campus radical according to historian David Halberstam because he initiated an attack upon the overwhelming power of Fisk fraternities and sororities in the selection of beauty queens.\textsuperscript{24} Apparently, fraternal power had been a source of concern at Fisk for quite some time and some faculty voiced their concerns seemingly to little avail. Lillian Voorhees, a speech and drama teacher for forty-six years at colleges established by the American Missionary Association considered leaving Fisk in 1946 in part, due to the omnipotence of campus fraternal organizations. She wrote Fred Brownlee of the AMA board,

\ldots there are three factors which make me doubt seriously whether I can continue here and hope to bring to fruition the plans we have been developing thus far. The first factor to which I refer is the domination of student life and politics by fraternal organizations, especially in the spring of the year, when the practices accompanying initiation make it almost impossible to do the quality of academic work for which Fisk stands. Student health is endangered and often permanently impaired by the sickening sadistic practices which prevail in spite of rules and alleged modification. If there were something I could do about it all, it would be a different matter, but the faculty itself is so involved with these organizations that the situation looks well nigh hopeless.\ldots\textsuperscript{25}

Not many students understood the urgency of more important issues such as the struggle for civil rights more than Fisk student and future Congressman John Lewis. He, too, was disturbed by the appearance of Fisk fraternity students engaged in seemingly trivial pursuits when juxtaposed to the harsh realities of black life. In his memoir Lewis recounts bitterly,

I will never forget gathering one afternoon that November [1961] to go downtown for a demonstration. We were over near Fisk’s Jubilee Hall, a cornerstone of the campus. It was a week or so before Thanksgiving. Autumn was in the air. We were getting set to drive over to the First Baptist when we heard a commotion and a group of fraternity guys came running around a building, thirty or forty or them, wearing dog collars around their throats and carrying their Greek paddles. They ran past us barking like hounds, hollering and whooping and going through their fraternity ritual. I was stunned. I really was. It struck me as completely distasteful, very distressing to see these young black men swept up in this trivial silliness at the very moment that people our own age, young men and women just like them, were risking their lives down in Mississippi, standing up for the future of all of us. What these young guys were doing had so little meaning compared to that. It was almost an affront. It was just so irrelevant, so insulting. It was hard to believe.\textsuperscript{26}
Not surprisingly, “the pressure for conformity was extremely powerful at a school such as Fisk and even dress codes were quite strict.” In the 1920s, Christian piety, in part, dictated the conservative social conventions on black campuses. Later, the emergence of the Cold War climate of the 1950s intensified the need for colleges to conform to puritanical norms. This pressure was particularly intense at black colleges attempting to graduate students who somehow had to gain acceptance or tolerance from the larger society. “Women were required to wear stockings and high heels every day, and only for a few brief hours on the weekend could they wear blue jeans.” Men also were expected to “dress properly.” “Dean Anna Harvin became so furious with one rather rebellious undergraduate, Julius Lester, later a professor at the University of Massachusetts and a member of the class of 1960, for continuing to wear blue jeans that she called his parents.”

While many Fisk students were jockeying for status on campus, a small group of dedicated young men and women attempted to obtain full citizenship for African-Americans. “Compared to many other southern states in the 1950s, Tennessee appeared moderate regarding civil rights. After the United States Supreme Court declared public school segregation unconstitutional, Tennessee’s governors and senators refused to join the diehard strategy of massive resistance.” “If Atlanta was the city too busy to hate, Nashville might claim it was too genteel to hate. The state’s image of moderation, however, hid deep fundamental differences regarding the place of blacks and the desirability of integration.”

A few Nashville students, whom author David Halberstam heard described as “the children,” became the focal point of change locally and nationally concerning integration and the extension of civil rights. Although many students were involved with the movement in varying degrees, Diane Nash and John Lewis among others, became prominent leaders in a movement destined to change the world.

Diane Nash was born in Chicago’s South Side to Leon and Dorothy Nash in 1939 and raised in the Catholic faith. When Diane’s parents divorced, her mother married John Baker, who was a waiter on a Pullman car. His position enabled Diane’s mother not to work after her second marriage. Diane studied at Howard University between secretarial jobs before transferring to Fisk University in 1959.

Nash’s light skin and involvement in the movement made her a curious crusader because she could have married comfortably and avoided the confrontations faced by her darker counterparts. In fact, Nash’s light skin seemed to be a hallmark of her beauty to some.
Young later an aide to Martin Luther King, said she “looked like the kind of young woman who would be a cheerleader or homecoming queen--popular on campus, pretty, light-skinned, and from a middle class family.” *Time* described Nash as a Catholic and light enough to pass for white, while John Lewis was simply awed by her beauty. “She was one of God’s beautiful creatures,” wrote Lewis, “just about the most gorgeous woman any of us had ever seen.” 31

According to historian Faye Robbins, many alumni of Fisk University were part of the light-skinned upper crust. Whether true or not, a myth that circulated among some blacks was that Fisk was founded to educate the children of white fathers. To the students like John Lewis and James Bevel of economically challenged American Baptist Theological Seminary, Fisk sometimes seemed as far away in terms of affluence and privilege as Vanderbilt. Light skin was often perceived by many whites and blacks, as more attractive and the assumption of greater intellectual capacity was implied. Accordingly, black America, like Fisk, wrestled with the dilemma of racial self-hatred in addition to white racism. 32 Indeed, negative racial perceptions remain a world wide reality. The nineteenth century German poet, playwright, and novelist Johann Goethe’s famous book entitled, *On the Theory of Color* attempted to solve the problematical question of beauty. Goethe concluded that the man who appears “most neutral in hue and least inclines to any particular or positive color, is the most beautiful.” 33 A painful reminder of this issue was revealed when historian David Halberstam interviewed a black man, Ben Jobe, a graduate of Nashville’s Pearl High. Jobe won a four-year scholarship to Fisk although his neighbors were sure he would never be able to make it at Fisk because of his very dark skin. Despite community trepidation, Jobe became an active student athlete on campus, graduating in 1956 with a degree in Health and Physical Education. Additionally, Jobe had a successful career as a basketball coach at Southern University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, among other coaching stints. Unfortunately, forty years later according to Halberstam, negative perceptions of skin color was “burned into his psyche.” Diane Nash’s involvement in the movement became a testament to her intelligence, dedication and morality, simply because she could pass as a white person if she desired. 34

John Lewis mirrored Nash’s commitment to the movement with his unshakable moral clarity of purpose. In fact, by age twenty-four Lewis had been arrested some thirty-two times in the struggle for civil rights. Lewis was born in Pike County, Alabama, in 1940 the third oldest of Eddie and Willie Mae Lewis’s ten children. Until he took his first trip into the town of Troy with his father at age six he had seen just two white people in his life. John Lewis was described as
the countriest of the original group of student leaders, which was no small title. Lewis had arrived at American Baptist Theological Seminary in Nashville when he was only seventeen years old. If his country manner was not bad enough, a speech impediment made this poor country boy seem even more inarticulate.  

Many students of varying backgrounds similar to Nash and Lewis chose Nashville to complete their education. The genteel world of Nashville’s segregation was mild and considered more of a cultural leftover from a past that would never fade, even as desegregation of city schools began in the fall of 1957. Unfortunately, a significant percentage of the city’s citizens ignored the reality that many black citizens were denied elemental American rights because of skin color. Therefore, it became evident that adult black leadership of Nashville needed the help of a younger generation of students that Fisk would help supply. 

The mobilization of African-Americans led by Martin Luther King, Jr. and fueled by students like those from Fisk helped achieve the goal of equality. In the wake of Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr’s leadership of the successful Montgomery bus boycott, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference on Transportation and Nonviolent Integration was established at Atlanta, Georgia, in January 1957. After receiving word that President Eisenhower and his Attorney General would not speak out for desegregation, King announced a second meeting to take place in New Orleans, Louisiana, in February of that same year. The response was gratifying as ninety-seven persons gathered at Reverend A. L. Davis’s New Zion Baptist Church and nominated Martin Luther King Jr. as president of the newly named Southern Christian Leadership Conference. The organization of the Nashville Christian Leadership Council in January 1958 followed the gathering of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference in Atlanta, Georgia, and the New Orleans meeting where Nashville representatives under the leadership of Reverend Kelly Miller Smith were in attendance. 

Reverend Kelly Miller Smith was born in Mound Bayou, Mississippi, in 1920 and earned an A. B. degree from Morehouse College and an advanced divinity degree from Howard University. Smith had arrived in Nashville in 1951 to head the First Baptist Church, which according to John Lewis, was “the church of choice for the upper crust of Nashville’s black middle class.” 

