



Administrative Recalcitrance and Government Intervention: Desegregation at the University of Florida, 1962-1972

Author(s): Jessica Clawson

Source: *The Florida Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 89, No. 3 (Winter 2011), pp. 347-374

Published by: Florida Historical Society

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23035878>

Accessed: 01-04-2020 13:40 UTC

REFERENCES

Linked references are available on JSTOR for this article:

https://www.jstor.org/stable/23035878?seq=1&cid=pdf-reference#references_tab_contents

You may need to log in to JSTOR to access the linked references.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

Florida Historical Society is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Florida Historical Quarterly*

Administrative Recalcitrance and Government Intervention: Desegregation at the University of Florida, 1962-1972

by Jessica Clawson

The desegregation of American schools in the wake of the Supreme Court's 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* was often long, slow, violent, and varied considerably based on location, leadership, and community attitudes.¹ The national political climate also influenced local responses to desegregation, as grass-

Jessica Clawson is a doctoral fellow in Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Florida's College of Education. She would like to thank Sevan Terzian and Bill Fischer for their help in reading multiple drafts of this project and providing valuable feedback.

1. Terry H. Anderson, *The Movement and the Sixties: Protest in America from Greensboro to Wounded Knee* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); Dan T. Carter, *The Politics of Rage: George Wallace, the Origins of New Conservatism, and the Transformation of American Politics* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995); Joseph Crespino, *In Search of Another Country: Mississippi and the Conservative Counterrevolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 2007); Kevin M. Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 2005); William A. Link, *William Friday: Power, Purpose, and American Higher Education* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press 1995); Robert A. Pratt, *We Shall Not Be Moved: The Triumphant Story of Horace Ward, Charlayne Hunter, and Hamilton Holmes* (Athens: University of Georgia Press 2002); Jason Sokol, *There Goes My Everything: White Southerners in the Age of Civil Rights, 1945-1975* (New York: Knopf, 2006); Peter Wallenstein, "Brown v. Board of Education and Segregated Universities: From Kluger to Karman—Toward Creating a Literature on King Color, Federal Courts, and Undergraduate Admission" (Organization of American Historians, Boston, MA, March 2004); and Peter Wallenstein, "Segregation, Desegregation, and Higher Education in Virginia" (Policy History Conference, Charlottesville, VA, June 3, 2006).

roots conservatism took hold in the post-war era.² Although white segregationists made pledges never to submit to racial integration, many southern white leaders subtly and strategically accommodated civil rights activists and the federal government. Their compromises helped preserve white elite priorities while casting the struggle against civil rights activists as part of a national battle to preserve the fundamental quality of American freedom.³ Segregationist leaders who employed this contingency called their strategy "practical segregation," as distinct from the hard-line plans of the White Citizens' Council.⁴ These more moderate segregationists sought to balance state-sponsored segregation with other concerns for industrial and political development. Believing that direct defiance would not work, they attempted to take control of the pace, timing, and location of desegregation. Proponents advocated measured, peaceful tactics, to keep desegregation from the public eye and minimize outside interference. In Florida, for example, Governor Leroy Collins held this view at the time of *Brown v. Board* decision by the U.S. Supreme Court.⁵ Likewise, university presidents across the nation, including those who guided the University of Florida, adopted this strategy.

Historians of southern desegregation have focused on the values, motives, and actions of white segregationists, while historians of education have discussed the dynamics of university desegregation and made crucial contributions to understanding black agency, policy, and student activism. Neither group has focused on

-
2. Carter, *The Politics of Rage*, 110; and Matthew Lassiter. *Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 2.
 3. Crespino, *In Search of Another Country*, 4.
 4. Crespino, 19. The White Citizens' Council was a white supremacist organization formed in 1954. Its goals were to oppose racial integration and protect "European-American heritage." Eventually the group had branches all across the South, and around 60,000 members. The groups usually had the support of many local business and civic organizations, and unlike the Ku Klux Klan, were not a secret organization. Like the Klan, however, WCC members were often responsible for the loss of jobs and homes of black and white people who supported black civil rights. The group changed its name to the Conservative Citizens Council in 1988, and continues to use that name today.
 5. Jerrell H. Shofner, "Custom, Law, and History: The Enduring Influence of Florida's 'Black Code,'" *History of Education Quarterly* 55, no.3 (1977): 277-98; Joseph A. Tomberlin, "Florida Whites and the *Brown* Decision of 1954," *History of Education Quarterly* 51, no. 2 (1972): 22-36; and Thomas R. Wagye, "Governor Leroy Collins of Florida and the Selma Crisis of 1965," *History of Education Quarterly* 57, no. 4 (1979): 403-20.