Evidently, the black middle class outside the confines of Nashville desired to hear Smith as well. As the President of the Nashville Branch of the NAACP and a preacher with a growing reputation, Reverend Smith was becoming a sought after speaker. In 1956, Smith was a youth
day speaker at Martin Luther King Jr.’s Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery. Apparently the two men had much in common as both preachers were graduates of Morehouse College and heavily involved in civil rights issues. Indeed, Smith, like King, had received some national attention when *Ebony* in 1954 named him one of America’s ten most outstanding preachers. In April 1959, President Kelly Miller Smith of the newly formed Nashville Christian Leadership Council made application for the Nashville organization to become the first affiliate of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. Affiliates were entitled to send one delegate to the annual meeting of the SCLC for each twenty-five dollar membership paid for a maximum of five decision-making delegates.  

The three principles of the Nashville Christian Leadership Conference were: 1) to discover ways of non-violent resistance or resistance in love to all forms of racial, social, economic or political injustice. 2) To explore opportunities of service in labor, industry, voting registration and civic life. 3) To co-ordinate those forces for good in the city which seek the growth of a genuine Christian movement towards the new community. Apparently, it was through pacifists, Reverends Glenn Smiley and James Lawson Jr. that members of the organization came to realize that Christian social action would necessarily include the discipline of non-violence. Two months after the formation of the organization, (March 26-28, 1958) the NCLC sponsored a workshop on Christian non-violence at Bethel A.M.E. Church in Nashville that included Reverends Smiley, Lawson and Miss Anna Holden. The guest speaker for the first workshop was King aide Reverend Ralph Abernathy.

According to David Halberstam, Fisk representation at workshops was mainly female. Of the Fisk men who attended, a surprising number turned out to be white exchange students. Paul LaPrad, a white Fisk exchange student from Manchester College in Indiana told Diane Nash about the nonviolent workshops that Lawson was conducting and she joined. Nash remembered feeling stifled in Nashville. In Chicago she at least had access to public accommodations, but the South was different. If Lawson’s classes lacked Fisk men it was made up for with the number of students from exceedingly poor American Baptist College. Reverend Smith who was the most popular professor at the seminary had brought some of the brightest most ambitious American Baptist students to Lawson’s workshops.

One Fisk student destined for fame and infamy that became an active leader in the movement was graduate student Marion Barry, Jr. Barry was born the son of sharecroppers in 1936 in Itta Bena, Mississippi. Barry’s widowed mother moved to Memphis and young Marion
later graduated from the city’s all black Booker T. Washington High School in 1954. Afterward, Barry graduated from LeMoyne College with a degree in chemistry in 1958 and entered Fisk University to begin working towards a graduate degree in chemistry. Barry’s consciousness had risen dramatically in the past few years due to his challenge against a perceived white segregationist member of the LeMoyne board of trustees. Apparently, John Lewis was impressed by Barry’s demeanor and described him as “tall lanky, and cool--very cool.”

Nash, Lewis and Barry were just some of the students taking part in non-violent workshops that James Lawson led with a passionate sense of Christian dedication for the cause of civil rights. Initially, Lawson came to Nashville in 1958 as southern secretary for the Fellowship of Reconciliation, an international Christian organization emphasizing pacifism and nonviolence, however, Lawson became a Nashville resident and studied for an advanced degree at Vanderbilt University. Lawson was described by King aide Andrew Young as “an all around American boy from Massillon, Ohio.” During the Korean War, Lawson was a conscientious objector and had served several months in prison before being paroled in May 1952. The Methodist Church sent Lawson to India after his parole where he worked from 1953-1956 as a missionary. Lawson’s bearing and sense of self impressed John Lewis. Writing in his memoirs years later, Lewis recounted that, “Even before he begin speaking, I could see that there was something special about this man. He just had a way about him,” Lewis continued, “an aura of inner peace and wisdom that you could see immediately upon simply seeing him.”

The non-violent workshops led by Lawson set the stage for the actual application of Christian principles of brotherhood. In January 1959, the NCLC attempted to desegregate downtown business establishments by negotiating with various merchants. Unfortunately, negotiations elicited little response from Nashville merchants. However, non-violent workshops involving college students from various Nashville institutions intensified when a small group of NCLC students conducted training sessions by quietly trying to integrate downtown businesses. Fisk student Paul LaPrad, recalled that test sit-ins were held at Harvey’s Department store on November 28, 1959, and at Cain-Sloan’s Department Store on December 5 of that year. Both stores had segregated eating facilities and management refused to respond to NCLC grievances.

The methodical training and preparation for justice in Nashville may have caused the NCLC to lose its immediate place in history because of the actions of four students in North Carolina. Four students at North Carolina A&T College in Greensboro, North Carolina, seized
national attention by staging a sit-in on February 1, 1960. However, it was “the Nashville activists, rather than the four Greensboro students,” according to historian Clayborne Carson, “who had an enduring impact on the subsequent development of the southern movement.” King aide Andrew Young concurred, suggesting that, “the students in Nashville nearly perfected the sit-ins.”

Initially, Reverends Smith and Lawson were apprehensive about starting a sit-in with less than one hundred dollars to utilize for court costs and bail. However, the momentum of history was on the side of the “children,” and on February 13, 1960, approximately 124 students from Fisk, American Baptist and Tennessee A and I State University began their first sustained sit-in demonstration in full public view. Students were given copies of lunch counter suggestions regarding the decorum that should be displayed. Participants were not to curse or strike back if abused or laugh out, or hold conversations. Additionally, students were not to leave their seats until given permission by the floor manager or block entrances to aisles or storefronts. Participants sat at lunch counters waiting for service that they knew would never materialize. Diane Nash recalled how fear was openly displayed as the students sat. “Waitresses dropped things,” said Nash, and “store managers and personnel perspired and several cashiers were led off in tears.” The cash registers were shut down and the lights turned off in the lunch counter section before the waitresses departed and the students sat in semi—darkness. At roughly six that evening the students stood up and walked out as orderly and silently as they arrived.

There were additional student led demonstrations on February 18 involving approximately 200 students and another on February 20 with about 300 participants. During the fourth sit-in on 27 February, tension mounted rapidly as white agitators kicked, repeatedly beat, and burned students with lighted cigarettes as the police watched passively. The non-violent training provided by Reverend Lawson helped prevent even more harm although the students and not their tormentors were arrested.

The events inspired Fisk student Julius Lester to write a poem for an arrested student named Candida titled, “The Death of Justice in Nashville.”

Ninety-one of approximately 400 students were arrested during the fourth sit-in. Many remaining students continued sitting-in even after the arrests. The incarcerated students were represented by Zephaniah Alexander Looby who first arrived in Nashville in 1926 as an assistant professor at Fisk. Looby was raised on the tiny and extremely poor island of Dominica in the British West Indies. Unfortunately, both of Looby’s parents died by the time he was fifteen. Looby became a cabin boy on a ship and made his way to America. After a series of menial
jobs, he worked his way through Howard University in 1922, and later obtained a law degree from Columbia University in addition to further study at New York University. Looby was involved in numerous civil rights cases, including the equalization of teacher pay for blacks in Nashville in 1945. Eventually, Looby was elected to the city council in 1951 and was well respected in the black community.\textsuperscript{50}

Initially student participants refused bail, but just before midnight, they were released into the custody of Fisk president Stephen J. Wright. President Wright assumed the presidency of Fisk after the death of former president Johnson in 1956. Born in Dillon, South Carolina, Wright graduated from Hampton Institute in 1934 and later Howard and New York Universities. Professionally he rose through the ranks from a high school teacher in Maryland to an administrator at Hampton, to president of Bluefield State College in West Virginia before going to Fisk.\textsuperscript{51}

According to longtime Fisk faculty member Leslie M. Collins, the trouble in Nashville seemed to reveal Wright’s “courage, diplomacy and leadership ability.” Wright was the first president locally and perhaps nationally to speak out in defense of the student sit-ins and John Lewis and his fellow students were euphoric. President Wright issued a statement that unequivocally supported student efforts and fortunately he enjoyed the support of faculty and the board of trustees. “As president of Fisk I approve of the ends our students are seeking by these demonstrations. From all I have been able to learn,” he continued, “they have broken no law by the means they have employed thus far. . . .” Herman Long of the Race Relations Institute located on the Fisk campus also supported the students and concurred with Wright’s decision. In fact, Long took the time to write,

\begin{quote}
I want to take this opportunity to express my deep appreciation for the statement which you made in connection with the efforts of students to avail themselves at eating accommodations in the Nashville downtown area through peaceful and disciplined protest. I thought your statement to be not only clear and sound but that it also demonstrated moral courage of the highest order.\textsuperscript{52}
\end{quote}

However, even Wright was capable of succumbing to what seemed a generational malaise. On March 3, 1960, Mayor Ben West appointed a bi-racial committee composed of five whites and two blacks including Wright to study the Nashville demonstrations. Downtown businesses had agreed to set up a partial integration plan where blacks would be served separately in designated sections of formerly white only restaurants. Committee members
apparently failed to recognize that partial integration was the same as segregation and it hurt Lewis and the students that the black committee members endorsed the plan. According to Lewis, “This felt like a betrayal of sorts to us, more evidence, he continued, “of the differences between the generations.”

Privately, Herman Long felt that the Nashville Committee was weak and ineffectual. Long responded to Charles Steele of the Louisville Urban League regarding the effectiveness of the Nashville bi-racial committee and suggested that the committee’s poor composition would not serve as a worthy model to emulate. Long observed that committee member W. S. Davis was compromised in his role because he was head of a state university for Negroes and that Wright of Fisk was also limited although not to the same degree. Additionally, Long offered that ministers and liberal whites were not represented on the committee.

Although Wright earned early praise for his support of sit-ins, he later distanced himself from student leaders by suggesting that prior commitments forced his abandonment of an advisory role that students offered him the next year. Students rejected partial integration and the NCLC moved to negotiate again for total integration. Among the representatives on the negotiating committee were Diane Nash and Herman Long. Long’s support for the students was tempered by his fear that the movement could suffer a backlash due to extreme revolutionary demands. Speaking at a Race Relations Institute gathering at Fisk in 1966, Long warned attendees not to “be engulfed by the extremes of the rising tide of pure black nationalism.” Long understood why the movement began to drift toward the direction of black power and he felt it was here with a “strong and healthy presence.” The new language and rhetoric complete with new symbols, all indicated self-consciousness and pride. Nevertheless, he frequently warned that the revolutionary movement must prevent itself from becoming nationalistic and racist in its appeal.

Apparently, there was no consensus among black leaders regarding the efficacy of the sit-ins. Speaking at Fisk in April 1960, future Supreme Court justice Thurgood Marshall implored the students not to stay in jail and refuse bail. The way to change America Marshall maintained was to utilize the courts. John Lewis disagreed. “It was clear to me that evening,” wrote Lewis, “that Thurgood Marshall, along with so many of his generation, just did not understand the essence of what we, the younger blacks of America were doing.” Incidentally, as a result of the student led sit-ins, Marshall’s chief biographer Juan Williams, noted the Legal Defense Fund was raising substantially more money in 1960 than the year before.
Notwithstanding the reservations of some older black leaders, the economic impact of student demonstrations was quite substantial. Vivian Henderson, a distinguished Fisk economist who studied black purchasing power believed that in March 1960 downtown Nashville stores lost approximately two hundred and fifty thousand dollars. The food business in downtown stores ran as high as forty per cent of total sales and sometimes as high as fifty per cent of gross profits of all total downtown sales. Ironically, the American Missionary Association, which created Fisk, and supported the sit-ins, held stock in some companies that Fisk students were demonstrating against such as Woolworth’s and Kress. During the 1950s the American Missionary Association owned over five thousand dollars worth of Woolworth stock and over fifteen thousand dollars worth of Kress stock before the stock was liquidated.  

Unfortunately, James Lawson had been expelled from Vanderbilt Divinity School on the same day as the previously mentioned bi-racial compromise. The expulsion came without a hearing or faculty approval. The day before Lawson’s dismissal, the Nashville Banner ran a story that Lawson was trained in India for the mission in Nashville. A companion article describing Indian Prime Minster Nehru praising Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev was strategically placed next to the Lawson article, inferring a Communist conspiracy of sorts. Despite, civil rights leaders diligent efforts to distance themselves from accusations of promoting Communism, many Americans clearly believed that ulterior motives were behind civil rights activity. The question of infiltration by left wing elements became a source of some concern at regular meetings of the Nashville Christian Leadership Conference and students were warned to be vigilant.

The sit-ins awakened a sense of achievement among students at Fisk and other colleges that continued with the call by Ella Baker for an Easter weekend conference to be held at Shaw University in Raleigh, North Carolina, on April 15-17 1960. In wake of the Montgomery bus boycott in Alabama, Baker was recruited to work with the SCLC, but she knew her time with the organization was limited. Unfortunately, sexism by King and other male leaders within the civil rights movement hindered Baker’s continued advancement within the group. Nevertheless, Baker persuaded the SCLC to appropriate eight hundred dollars to help create a student led organization that would not be controlled by the older and more conservative civil rights organizations.

Marion Barry and Diane Nash were among a group of sixteen Nashville students who arrived in three cars for the student conference at Shaw University. In fact, the Nashville
contingent was one of the largest attending the conference and Fisk students played key leadership roles. In an attempt to recognize the influential Atlanta delegation, the chairmanship of the new organization went to Marion Barry of Fisk but the headquarters was housed in Atlanta.\textsuperscript{60}

Julian Bond of the Atlanta group was struck by the differences between the Atlanta and the Nashville contingents. “Atlanta was a mercantile city where business and money talked, so activists in Atlanta tried to use economic power against the establishment,” said Bond. By contrast, Nashville with its church schools and religious publishing houses was going to “love segregation to death.” Unfortunately, Bond’s sophistry seemed to diminish the previous efforts of the Nashville Christian Leadership Conference. In fact, the SCLC decision not to include the Nashville group in its promotional literature entitled, “The SCLC Story in Words and Pictures,” caused some resentment and Reverend Kelly Miller Smith was compelled to respond in 1964. Writing to Ed Clayton of the SCLC, Smith assured the office, “while I have no personal complaint, we were quite surprised that the movement in Nashville was not brought into the picture.” It appeared that Bond and the SCLC leadership were merely reflecting a competitive economic and class divide that the larger black bourgeoisie of Atlanta seemingly nurtured. Despite class divisions, a new organization, The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee designed to combat evil and suffering with love and nonviolence was created. Thankful students profusely praised Martin Luther King Jr. and Ella Baker for their financial contribution and guidance regarding SNCC’s initial goal of promulgating information concerning the movement.\textsuperscript{61}

As Diane Nash and the other students returned from North Carolina, word came that Attorney Looby’s home had been bombed. The force of the April 19 explosion damaged two neighboring houses and blew out approximately one hundred forty-seven windows across the street at Meharry Medical College. The front of the Looby home was destroyed but Looby and his wife were in the back of the dwelling and miraculously were unharmed. Domestic terrorism against African-Americans was common and the message was clear. However, the attack galvanized the community and nearly 3,000 people, including some white residents held an impromptu march. The Fusons were one of several white families emotionally distressed by the bombing. Fisk faculty member Nelson Fuson and his wife Marian personally expressed their dismay and offered help to the Loobys. Even the Fuson’s third grade son Dan, to his parent’s delight, helped raise money for the Looby’s at his elementary school. The total loss to the Looby
home was about $15,500 with a little more than $3,000 covered by insurance. Fortunately, the NCLC spearheaded a drive that raised an additional four thousand dollars for the Loobys.\textsuperscript{62}

The bombing forced the issue of human rights upon a public that could no longer ignore the dangers associated with challenging segregation. On the very day of the bombing, Diane Nash and Reverend C. T. Vivian led an estimated 3,000 silent marchers some three to four abreast toward city hall to meet with Mayor Ben West. John Lewis thought around five thousand was a more accurate number. After a verbal confrontation between Mayor West and Reverend Vivian, Diane Nash pressed the mayor openly to favor lunch counter desegregation and to the mayor’s surprise he found himself agreeing to such an act.\textsuperscript{63}

Many Fisk faculty concurred with student demands and continued to play key roles in the local effort to obtain civil rights. The Fusons was only one Fisk family deeply committed to civil rights. Nelson Fuson was born in Canton, China, in 1913 the son of Presbyterian Missionaries. After attending Shanghi American School Nelson returned to the United States and received his A.B. degree from the College of Emporia in Kansas. Nelson continued his education at the University of Kansas where he received the A. M. degree before earning a doctorate from the University of Michigan in physics.\textsuperscript{64}

Fuson was teaching conversational Chinese at Pendle Hill, a Quaker school during World War II when he met Marian Darnell, a 1942 graduate of Oberlin College from Moorestown, New Jersey. Nelson and Marian were married in 1945 in Marian’s hometown and the young couple eventually moved to Washington, D. C., when Nelson received a grant to study at Johns Hopkins University. Nelson supplemented his salary during the 1948 and 1949 school year by teaching at Howard University before being asked to teach at Fisk.\textsuperscript{65}

In 1950, James R. Lawson, a 1935 graduate of Fisk who also earned a doctorate in physics at the University of Michigan contacted Nelson and arranged for then president Charles S. Johnson of Fisk to stop by the Fuson home. Johnson spent time holding the Fuson’s newborn son Allan while he persuaded Nelson to move to Nashville and accept a position as an associate professor of Physics at Fisk.\textsuperscript{66}