the role of segregationist university presidents.⁶ Throughout the mid- to late-1960s, university presidents across the United States responded to student activism in a wide range of ways that set the course for their own institutions' desegregation.⁷ Examining the desegregation of Florida's flagship university can help historians look beyond the headline-making moments of integration in "the Deep South."⁸ The University of Florida, located in Gainesville, Florida, had its share of student activism, and administrators had to chart a careful course balancing outsider demands with student pressure. Two University of Florida presidents—J. Wayne Reitz and Stephen C. O'Connell—employed the practical segregationist strategies of other postwar and mid-century conservative leaders and thereby slowed the integration of the university. This case history presents an example of how practical segregationist strategies worked in the 1960s and early 1970s, before federal mandates put an end to presidential recalcitrance. It examines the roles played by the two presidents of the University of Florida in the unfolding of desegregation and places their views on race and education

-
6. Wallenstein, "Brown v. Board of Education and Segregated Universities;" Wallenstein, "Segregation, Desegregation, and Higher Education in Virginia." Donald Boyd's paper on Stephen C. O'Connell discusses O'Connell's response to student activism on campus; the paper is contextualized in student dissent, rather than in university desegregation or conservative ascendancy nationwide. Donald Boyd, "The Irony of Protest" (paper presented at the History of Education Society Annual Conference, October 2005). Also, William Link's biography of William Friday, the president of the University of North Carolina during desegregation, looks in depth at the role of the university president during such a turbulent time, but I would not categorize Friday as a segregationist in the vein of Reitz and O'Connell (Link, *William Friday*, 82-98).
 7. Link, 82-98.
 8. Robert O. Self argues that historians should not only focus on the South as the postwar location of black activism and the civil rights movement; by extension, historians need to continue to look beyond the states known for their violence in response to the 1960s civil rights movement. See *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 235. Further, Paul Ortiz makes the case for studying Florida, demonstrating that Florida was the site of a great deal of violence in the early- and mid-20th century. Ortiz puts the Florida civil rights movement in the context of the national post-World War I black freedom struggle. The Florida struggle was distinctive because Floridians built a statewide social movement linking rural and urban residents. Black Floridians continuously resisted segregation but their effectiveness varied with regional and national economic, political, and legal change. See *Emancipation Betrayed: The Hidden History of Black Organizing and White Violence in Florida from Reconstruction to the Bloody Election of 1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 61-63.

within the context of state and national conservative ideologies, particularly those related to anticommunism and segregation.

Presidents Reitz and O'Connell were both "practical segregationists" who understood the likelihood of desegregation, but sought to control it. They relied on tokenism, empty promises, and slow movement to stall the integration of the University of Florida's student body and faculty. Both men endorsed the national conservative ideology of the mid-twentieth century, especially anticommunism and a commitment to segregation. As leaders of the university and important figures in the Gainesville community, each worked toward preserving the tradition of segregation—in spirit, if not in absolutes. They guided the state's largest university through a key transitional period of state and national racial change, thus shaping the demographics of the university in lasting ways. Both men employed the rhetoric of white backlash and distrust in the federal government to stall the speed of integration and de-emphasize the student protests on campus during the Vietnam War. O'Connell in particular was known for exhibiting no tolerance for outspoken liberal students, and when some students—black and white—protested his recalcitrance on racial issues, he was unwilling to cede any ground. After Vietnam War protests on campus, the national media began to cover events at the University of Florida, and the federal government pressured O'Connell to increase black student enrollment, or risk losing federal funding.⁹ University presidents had an important role to play in a time of great upheaval, and while much of the research has focused on the dynamic and powerful student stories, understanding the administrations' roles in the proceedings provides a fuller picture of the course of desegregation, and its aftermath.