The Fusons were active in civil rights issues early during their tenure in Nashville as they were also members of the same international religious organization that employed Reverend James Lawson. Nelson, historian August Meier and other faculty and staff were on the membership committee for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
while Marian Fuson arranged time between her busy schedule as a homemaker to address discriminatory issues.\(^{67}\)

The Fusons effectively utilized their time and money attacking segregation and discrimination on diverse fronts in Nashville. Marian’s delicate chiding of the Civic Music Association’s refusal to allow qualified black children positions in the local youth symphony coupled with Nelson’s numerous letters contesting discrimination by local businesses helped support student demands for change. Nelson closely followed the dismissal of Reverend Lawson from the Vanderbilt Divinity School and wrote numerous letters decrying the injustice done to Lawson. Additionally, Fuson’s constant demands for local businesses to treat blacks equally helped maintain pressure on the system of racial segregation.\(^ {68}\)

An example of the Fuson’s resolve was a letter written to Sears Roebuck and Company in April 1960 inquiring whether the Nashville Sears Store served Negro customers at their lunch counters. After Sears failed to respond, the Fusons sent their charge card back with a noble statement of purpose. “We cannot consider trading at a store which will permit us to eat at its lunch counter but would not extend the same comfort and courtesy to our Negro friends with whom we often shop.” Therefore, they continued, “our Sears Revolving Charge plate is thus no longer useful to us. . . .”\(^ {69}\)

In 1960, the arrest of Fisk student and Fuson baby sitter Elena Gooch, prompted increased civil rights involvement by the Fusons. Many Fisk faculty members supported student protest efforts and called on local leaders to reconsider their policy of arresting persons seeking service in public restaurants and hotels. Nelson, as chairman of the Nashville Branch of the Fellowship of Reconciliation, was the contact person for Oberlin College students concerned with civil rights in Nashville. Oberlin students raised over $2,500 for the Nashville Christian Leadership Conference. Additionally, church youth groups from around the country sought guidance from the Fusons before touring Nashville and other southern cities. The Fusons actively fostered cooperation among like-minded whites concerned with human rights. Visiting professors at Vanderbilt even wrote Nelson to ask where they should donate money.\(^ {70}\)

One of the most influential whites working with the Fusons was the independently wealthy Martha Ragsdale Ragland. Ragland was born in 1906 near Russellville, Kentucky, and later graduated from Vanderbilt in 1927 and 1928 with undergraduate and master’s degrees in economics. She became active in political, health and women’s issues after her marriage to
Thomas Ragland in 1932 and supported Planned Parenthood, the League of Women Voters and several other civil rights issues through the years.  

Since Martha Ragland was active on a local, state and federal level she eventually crossed paths with the Fusons and evidently the elder sage had much to teach Marian about effective public speaking. Martha advised Marian to do surveys that would add more facts and figures to her speeches at community meetings. “You are like a storm at the beach,” wrote Martha, “bringing in all manner of unexpected and unfamiliar objects. In this case you churn up chaotic and half-formed ideas instead of shells. . . .”  

Meanwhile, SNCC students such as Diane Nash, Pauline Knight and Bernard Lafayette maintained frequent contact with the Fusons regarding their optimistic involvement in the movement. Such optimism fueled the “Freedom Rides” of 1961 through the south initiated by the Congress of Racial Equality and continued with SNCC help. The freedom rides proved to be a baptism by fire as students were beaten and jailed in Mississippi for riding buses through the segregated South. The intrepid John Lewis noted the deplorable living conditions, poor food and beatings that were common occurrences in Mississippi jails.

Eventually, public recognition enveloped the Freedom Riders in unique ways. Albert Bigelow, former navy commander and Quaker activist who served jail time in 1958 for sailing a ship named the *Golden Rule*, into an American test site in the Marshall Islands in the Pacific, wrote Nelson and Marian Fuson of how impressed he was with John Lewis, “one of the finest.” “Mature, brave and bright.” Bigelow broke his own rule regarding lending money and gave Lewis a hundred dollars to help with expenses. Bigelow appealed to the Fusons to find scholarship aid for Lewis but money was in short supply. Fortunately, Lewis won a scholarship to study philosophy at Fisk University in the fall of 1961 with the help of Martin Luther King and the SCLC. Apparently, freedom ride fame was not always good. According to Lewis, “many professors at Fisk, as well as many of my fellow students thought I was some sort of weird character, that I was not really in school but just using Fisk as a base of operations. . . .”

Evidently, Diane Nash’s civil rights activity met with a similar reaction from the Fisk administration. David Halberstam noted that the more she did in the movement, the more it seemed to offend Fisk officials such as Dean Anne S. Cheatham. After the Looby bombing, Nash and other student leaders were besieged with requests to appear as guests before national organizations and television news programs. Some Fisk administrators implied that Nash would have been dismissed from school were it not for the national press she received because “she
simply seemed to forget she was a student of Fisk University.” In the end, Nash did drop out of college in 1961 and became a full time paid worker for the local branches of both SNCC and the SCLC. Annual giving to Fisk University did not decrease because of student activity as many feared because the university was financed by outside money from the North and not dependent on local resources. However, the looming Black Power movement changed the financial situation for Fisk and other black organizations.

Ironically, the efficacy of mass student efforts for equal rights in the 1950s and 1960s can be seen in the basic lack of knowledge of people or events surrounding the civil rights movement among the average high school and college students of today, who seem sometimes to think the country was always desegregated. Distant memories may signal success, but painful reminders of race once forgotten by many, often resurfaces among those least economically able to defend themselves.75
Notes to Chapter VI

1 “We Shall Over-Come: Songs of the Freedom Riders and the Sit-ins,” Fuson Papers, Box 3 folder 20, Vanderbilt Special Collections, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tennessee.


4 Wolters, The New Negro on Campus: Black College Rebellions of the 1920s, 144; Thomas E. Jones to James Weldon Johnson, 21 January 1931, James Weldon Johnson Papers, Box 1 folder 2, Fisk University Library Special Collections Department, Nashville, Tennessee; Thomas E. Jones to James Weldon Johnson, 6 June 1931, James Weldon Johnson Papers, Box 1 folder 2, Fisk University Library Special Collections; Thomas E. Jones to James Weldon Johnson, 8 November 1934, James Weldon Johnson Papers, Box 1 folder 3, Fisk University Library Special Collections; James Weldon Johnson to Thomas E. Jones, 26 November 1934, James Weldon Johnson Papers, Box 1 folder 3, Fisk University Library Special Collections; Robert E. Hemenway, Zora Neale Hurston: A Literary Biography (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1980), 205. Ibid., 206.


6 Blyden Jackson, “A Postlude to a Renaissance,” The Southern Review 26 (October 1990): 746; Arthur R. Berry to Keith W. Berry, 17 July 2000; August Meier, A White Scholar and the Black Community 1945-1965: Essays and Reflections (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1992), 17; Apparently, Meier did not get along personally with President Charles S. Johnson. Meier noted that teaching at Fisk was “an exhilarating, if sometimes frustrating experience. In the spring of 1956 Charles S. Johnson, peeved at a satirical piece I had written about Fisk for a student magazine, used the occasion of a structural change in faculty arrangements to fail to renew my contract.” See, Meier, A White Scholar and the Black Community, 18.

7 Jackson, “A Postlude to a Renaissance,” 759.

8 “Statement Regarding Train Difficulties,” Race Relations Department Papers, Box 133 folder 1, Amistad Research Center, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana.


20 Ibid., 84.


24 Halberstam, The Children, 73.

25 “United Church of Christ Archives, Manuscripts and Related Holdings,” [Index] October 1996; Lillian Voorhees to Fred Brownlee, Lillian Voorhees Papers, Box 15 folder 8, Amistad Research Center, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana.


29 Halberstam, The Children, 177.


35 “Biographical Data,” Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Papers, Box 21 folder 352, Martin Luther King Jr. Center, Atlanta, Georgia; John Lewis and Michael D’Orso, Walking with the Wind: A Memoir of the Movement, 20; Ibid., 22, 28; Halberstam, The Children, 67.

37 “Records of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference Index,” Martin Luther King Jr. Center, Atlanta, Georgia; Nelson and Marian D. Fuson Papers, Box 3 folder 9, Vanderbilt Special Collections, Vanderbilt University, Nashville Tennessee; David J. Garrow, Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King Jr., and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (New York: Quill Press, 1986), 89; Ibid., 90.

38 “Biographical Data,” Box 16 folder 22, Kelly Miller Smith Papers, Vanderbilt Special Collections, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tennessee.

39 “Biographical Data,” Box 16 folder 22, Kelly Miller Smith Papers, Vanderbilt Special Collections; John Lewis and Michael D’Orso, Walking with the Wind: A Memoir of the Movement, 82.