Conservatism and the South

The roots of conservatism in the postwar United States had both top-down and bottom-up elements. Conservatism is a difficult term to define, but this essay will focus on the strands related to anticommunism and segregationist principles. These are the aspects of conservatism that most motivated Reitz and O'Connell.

9. Lester Hale, interview by Samuel Proctor, 22 May 1982, Proctor Oral History Program, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL, 51; Stephen C. O'Connell, interview by Samuel Proctor, 13 September 1991, Proctor Oral History Program, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL, 142-45.

Grassroots conservatism was fundamental to the overwhelming success of the conservative movement in cementing its ideologies in national politics, moving the United States to the center-right of the political spectrum in a period of great upheaval. For many Americans, the Republican Party was no longer the party of wealthy interests and big business, but the party of the average family. The Democratic Party, in their eyes, consisted of elitists who triumphed social engineering, privilege, and special interests at their personal expense. This populist makeover transformed American politics.¹⁰ Segregationists used what they saw as undue government interference to frame their fight as a national struggle against coercive centralized government.¹¹

At the grassroots level, many white southerners saw the civil rights movement as a communist conspiracy. They thought the actions of blacks were so novel and unthinkable that they must have been the work of outside influences, like the Communist Party. White segregationists developed a circular worldview defined by local black people, outside agitators, and civil rights. Believing the civil rights movement was a communist conspiracy allowed these segregationists to more easily justify their opposition to it. The enemy was not "their Negroes," but a faceless red monolith, and whites could see themselves as defenders of American freedom. It was hard to understand how the blacks they had always seen as docile and easily manipulated could have become so suddenly organized, discontented, and autonomous in the 1960s. Anticommunism provided a crutch.¹² In the face of this disorienting discontent on the part of southern blacks, some whites fled to the suburbs and the New Republican Party, which, by the late 1960s, used racial innuendo to play on fears of black advances. Middle and upper class whites had disliked the actions of the white lower class, whom they perceived to engage in mob-like behavior, but now feared integration and the tax burden for new social services imposed by the activist federal government.¹³ These changes to the outlook and daily lives of conservative constituents occurred nationwide. In Florida, the state saw demographic and social changes of its own during this time that led to the rise of the Republican Party.

10. Donald T. Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 214.

11. Crespino, *In Search of Another Country*, 92.

12. Sokol, *There Goes My Everything*, 83-93.

13. *Ibid.*, 114.

Florida's Political History

Florida moved from its position as a backwater southern state to a crucial locus for the nation's politics and prosperity during the era of conservatism's rise.¹⁴ The civil rights movement and massive resistance splintered the state Democratic Party and allowed the Republican Party to emerge. The election of Democrat Leroy Collins to the governorship in 1955 provided Florida leadership for modernizing race relations at a time when many other southern governors had not even considered integration. Collins was something of a practical desegregationist. He encountered extremists at every stage, but refused to allow Florida to fall into a racial quagmire. He eventually came to believe and publicly state that changing southern racial customs was a moral obligation. Collins also supported student activists, at political cost to himself.¹⁵

All of this said, the long-held assumption that Florida has always been more progressive than other southern states in terms of race relations is unjustified. Florida's history shares the "economic predation, political exclusion, spiritual oppression, and endemic violence" with its Deep South neighbors.¹⁶ Segregation was ingrained in the psyche of Floridians, and their electoral behavior indicates their sense of injustice at being compelled to integrate. The 1885 Florida State Constitution enshrined two aspects of segregation into the fabric of the state: Article XII, Section 12 stated that "White and colored children shall not be taught in the same school, but impartial provision shall be made for both."¹⁷ Article XVI, Section 24, also prohibited social interaction between white and black people: "All marriages between a white person and a negro, or between a white person and a person of negro descent to the fourth generation, inclusive, are hereby forever prohibited."¹⁸

As of the spring of 1954, Florida was one of four states with no school integration at all. Thus, the *Brown v. Board* decision was significant to the state's public education tradition. White resistance

14. David R. Colburn, *From Yellow Dog Democrats to Red State Republicans: Florida and its Politics since 1940* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2007), 2.

15. Colburn, 16; and Wagy, "Governor Leroy Collins of Florida," 403-20.

16. Irvin D. S. Winsboro, introduction to Irvin D.S. Winsboro, ed., *Old South, New South, or Down South?: Florida and the Modern Civil Rights Movement* (Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 2009), 1-2.

17. Florida Constitution of 1885, art. XII, sec. 12.

18. *Ibid.* art. XVI, sec. 24.

to *Brown* occurred almost immediately. Acting governor Charlie Johns stonewalled desegregation and his actions filtered down to other state officials, local lawmakers, and school board members statewide.¹⁹ State School Superintendent Thomas Bailey echoed the thoughts of most white Floridians when he said, in explaining why the state would go on with school construction as planned, that “My presumption is that Negroes attending a good school are going to prefer to remain there.” By 1956, Florida had abandoned its moderate position on *Brown*, as had the South generally. The White Citizens Council movement spread throughout the South, including Florida, in a show of hostility to the Court’s second *Brown* decision in 1954. Collins offered financial incentives to school boards to desegregate, but when he left office only Dade County had desegregated—and its desegregation involved four black students attending one elementary school. Under Governor Cecil Farris Bryant in 1961, Florida took a more dogmatic stance against desegregation.²⁰

Following the 1964 Civil Rights Act, many Democrats switched to the Republican Party due to their outrage and feelings of betrayal. Others voted Republican because they worried that race-based policies might harm their opportunities, and did not support the idea of court-mandated public schools in the state. These fears mirrored the feelings of newly-minted Republicans nationwide, who saw urban chaos and voted for the candidate who promised law and order. The Republican electoral majority in Florida and across the United States emerged with the 1968 election of Richard Nixon, who won among middle-class voters everywhere.²¹ Florida went through the same upheaval as the rest of the nation. The demographics in Florida were different than in other southern states, given that it had a large population of Midwestern and Northeastern transplants, but it retained the Deep South’s commitment to racial exclusion.

The University of Florida underwent massive changes in the first half of the 20th century as well. Opened in 1906 to serve white male students, it grew to be one of the largest public universities in the nation during the 20th century. World War II impeded the growth of the university until the Federal Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944 prompted unprecedented funds for campus construction to

19. Winsboro, *Old South, New South, or Down South?*, 11.

20. David R. Colburn, *Racial Change and Community Crisis: St. Augustine, Florida, 1877-1980* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1991), 25-27.

21. Colburn, *From Yellow Dog Democrats to Red State Republicans*, 98.

keep pace with the rapidly rising enrollment. Over the next decade, the campus grew, thanks in part to the admission of women in 1947. Subject to national and international events such as wars and the feminist movement, the university experienced the pains of growth and adjustment in an unstable time. When J. Wayne Reitz became president of the university in 1954, he saw the importance of the university to world events. Presidents before him had "stressed the university's international role as a cosmopolitan institution abetting goodwill and world peace," but Reitz "defined the university's global role as an agent against communism."²² He adopted the Cold War ideologies of the national conservative movement, hoping to inspire the university's foreign graduates to become ambassadors for the United States and cultivate new allies overseas. Integration was not among his priorities until he, along with the state administration and the Board of Governors, made the decision to quietly allow seven black students to enroll in the undergraduate division of the university in 1962.