43 Thomas Rose and John Greenya, eds., Black Leaders Then and Now: A Personal History of Students who Led the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s And What Happened to Them, 47, Student Sit-In Movement Papers, Loose leaf pamphlet, no box or folder number, Fisk University Special Collections, Fisk University, Nashville, Tennessee; Halberstam, The Children, 219, 63; John Lewis and Michael D’Orso, Walking with the Wind: A Memoir of the Movement, 91.


“The Sit-in Protest Study Report,” Race Relations Department, Amistad Research Center, Box 130 folder 15, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana.


47 John Lewis and Michael D’Orso, Walking with the Wind: A Memoir of the Movement, 101-103; “Sit In,” Kelly Miller Smith Papers, Box 76 folder 22, Vanderbilt Special Collections; “Lunch Counter Suggestions,” Kelly Miller Smith Papers, Box 76 folder 6, Vanderbilt Special Collections; Peter B. Levy, ed., Documentary History of the Modern Civil Rights Movement (New York: Greenwood Press, 1992), 68.


49 When I awoke this morning snow was on the ground. The cold, white ashes had covered all with their insulting and mocking beauty, falling quietly while we slept. . . .I want to cry, but ache is all the response. I shake myself. The ashes have not moved. A few raindrops are starting to fall. Maybe God is crying for us Candida, but does He have that many tears? see, “The Death of Justice in Nashville,” Fuson Papers, Box 3 folder 24, Vanderbilt Special Collections, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tennessee.

50 “Sit In,” Kelly Miller Smith Papers, Box 76 folder 22, Vanderbilt Special Collections; Halberstam, The Children, 229; Don H. Doyle, Nashville since the 1920s (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1985), 228; “A Salute to Z. Alexander Looby, Esquire,” Kelly Miller Smith Papers, Box 17 folder 5, Vanderbilt Special Collections.


52 Collins, One Hundred Years of Fisk University Presidents: 1875-1975, 153; John Lewis and Michael D’Orso, Walking With the Wind: A Memoir of the Movement, 109; “The Influence of Student Demonstrations on Southern Negro Colleges Study,” Race Relations Department, Box 129 folder 13, Amistad Research Center, Tulane University, New Orleans Louisiana; Herman Long to Stephen J. Wright, 10 March 1960, Box 130 folder 13, Race Relations Department, Amistad Research Center, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana.

Herman H. Long to Charles T. Steele, 25 March 1960, Race Relations Department Box 130 folder 13, Amistad Research Center, Tulane University, New Orleans Louisiana.


John Lewis and Michael D’Orso, Walking With the Wind: A Memoir of the Movement, 113; Jauan Williams, Thurgood Marshall: American Revolutionary (New York: Times Books, 1998), 288; The Legal Defense Fund was technically separate from the NAACP since 1940 to allow tax-exempt contributions to flow into the LDF. The NAACP, which was openly political and lobbied Congress, was not tax exempt. See Williams, Thurgood Marshall: American Revolutionary, 259.


John Lewis and Michael D’Orso, Walking With the Wind: A Memoir of the Movement, 110; Branch, Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954-1963, 280; Sumner, “The Publisher and the Preacher: Racial Conflict at Vanderbilt University,” 39; The Nashville Banner 1 March 1960; “Minutes of the Executive Committee,” Kelly Miller Smith Papers, Box 76 folder 1, Vanderbilt Special Collections.


Halberstam, The Children, 217; “SNCC Constitution,” Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Papers, Box 25 folder 1, Martin Luther King Jr. Center, Atlanta, Georgia; “Statement of Purpose,” Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Papers Box 1 folder 1, Martin Luther King Jr. Center, Atlanta, Georgia; Kelly Miller Smith to Ed Clayton 10 June 1964, Martin Luther King Jr. Papers Box 16 folder 45, Martin Luther King Jr. Center, Atlanta, Georgia; Jane Stembridge to Martin Luther King Jr. 13 July 1960, Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Papers Box 9 folder 19, Martin Luther King Jr. Center, Atlanta, Georgia; Fortunately students
were unaware of the tension between King and Baker over the control of SNCC, see David Garrow, *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference*, 133.


63 Mayor West was ambushed morally and reflexively responded “yes” to a question as to whether lunch counters should be desegregated. Within a few days desegregation of the lunch counters quietly began. See, Halberstam, *The Children*, 234; John Lewis and Michael D’Orso, *Walking With the Wind: A Memoir of the Movement*, 116; Wynn, “The Dawning of a New Day: The Nashville Sit-Ins, February 13-May 10, 1960,” 51.

64 Telephone Interview with Nelson and Marion Fuson by Keith W. Berry 5 June 2002; *Fisk University Bulletin*, May 1950, Fisk University Special Collections, Fisk University, Nashville, Tennessee.

65 Telephone Interview with Nelson and Marion and Fuson by Keith W. Berry 5 June 2002.


67 Telephone Interview with Marion and Nelson Fuson by Keith W. Berry 5 June 2002; “The Fisk Campus Committee,” 25 February 1954, Fuson Papers Box 1 folder 11, Vanderbilt Special Collections.

68 Telephone Interview with Marion and Nelson Fuson by Keith W. Berry 5 June 2002; “The Fisk Campus Committee,” 25 February 1954, Fuson Papers Box 1 folder 11, Vanderbilt Special Collections; Marian Fuson to Mr. Barbour 4 February 1954, Fuson Papers Box 1 folder 1, Vanderbilt Special Collections; There are numerous letters written by Nelson Fuson asking local Nashville businesses to open their lunch counters to all citizens, see Fuson Papers Box 1 folder 2, Vanderbilt Special Collections, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tennessee.

69 Nelson and Marian Fuson to E. Mack Cates April [nd] 1960, Fuson Papers Box 1 folder 2, Vanderbilt Special Collections, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tennessee; Nelson and Marian Fuson to E. Mack Cates 14 June 1960, Fuson Papers Box 1 folder 2, Vanderbilt Special Collections, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tennessee.

70 Telephone Interview with Marion and Nelson Fuson by Keith W. Berry 5 June 2002; Faculty Meeting Minutes and Resolutions, 1940-1969, American Missionary Association Addendum Series A, Box 168 folder 15, Amistad Research Center, Tulane University, New Orleans,

Martha Ragland to Marian Fuson 9 January 1965, Fuson Papers Box 1 folder 4, Vanderbilt Special Collections.

Pauline Knight to Allan Fuson 14 June 1961, Fuson Papers Box 1 folder 4, Vanderbilt Special Collections; Bernard Lafayette to Nelson and Marian Fuson 17 August 1962, Fuson Papers Box 2 folder 9, Vanderbilt Special Collections; Diane Nash to Nelson and Marian Fuson 6 March 1961 Box 1 folder 4, Vanderbilt Special Collections; *Voice of the Movement*, 30 June 1961, Fuson Papers Box 2 folder 21, Vanderbilt Special Collections.


Halberstam, *The Children*, 268; *Fisk News*, “From the Jubilee Bell Tower,” (Summer 1960); “Dr. Stephen J. Wright,” Race Relations Department Box 111 folder 5, Amistad Research Center, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana; Halberstam, *The Children*, 269.
CHAPTER VII

Desegregation and Decline: Fisk University’s Struggle for Survival

“We must have Negro colleges. Society needs them. But they must be good colleges”
Leander L. Boykin

According to historian John Hope Franklin, three significant trends in higher education of blacks became prominent in the second half of the twentieth century. One was the dramatic increase in the enrollment of blacks in predominantly white colleges and universities. Another trend involved the increase of black administrators in higher education and finally, the number of black professors at white colleges and universities increased steadily during the post war years.\(^1\)

The Second World War and its aftermath proved to be both a boon and a bust for black colleges. For example, seventy-five black college presidents were asked to make statements regarding the impact of the war on their institutions, and forty-one presidents responded by expressing trepidation regarding the future of their respective colleges. The first major impact according to the questionnaire was a decrease in male enrollment as a result of selective service coupled with employment opportunities in defense industries. By 1949, decreased enrollment was actually welcomed by institutions lacking the infrastructure to handle the influx of veterans, yet the downside meant that most black colleges feared a decline in much needed revenue. Budget difficulties, loss of faculty and burgeoning student unrest were fast becoming undeniable realities that black colleges would have to master in order to survive.\(^2\)

Budget shortfalls were of constant concern for most colleges but black schools were especially hard pressed for funds. Black colleges were reluctant to raise fees because black family income in the South was so low. Enrollment declines caused by World War II coupled with relatively low student fees made it more difficult even for elite black schools such as Fisk. Frederick Patterson, president of Tuskegee Institute in Alabama contacted a number of private black college presidents in 1943 with an idea of addressing chronic budget shortfalls at black colleges by collectively raising money. Despite initial resistance from Fisk president Thomas
Elsa Jones who believed the effort would not succeed, Patterson and other presidents set about the task of creating the United Negro College Fund.\textsuperscript{4}