J. Wayne Reitz and Initial Desegregation

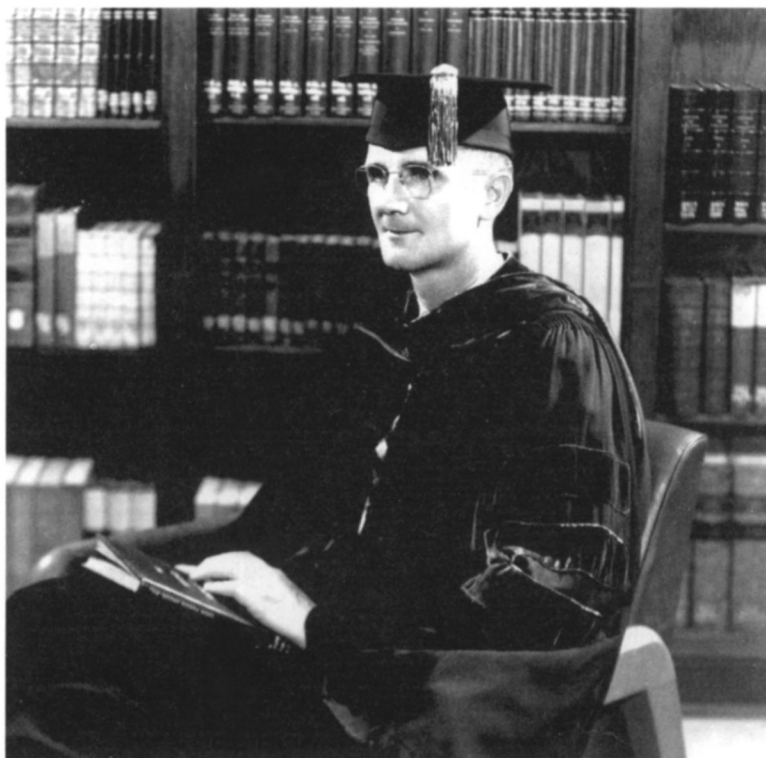
For a person who would be thrust into the early struggles of desegregation, J. Wayne Reitz had very little background in politics before becoming the University of Florida's fifth president. He was born in Kansas and never lived south of Urbana, Illinois, before he moved to Florida in the 1930s. He worked for the Farm Credit Administration before becoming a professor of agricultural economics at the University of Florida. Reportedly, he made his career choice when stuck in a snowstorm in Colorado, where he was traveling for work. He had time to contemplate his life goals, and concluded that he eventually wanted to go into education, thinking he could make a difference.²³ In 1949, Reitz was appointed Provost for Agriculture. He became the fifth president of the university on April 1, 1955.²⁴

As president, Reitz faced controversy from all sides, while also working to maintain cultural customs of the university. He supported strict behavior and dress codes for women, continued in the spirit of

22. Sevan G. Terzian and Leigh Ann Osborne, "Postwar Era Precedents and the Ambivalent Quest for International Students at the University of Florida," *Journal of Studies in International Education* 10, no. 3 (2006): 297.

23. Frances Reitz, interview by Emily Ring, 21 March 1986, Proctor Oral History Program, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL, 10-11.

24. University of Florida Office of the President Website, Biography of J. Wayne Reitz. <http://www.president.ufl.edu/pastPres/reitz.htm> (accessed January 12, 2011).



J. Wayne Reitz in cap and gown, 1957. *Image courtesy of University of Florida Digital Collection.*

President Albert A. Murphree's efforts to ban alcohol consumption and other immoral behaviors, and installed a Faculty Disciplinary Committee. Many students and faculty saw these moves as too controlling of student conduct, particularly women's behavior. Reitz also continued the University of Florida's tradition of promoting anticommunism.²⁵ Under his watch, the Florida Legislative

25. During the Red Scare of 1919, Dr. Newell L. Sims, a sociology and political science professor at the University of Florida, made "suspicious statements" referring to the "hellish American government" and praised the Soviet system. Federal agents raided his office and his home, but failed to find any incriminating evidence. The university administration was embarrassed by the national attention given to his case, and was relieved when Sims resigned under pressure. President Murphree, in a letter to a friend, said that "the whole matter was deplorable. We are going to have no socialism, Bolshevism, or atheism at the university." See Julian Pleasants, *Gator Tales: An Oral History of the University of Florida* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2006), 20.

Investigating Committee, otherwise known as the Johns Committee, accused and fired twenty-two employees, and expelled several students, for homosexuality in the early 1960s. For nine years, the Johns Committee, ostensibly rooting out communism in the dying light of the McCarthy hearings, targeted anyone who was a “free and liberal thinker without concern for society” on the university campus and elsewhere in the state. Reitz cooperated with the committee and was involved in its targeting of homosexuals on the university campus. Later, Reitz laid responsibility on the state, claiming that administrators had no alternative but to counsel the accused to leave the university.²⁶ Reitz embraced the postwar conservative idea that the civil rights movement and other non-mainstream views were likely to be communist-influenced, if not communist conspiracies.²⁷

Another scandal struck at the end of the Reitz presidency. In 1967, university officials denied tenure to Marshall Jones, a professor of psychiatry and psychology in the university’s College of Medicine. Jones had been arrested twice in previous years for picketing at civil rights demonstrations in Florida. His activism aside, he was enormously popular with his students and with his department. He had been unanimously recommended for tenure by his deans and superiors in the College of Medicine, and was up for promotion in addition to tenure—a sign of respect from his department heads. Officially, Jones was fired for giving a speech entitled “The Role of Faculty in Student Rebellion” to the educational honor society, a speech that was later published in a scholarly journal. A professor who knew both Reitz and Jones well said Reitz called Jones “an evil man” who needed to be removed. Students and faculty spoke out and protested the reasons for Jones’s firing. The American Academy of University Professors censured Reitz for denying Jones tenure based on such flimsy reasoning. Jones’s counsel maintained that he had been denied tenure because “President Reitz didn’t like his political beliefs,” including a policy of rebellion and social change.²⁸

The *St. Petersburg Times* also spoke out in support of Jones:

His ability to teach his students was acknowledged in the recommendation for a promotion. He was not accused of insert-

26. Graves, *And They Were Wonderful Teachers*; and Pleasants, *Gator Tales*, 50.

27. Crespino, *In Search of Another Country*, 83-93.

28. Robert Ben Cason, “Cause for Controversy in Gainesville,” *St. Petersburg Times*, 11 November 1967; and Eunice Martin, “Committee Deliberates Marshall Jones Case,” *St. Petersburg Times*, 8 May 1968.

ing political opinions in his lectures, nor of creating intolerable campus dissension, nor of insubordination. Instead, a speech on student rebellion which he delivered to a professional organization and which was reprinted in a scholarly journal, was given as cause. This has the shabby mark of someone looking for a reason to fire him. We also disagree with Jones' opinions, but defend his right to speak them.²⁹

Various communities took Jones's denial of tenure very seriously. Jones had been mistreated because he encouraged an activist mindset among his students. Reitz had already demonstrated during the Johns Committee witch-hunt that he was willing to persecute his own faculty members in service of the state's anticommunist goals. While there is no evidence that Jones was a communist or a conspirator, he supported activist students. In support of postwar anticommunism, whether consciously or not, Reitz had Jones fired. These actions help explain the tone of Reitz's presidency during a time when some Americans feared communist infiltration on college campuses.

Others defended the actions of Reitz. In an oral history interview two decades after Reitz's tenure ended, Vice President of Student Affairs Lester Hale remembered, "Wayne Reitz brought a very deep sense of ethical responsibility and a new type of administrative style that the university was in need of at the time."³⁰ Hale was fiercely loyal to Reitz. They both represented the power structure of the university, and Hale would embrace the practical segregationist strategies and rhetoric of Reitz and his successor. Stephan Mickle, among the first group of black students admitted to the university, noted that Reitz alone did not determine the moment of desegregation. Rather, Ferris Bryant (governor of Florida from 1961-1965) had told Reitz, in Mickle's words, "We do not need the kind of dogs, lying, and foolishness that is going on in Mississippi. We have a tourist state and a citrus industry. We do not want to do anything that is going to harm our industry, so you let them little, southern, colored children in there and keep them quiet." No civil rights movement in Gainesville existed at the time, and the Gainesville newspaper did not mention the school's desegregation, because, according to Mickle, "They [the governor and Reitz] did not want the rednecks to come in and start trouble. So the University of Florida very quietly integrated."³¹

29. Editorial, "Marshall Jones' Tenure," *St. Petersburg Times*, 11 December 1967.

30. Hale, interview, 52; and Pleasants, *Gator Tales*, 44.

31. Stephan P. Mickle, interview by Joel Buchanan, 3 October 1995, Proctor Oral History Program, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL, 22.