The first executive director of the United Negro College Fund was William J. Trent, Jr. working alongside Patterson who became the first president of the Fund. Prominent New York businessman Walter Hoving of the Lord and Taylor department store became the first national campaign chairman. Additionally, John D. Rockefeller, Jr. helped launch the campaign at the Waldorf Astoria by publicly supporting the effort. In the first campaign in 1944, with twenty-seven member colleges, 11,276 contributions were received amounting to $765,563 and the financial allocation for Fisk from the Fund that year was $39,905. Through private grants and the UNCF campaign, Fisk raised its endowment to $3,900,000 by 1946. By contrast, however, all white Vanderbilt University’s endowment that same year was approximately 38 million dollars.\textsuperscript{5}

Current income by 1947 matched current expenditures for that year and by the next year Fisk had a $1,450.37 surplus after current expenditures. Despite the apparent success of UNCF collections the amount going to Fisk was inadequate. In October 1948, President Johnson reported that “There is a substantial gap between the actual cost of operation and funds available for operating expenses from Fisk’s quota in the United Negro College Fund.” For the previous ten years, the General Education Board had supplied approximately $35,000 a year for general Fisk expenses pending the completion of an endowment-matching campaign which was concluded in June 1948. Although the GEB continued to support Fisk for an additional year, it was clearly evident that Fisk needed to fill the financial void left by the loss of that income. In fact, educational and general expenses had increased from $507,162.45 in 1947 to $560,666.09 in 1948. The expanding operational costs for the school, coupled with the loss of foundation money required at least an additional $36,000 and the replacement of the annual grant of $30,000 from the GEB according to Fisk officials.\textsuperscript{6}

Additionally, in 1949-50, caused in part by the onset of the Korean War, the number of veterans enrolling at Fisk declined from 253 the previous year to 193, thereby forcing an increase in student tuition from $250 to $300. Fisk leaders admitted that the school had been “uncomfortably congested,” over the past four or five years and the decrease relieved acute pressure, but added, “there is a relationship between tuitions and budget that could not be entirely ignored.” Despite severe financial difficulties, Fisk increased its endowment in 1953 by six hundred thousand dollars with the renewed help of the American Missionary Association
which voted Fisk a continuing annual grant equivalent to $200,000 while the General Education Board agreed to match this grant on a 2 for 1 basis. This was no doubt a testament to the influence of Charles S. Johnson. Despite the above grants, Fisk was dependent on tuition and in 1955 Johnson’s report to the Board of Trustees highlighted concerns about the ability of the average family to pay tuition. Johnson maintained that, “We have kept tuition moderate by balancing the difference with larger grants from educational foundations, endowment income and other sources.” Unfortunately, for Fisk, its foundation connections waned after Johnson’s death in 1956.7

The Fisk Alumni Association tried to ameliorate the university’s financial woes by abolishing the alumni dues plan for giving which allowed the association to spend money as it pleased and adopting the alumni fund plan. Under the new system, funds went directly to specific projects. Alumni increased their contribution to the college from $4,021.60 in 1948-49 to $10,609.13 the next year in order to equip the gymnasium. Evidently, basketball remained a popular sport on campus. The administration often ignored alumni wishes and shifted monies to cover expenses in undesignated areas. For example, $18,000 that the alumni association raised to furnish Scribner Hall at Fisk was turned over to the administration in 1951 to finance the more pressing need of funding the endowment. Alumni contributions totaled almost $100,000 during the 1950s, but this was not enough to resolve ongoing financial problems that were compounded by the tumultuous racial climate of the era.8

The laws of Tennessee mandated segregation in all forms of education in 1901. Although white faculty member’s children attended Fisk prior to 1901 and white exchange students matriculated prior to the 1960s, an overwhelming majority of students were black. However, when the walls of segregation finally began crumbling Fisk faced a new set of challenges. The admission of a select few black graduate students to the University of Tennessee in 1952 marked the first occasion that a public university of the state officially opened its doors to everyone. The threat of desegregation also confronted Fisk with new competition from black state supported schools and eventually white state supported institutions charging lower tuition 9

Ironically, the strengthening of black state supported schools began with an effort by state governments to prevent blacks from attending white state schools. In 1936, Lloyd Gaines applied for admission to the law school at the University of Missouri and was denied admission based upon race. The case worked its way up to the Supreme Court in December and Gaines won a surprising victory in 1938. The court ruled that states had the responsibility to provide
comparable education within their borders for all citizens. Prior to 1938, private black institutions were educating fifty-four percent of all blacks that attended college. After Gaines, states begin strengthening their public institutions of higher learning for Negroes in order to prevent blacks from enrolling in white schools. As a result, private black colleges were faced with growing competition for faculty, students and the income derived from them. Competition from junior colleges also added to the challenge. In fact, concerns about the growth of junior colleges had been voiced since the 1950s as Fisk officials noted the increasing number of two year institutions. During the last half century the public junior college had by far the greatest rate of growth of all major types of colleges and universities in the country.\textsuperscript{10}

Fisk officials were compelled to find new ways to achieve enrollment. In what seemed to be a contradictory move, the university made a conscious effort to limit the enrollment of women beginning in 1945, evidently to allow returning veterans choice educational opportunities. But, the dependency upon military enrollment was problematic given the cyclical nature of veteran availability. Regardless of wartime necessity or its peaceful aftermath, female enrollment far outpaced men at the undergraduate level. Summer graduate school enrollment was also especially high among women when compared to men. A major factor in the decrease in enrollment after 1947 according to the administration was the gradual depletion of G. I. benefits which assisted hundreds of World War II veterans at Fisk. Of the over 1,000 students enrolled in 1947, more than one-fourth were veterans. The distribution of students by sex between 1945 and 1970 is given in the following table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total Enrollment</th>
<th>Decrease or Increase</th>
<th>Undergraduate Total</th>
<th>Undergraduate Total Men</th>
<th>Undergraduate Total Women</th>
<th>Graduate Total</th>
<th>Graduate Total Men</th>
<th>Graduate Total Women</th>
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<td>---</td>
<td>782</td>
<td>227</td>
<td>555</td>
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<td>454</td>
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<td>-105</td>
<td>852</td>
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<td>247</td>
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<td>-47</td>
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<td>Change</td>
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<td>Change</td>
<td>Students</td>
<td>Graduates</td>
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<td>56</td>
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<td>19</td>
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<td>-19</td>
<td>914</td>
<td>312</td>
<td>602</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>12</td>
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<td>345</td>
<td>624</td>
<td>51</td>
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<td>361</td>
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<td>34</td>
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<td>N/A</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>N/A</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Census data indicates that in the United States black women outnumbered black men from 1940 to 1970. Even by 1980, the black female population was 11.6% higher than the black male population. Given the sheer number of women that matriculated at Fisk, it is interesting to note that promotional materials often highlighted men, and in some ways appeared unintentionally to denigrate women. Although Fisk did not exclude women in promotional material, extensive sections such as “Fisk woman graduates may seek careers or they may be the inspiring and helpful wives of men of distinction,” was promulgated to infer that Fisk would help fashion young women into becoming acceptable wives.

Certainly many faculty members promoted the intellectual growth of female students as evidenced by math professor Lee Lorch’s example, but Fisk administrators could often seem paternalistic regarding women. A 1955 president’s report to the trustees stated that the academic curriculum at Fisk should be better tailored to suit the needs of women. It was observed that:

. . . The other problem is still in the controversial stage. It points to the need for a careful study of the peculiar academic needs of women
students at Fisk for the purpose of providing for them the basic training and experience necessary to enable them to participate successfully in those activities in American life in which women alone engage. . .” “At Fisk for example, considerable emphasis is placed upon pre-professional preparation for medicine, law, dentistry, and engineering; upon business administration, upon research in the sciences and the social sciences; and upon preparation for diplomatic and educational services in foreign lands. These are activities which very few of our women students engage, but they attract a large number of our men students.\textsuperscript{14}

Unfortunately, the administration seemed unwilling to promote male dominated fields to female students. The seeming lack of desire by women to engage in particular career paths were not exclusively the fault of Fisk or its administration, but, promotional literature highlighted the administrations desperate effort to attract and maintain male student enrollment.