Indeed, it appears that Bryant was no crusader for civil rights. However, he had decidedly refused to “stand in the schoolhouse door” alongside other southern governors when asked to take a leadership role in resisting integration. After *Brown v. Board of Education*, Bryant neither blocked integration nor encouraged it, but he did oppose the idea of mandatory integration imposed by the federal government, believing the best solution to these problems could only come from voluntary action on the part of citizens. He also believed Florida had been a consistently conservative state since the mid-1940s, and wanted to govern in a way that would most please the greatest possible number of constituents.³²

Reitz, freed from having his hand forced in either direction by the governor, proved to be a practical segregationist during his time in office. He thought it best to desegregate on a token basis before the school was sued for admission to the undergraduate division. He admitted a handful of black students to placate the civil rights community without fundamentally changing the lives of white students on campus. Neither the federal government nor the civil rights community intervened. Without national attention and federal intervention, black student enrollment would remain low, fewer than seventy students at most, for the next eight years.³³

The initial desegregation of the University of Florida proceeded smoothly. In the fall of 1962 seven black undergraduates registered—Johneya Williams, Alice Marie Davis, Rose Greene, Jesse Dean, John Redic, Oliver Gordon, and Stephan Mickle. Their registration received some attention from opponents of desegregation but no violent opposition.³⁴ The accommodating white student population, the willingness of the Gainesville press to avoid publicizing the event, and the support of the governor

32. Ferris Bryant, interview by Ray Washington, March 1979, Proctor Oral History Program, University of Florida, FL, Gainesville.

33. The University of Florida was sued to admit students to the law school, and the law school had been desegregated in 1958. This desegregation process had also proceeded without violence of any sort. Richard Alexander's non-thesis Master's paper discusses this process, focusing on the student perspective. The date of his paper is not available. A copy of the paper is available in the University of Florida Special Collections. See Richard Alexander, “A Smooth Transition: Racial Integration at the University of Florida, 1954-1958” (Non-thesis Masters. University of Florida, date unavailable).

34. Peter Wallenstein, “Black Southerners in Nonblack Universities: The Process of Desegregating Southern Higher Education, 1935-1965,” in *Higher Education and the Civil Rights Movement: White Supremacy, Black Southerners, and College Campuses*, ed. Peter Wallenstein (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2008), 43-44.

helped quash potential violence.³⁵ This lack of attention may have made life immediately easier for the students, but ultimately, it was to their detriment, as they were unable to fully integrate into the university. The practical segregationist strategy Reitz employed worked, and meant that state conservatives could downplay the effectiveness of and attention to the civil rights movement.

The national climate was useful to Reitz. John F. Kennedy campaigned on a promise to rid the nation of *de jure* racial discrimination. However, for much of his presidency, he remained silent on civil rights. He did not want to risk potential foreign policy consensus amongst Americans by alienating valuable constituents. On matters of civil rights, the Kennedy administration preferred to use persuasion rather than coercion.³⁶ With this kind of permissiveness from the president of the nation, the president of the university found it much easier to desegregate on a token basis. A baseline level of compliance and accommodation was enough to keep the negative attention of the Kennedy administration away from Florida.³⁷

Given the desire of Reitz and Bryant to avoid federal intervention, it is worth noting that the very peacefulness of the initial integration did not escape national attention. In 1963, Reitz received a memo from the Kennedy White House asking him for the details of the integration, saying it was "one of the best desegregation jobs in the country."³⁸ Reitz credited the willingness of the students to privilege the school's reputation over their opinion of integration, a cooperative governing board, and the fact that no one outside the school or the state tried to use the integration process for political capital.³⁹ Undercutting the ability of civil rights workers to use the desegregation of the university to strengthen their movement was precisely the goal of Reitz and of southern conservative leaders at the time.