To stem the tide of dropping enrollment, in 1952, Fisk implemented a number of initiatives, including departmental recruiting, extension of evening and weekend classes, increased work aid, outside funds for teaching and research, and long range recruiting efforts. Although enrollment stabilized somewhat, the slow decline became such a problem due to the lack of revenue that fewer students generated that the United Negro College Fund relaxed restrictions regarding soliciting alumni and foundations interested in specific schools.\textsuperscript{15}

In addition to concerns regarding student enrollment, faculty recruitment became another issue for Fisk to address. Institutions such as Fisk found themselves in a recruiting battle with white and black state supported schools as blacks benefited from civil rights struggles. Scholar Earl McGrath noted that, “the desire of predominantly white institutions in the North to show their interest in the equal rights movement by engaging Negro faculty members is laudable,” but McGrath and other scholars such as Rayford Logan were concerned about the loss of faculty and the potential effect upon black colleges. McGrath believed that white institutions had a moral obligation to replace faculty recruited from a black college so as not to encourage the intellectual impoverishment of black colleges.\textsuperscript{16}

Since there was a shortage of African-Americans with advanced degrees, departing black faculty sometimes had to be replaced with capable whites. Educator Fred Paterson observed, “I fear Negro colleges have gotten the culls of white professional talent or those merely seeking experience. The process of faculty integration racially must not be confused by equating white with excellence. . .” Since there was a paucity of African-American faculty, it was often necessary to employ larger numbers of white faculty.\textsuperscript{17}
Lack of adequate resources and increasing competition made it difficult for even a notable institution such as Fisk to retain faculty. There had been only two salary increases from 1946 to 1951 (five percent) which was obviously did not keep pace with the rising cost of living. According to the index of the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, the cost of living increased during the decade of 1940-1950 by seventy-three percent. Therefore, the real income of faculty members declined materially. Johnson’s 1951 presidential report to the Fisk board of trustees admitted that Fisk could not compete with the salaries offered by state supported schools. Lack of adequate faculty compensation remained an issue during the 1960s and beyond.  

Some scholars suggested that prior to desegregation black colleges benefited from the fact that black faculty opportunities were limited. Certainly, segregation allowed elite schools such as Fisk to profit from the availability of black teaching talent, but too often, employment at many black colleges was based upon paternalism, where behavior could frequently become more important than credentials. Assuredly, Fisk was not immune from a certain degree of paternalism at times, yet faculty was often able to rise above the fray. The 1960s brought new challenges regarding faculty morale, student retention and the availability of foundation grants.  

Student retention accompanied Fisk’s problems of enrollment and faculty recruitment. Black high school graduates dramatically increased during the post war years, but competition for them was fierce. The number of African-Americans aged twenty-five and over who completed four years of high school increased steadily from the 1940s through 1960s and potentially created an opportunity to expand the Fisk student body. In 1940, both male and female blacks aged twenty-five and over completed high school at a rate of only 7.7 percent compared to 26.1 percent for whites. Black high school completion rates increased to 33.7 percent by the beginning of the 1970s. This was a far cry from the 57.4 percent completion rate of whites; nevertheless, the increased pool of black students became a rallying point for Fisk to compete for the brightest students when attempting to increase its enrollment. Maintaining a quality student body was a daunting task and some Fisk officials feared that the need to increase enrollment would lower the academic quality of the institution.  

By the end of the 1960s, Fisk became so concerned about future student attendance that a Fisk University Planning Team composed of faculty and administrators recommended seeking junior college graduates whom the university previously avoided. Dean of Education George Redd expressed grave concerns at a planning meeting that increasing the size of the student body
would lower quality. When his colleague Dr. Paul Puryear asked why a larger number of students would change the nature of the institution, Redd rather arrogantly concluded that, “he would rather have one thousand students who could pay their own way than to expand the student body beyond one thousand and in doing so, lower its quality.” Desegregation and financially enhanced black state schools had taken away many good students that previously would have gone to Fisk, and compelled it to change the student body composition. Apparently, Fisk would have to lower its standards somewhat and increase remedial programs in order to increase enrollment. Fisk tried both approaches. Some students protested the lack of academic rigor while other student leaders demanded that Fisk stop exploiting students that were not academically prepared by taking their money and not providing adequate remedial programs to assure their success. Both enrollment and student retention were continuing problems. In addition to dealing with problems of enrollment, student retention and faculty recruitment, Fiskites engaged in a debate about exactly what type of university Fisk should be. Each phase of the civil rights movement affected Fisk, and the Black power movement was no exception.

Many students and alumni wanted Fisk to retain its identity as a “black university,” much like Brandeis, Yeshiva and European universities retained their cultural heritage, however, black colleges were pulled in two different directions. The famed Swedish economist Gunnar Myrdal, author of a massive tome on race relations, suggested in a speech given at historically black Howard University in 1962, that imminent integration meant the end of black institutions. For other observers, black colleges were part of a proud justifiable tradition of achievement. Myrdal prophesized that all schools would be open to merit and that there “will be no place for a Negro university.” In the view of many African-Americans, his position left room for predominantly white universities to continue to exist, while the loss of a cultural environment beneficial in many ways for blacks would be lost. Large numbers of a particular race can produce an environment that may be especially helpful to some young students who are unsure of their place in society. The sheer number of historically black colleges may not be necessary but the culture retained by them is. Speaking at a Race Relations Institute in 1966, Wesley Hotchkiss of the American Missionary Association said that black colleges “must become more Caucasian racially while becoming more conscious of its Negro heritage without apology.” Hotchkiss and other well meaning people desired to increase income for black colleges by enrolling whites as well as desegregating education, but most Fisk students disagreed. They pushed for a “black university,” that would promote black liberation. Black liberation, was not
necessarily anti-white. For some students it meant simply self-affirmation and control. Although the desire to create a “black university” or an educational emphasis that validated black students was not necessarily as exclusionary as it sounds, the rhetoric was disturbing to some. Obtaining autonomy without isolating themselves from whites completely was a delicate task few students and black liberation leaders mastered. Fisk and other black private schools needed money from whites as well as blacks. Self-determination is easier to achieve from a position of strength. Fisk faculty member Lee Lorch acknowledged that while most students were African-American, black institutions such as Fisk were not completely controlled by African-Americans. Sadly, some students did not know how to express their yearning for self-respectful independence, nor did some students desire such a goal.  

Some Fisk students disrupted campus with violence by damaging property and sending hundreds of letters to philanthropic organizations rudely advising them to keep their money as they intended to be supported by black donors. These students evidently desired the removal of white students and faculty. Fortunately, not all students agreed with these extreme notions. Fisk student government candidate Wendell Allen saw the fallacy of the extreme positions taken by some students. Allen approved of creating African Studies programs but he thought that the notion that some students held of an all black faculty was “ridiculous as well as financial and academic suicide.”

Inevitably, the civil rights revolution placed Fisk in the position that so many black organizations routinely found themselves regarding race, economics and self-determination. In fact, the independence of many organizations that promoted civil rights for blacks was dependent upon the largess of the larger white community. Some Fisk students vented their frustration by proclaiming control of their own destiny while simultaneously trying to avoid alienating white support. Eventually, peaceful direct action methods utilized by the national civil rights movement garnered sympathy around the world. As expectations for equal rights increased, however, so too did the rhetoric. Professor August Meier was perceptive enough to understand the transition when he explained:

It is natural that Negroes should want to discard paternalistic white leadership. But the ironic result is that a movement for racial equality operates ideologically with the notion that whites should be subordinate in it to Negroes. Undoubtedly this is a passing phase; as we approach genuine full citizenship for American Negroes this sort of anomaly will disappear.
Increasing impatience with the slow move toward black equality for many students grew and manifested itself in the strident rhetoric and posturing that made many whites and some blacks uncomfortable. Moreover, leadership changes by mid 1965 and 1966 within many civil rights organizations changed the tone and receptiveness of their message. Fisk student John Lewis left the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee shortly after losing an election to the more strident Stokely Carmichael in 1966. Lewis thought that the notion of blacks developing solutions for themselves was fine, but he was not going to separate himself from the larger community around him. Martin Luther King, Jr. aide, Bayard Rustin addressing a 1967 Race Relations Institute at Fisk seemed to concur with this assessment and suggested that blacks needed to seek alliances. Unlike professor Meier, many whites could not intellectualize why the militant rhetoric was necessary and it produced a backlash. Regardless of conclusions concerning this phase, finances remained the single most serious problem for Fisk and most other private black colleges during this particular period.  

Fisk faculty member Leslie Collins wrote that President Stephen J. Wright believed that his defense of student efforts to gain citizenship would ultimately make contributions to Fisk increasingly difficult to secure. Despite the turmoil of the 1960s, national higher education revenues increased steadily throughout the decade, but Fisk faced even greater economic peril under Wright and his successor’s leadership. As mentioned earlier, Fisk tried to recruit more students in order to deal with financial matters. In 1960, Wright began to plead with alumni to help increase freshmen enrollment. He specifically asked alumni to recruit two-hundred male students each year to meet pressing enrollment goals as the majority of Fisk income came from student tuition and fees.  

In 1964 Wright appointed twenty year employee and Fisk librarian Arna Bontemps as Director of Development with major responsibilities for fund raising. Bontemps was unable to improve the school’s financial situation. Additionally, under Wright’s leadership Fisk tried to increase its endowment by initiating a centennial endowment campaign. The Executive Committee of the General Alumni Association at their annual meeting of June 2, 1961, voted that the alumni share in the Centennial Program and raise a total of eight hundred and fifty thousand dollars toward the goal of six million. Unfortunately, the campaign was an abysmal failure and Wright abruptly resigned his post in 1966. Wright’s successor, Raymond Lawson assumed the presidency in 1967, but Fisk continued facing woeful money problems and President Lawson’s effort to pay off debts led him to begin spending the principal of the Fisk
endowment. Eventually, Lawson was also forced to resign in 1975 because of his failure to acquire more income for Fisk. 30

Fisk graduate, W.E.B. Du Bois explained that the role of black colleges was to maintain the standards of popular education while seeking the social regeneration of the Negro. More importantly, Du Bois said race contact and cooperation helped develop men. Fisk was successful on all points. It has played an integral role in the survival of African-Americans and been a jewel in the educational crown of America. But racial problems are far from solved. However much African-Americans contributed to the progress of America, in 1970 the editors of Time Magazine announced that they would devote an entire issue to the overriding “problem of the black in America today.” Fisk was and is simply one of many black intuitions that have served a marginalized people who are still regarded as a problem. However bleak the outlook seems, African-Americans must take the lead in maintaining viable economic and educational institutions such as Fisk that will continue serving the community and the nation at large. The persistent push for civil rights by the Fisk community was successful, but more remains to be done. 31
Notes to Chapter VII


6 Isaiah T. Creswell to Charles S. Johnson, 4 September 1948, American Missionary Association Archives Box 168 folder 18, Amistad Research Center, Tulane University, New Orleans Louisiana; “Summary Report of the President to the Board of Trustees of Fisk University,” 25 October 1948, Box 169 folder 7 Amistad Research Center, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana.

7 “President’s Reports to Trustees,” 25 October 1949, American Missionary Association Addendum, Box 169 folder 8, Amistad Research Center; President’s Reports to Trustees,” 24 April 1953, American Missionary Association Addendum Series A Box 169 folder 10, Amistad Research Center; “President’s Report to Trustees 1955,” American Missionary Association Archives Addendum Series A, Box 170 folder 2, Amistad Research Center.

8 “President’s Reports to Trustees,” 27 April 1951, Box 169 folder 10, American Missionary Association Archives Addendum Series A, Amistad Research Center; “President’s Reports to Trustees,” 24 October 1950, Box 169 folder 9, American Missionary Association Archives Addendum Series A, Amistad Research Center; “President’s Reports to Trustees,” 25 October 1948, Box 169 folder 7, American Missionary Association Archives Addendum Series A, Amistad Research Center; “In Retrospect,” *Fisk News*, (Spring 1960).


11 *Fisk University Bulletins* 1945-1970, Fisk University Special Collections, Nashville, Tennessee; Net totals include first and second semesters and does not include summer enrollment; “President’s Report to the Trustees,” 23 April, 1954, American Missionary Association Addendum Series A, Box 170 folder 1, Amistad Research Center.


13 “Publications-Promotional Brochures,” American Missionary Association Addendum Series A, Box 171 folder 18, Amistad Research Center.


18 “President’s Report to Trustees,” 27 April, 1951, American Missionary Association Addendum Series A, Box 169 folder 10, Amistad Research Center.


21 “Fisk First 100 Years,” Clippings File, Fiskiana 1966, Amistad Research Center.


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CONCLUSION

Both Fisk University and Charles S. Johnson contributed to the long struggle for black civil rights and desegregation. Fisk was interracial from the beginning and taught white students, though most were faculty children, until prohibited by state law. Even then it maintained an interracial faculty and was a shining example that black and white men and women could live and work together harmoniously. Fisk always taught students that discrimination was wrong, and numerous Fiskites as disparate as W.E.B. Du Bois and Julius Lester became religious, educational, business, and civil rights leaders. Decades before the sit-in movement, Fisk students protested lynching, discrimination, and segregation, and pled for recognition of the dignity of African-Americans in the pages of the Fisk Herald, and through petitions, strikes, and public demonstrations. It was also one of the first southern black colleges to seek out white exchange students years before the United States Supreme Court declared segregated schools illegal in 1954. Fisk graduate, W.E.B. Du Bois, declared that that the role of black colleges was to maintain the standards of popular education while seeking the social regeneration of African Americans. More important, he added, education helped develop “men,” meaning mature, thoughtful, and compassionate, race conscious men and women.

The role of Charles S. Johnson in helping to bring the civil rights movement to fruition should not be underestimated. In nearly every major racial policy decision where blacks were involved, Johnson was consulted. Johnson often met stiff resistance to his ultimate goal of racial inclusion in the democratic system, yet he systematically established a plan to achieve his objectives. The deliberate insertion of black artistic talent throughout the pages of Opportunity Magazine in the 1920s to the establishment of a social sciences department that gathered data to examine the position of blacks were all conscious efforts to attain the dignity due all citizens. Johnson actively recruited students from other institutions to train and work at Fisk. Inevitably, Fisk became a training ground for activist social scientists and future college presidents such as
Herman Long and Vivian Henderson. Fisk was the ideal place for Johnson to launch an assault on racism and segregation given the history and interracial character of the institution.

Johnson and Fisk’s effort to make democracy real in the United States was enhanced with the creation of the Race Relations Department. Arguably, the Race Relations Department did more to support the goals of the NAACP than any other organization. Department publications, and systematic self-surveys of various cities helped form the basis for policy changes in segregated travel, housing, and hiring policies related to blacks. The NAACP was grateful for the help provided by the department toward addressing these concerns.

Beginning in the 1940s, the Race Relations Institutes led by Johnson, created a forum to address interracial concerns at a time when no other educational institution of higher learning in the south dared such a venture. Staffs from across the country were trained to deal forthrightly with racial problems facing various communities. Evidently, NAACP legal counsel Charles Houston and later Thurgood Marshall were greatly influenced by Institute efforts as they returned to participate year after year despite their busy schedules. No organization, including the NAACP, had the infrastructure to produce trained and educated citizens that could be placed within an existing framework of efforts to combat racism like Fisk. The Race Relations Department remained viable after Johnson’s death. Indeed, it became more activist under Herman Long’s leadership, not necessarily because Johnson was less cautious than Long, but because the department changed with the times. Long challenged segregation in Nashville schools, public parks, and on the golf courses. He consistently supported the NAACP by testifying in court cases and before congressional committees, and by collecting funds, providing publicity and leading membership campaigns. The Race Relations Department helped train students for civil rights activity, encouraged the sit-in movement, and black voter registration drives.

Johnson and Long played pivotal roles in bridging the gap between whites and blacks. Both participated in numerous interracial organizations. When the Southern Historical Association formally desegregated in 1955 at Memphis, Tennessee, it invited Johnson to be on the program. Although unable to attend, Johnson found black replacement speaker, Benjamin Mays, the president of Morehouse College in Atlanta, to speak at the first integrated banquet to be held at the Peabody Hotel in Memphis. Historian Fred A. Bailey’s article entitled, “The Southern Historical Association and the Quest for Racial Justice, 1954-1963,” in The Journal of
Southern History’s 2005 November issue, highlights Johnson’s involvement in the quest for equal rights. By the time of Johnson’s death in 1956, Fisk had distinguished itself as a training ground for black intellectual leadership.

Aside from the Race relations Department, Fisk faculty, both black and white, strove to improve the position of blacks in American society. Their efforts ranged from boycotting merchants who discriminated based on race, protesting segregated seating on trains, enrolling their children in segregated schools, attempting to desegregate professional educational societies, and sitting-in at segregated lunch counters. Fisk students, including Diane Nash, and John Lewis, engaged in sit-in attempts to desegregate Nashville restaurants and led local and national efforts to break down segregation and discrimination. The battle is not yet over. Celebration of the dramatic change in the position of African Americans since World War II, to which Fisk and Johnson contributed significantly, must be tempered by the knowledge that many blacks were left behind, unable to take full advantage of the opportunities that prepared blacks could assume. The legacy and lesson that Charles S. Johnson and Fisk left behind was that a vision based upon solid education and training must be implemented first, before one embarks on too many fronts like “the brave knight of old who jumped on his horse and rode off in all directions.”
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THESES AND DISSERTATIONS


BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Keith W. Berry was born in Tallahassee, Florida, in 1965 on the campus of Florida A. and M. University (FAMU Hospital). He grew up in Albany, Georgia, and attended the public schools of the city, graduating from Monroe High School in 1983. Mr. Berry returned to Tallahassee and graduated from Florida A. and M. University with a degree in history in 1987. He entered Florida State University in the fall of 1987 and received the Master of Arts degree in the fall of 1991. He has been employed full-time at Hillsborough Community College since 1994 and is currently a tenured instructor of history.