35. The president of the student body, Bill Trickel, said in an interview on 7 September 1962 with the *Florida Alligator*, "As president of the student body, I feel that I can speak for the great majority of the students here and say that the recent integration at the undergraduate level will be received with the same maturity as integration of our graduate level in past years" (Lawrence, "Integration Arrives Without Incident"). It is also worth noting that the black students were not accompanied by armed National Guardsmen, as black students desegregating other southern universities had been.

36. Chafe, *The Unfinished Journey*, 206-09.

37. Crespino, *In Search of Another Country*, 76, 176; and Link, *William Friday*, 252.

38. Brooke Haye to J. Wayne Reitz, 6 July 1963. J. Wayne Reitz Papers, University of Florida Library, Gainesville, FL.

39. J. Wayne Reitz to Brooke Haye, 17 July 1963. J. Wayne Reitz Papers, University of Florida Library.

Reitz handled desegregation in a way entirely consistent with the strategies of the anticommunists and segregationists within the rising conservative movement. By the early 1960s, this became an increasingly common strategy for those who wanted to slow the loss of their old way of life, and similar tactics were used at universities in Georgia, Virginia, Texas, and South Carolina. At other universities in the South, school presidents attempted to accommodate proponents of desegregation while appeasing those who resisted change—even as they themselves might have resisted it personally. Desegregation at these universities was not always smooth, but the tactics were familiar by the time the University of Florida used them.⁴⁰ Reitz was effective because he was able to keep the student body on board, preventing outbursts, and assuring them, if only between the lines, that this would not change their way of life. For the most part, black students lived off campus, were rarely called on in class, and did not interact with the white students.⁴¹ According to Mickle, “It was mainly a wall of silence. Nobody spoke to you all day long.” The university made no effort to integrate the students into campus life in the early years of desegregation.⁴² Reitz and Bryant had done what they needed to do to prevent the introduction of fire hoses and dogs. Reitz resigned the presidency in 1967, citing fatigue.⁴³

Stephen C. O’Connell

O’Connell’s personal history was more political, as well as more southern, than was Reitz’s. He was a native Floridian, having been born in West Palm Beach, and received his undergraduate and law degrees from the University of Florida. He served in World War II and then worked as a lawyer while becoming active in the Democratic Party. He was appointed to the Florida Supreme Court by Governor LeRoy Collins in 1955 and was elected chief justice in 1967. That same year, he resigned the bench to become the sixth president of the University of Florida and the first alumnus to do so.⁴⁴

40. Crespino, *In Search of Another Country*, 109; Sokol, *There Goes My Everything*, 97; and Wallenstein, *Higher Education and the Civil Rights Movement*.

41. Wallenstein, “Black Southerners at Nonblack Universities,” 43-44.

42. Mickle, interview, 23. For examples of the problems of integration and sports, see Derrick E. White, “From Desegregation to Integration: Race, Football, and ‘Dixie’ at University of Florida,” *Florida Historical Quarterly*, 88, no.4 (Spring 2010): 469-496.

43. University of Florida Office of the President Website, Biography of J. Wayne Reitz. <http://www.president.ufl.edu/pastPres/reitz.htm> (accessed January 12, 2011).

44. Pleasants, *Gator Tales*, 55; and Boyd, “The Irony of Protest.”



Stephen C. O'Connell standing in front of Tigert Hall, 1960s. *Image courtesy of University of Florida Digital Collections.*

In 1955, The Florida Supreme Court heard *Virgil Hawkins v. Board of Control*, in which Hawkins, an African American, sued to be admitted to the University of Florida law school. He had been attempting to enter the law school since 1949, and the courts had refused to admit him based on the separate but equal doctrine of *Plessy v. Ferguson*. The United States Supreme Court ordered the Florida Supreme Court to reconsider after *Brown v. Board*. The Florida Supreme Court's opinion decried the federal government's interference in states' rights and proclaimed that Hawkins should not be denied admission because of his race, but because

to do so would “cause a public mischief.” O’Connell and the other members of the court felt that Hawkins was not trying to get an education, but to prove something, and that the well-being of the university should not be jeopardized to serve that particular purpose. O’Connell also argued that Hawkins was not qualified for admission.⁴⁵

As president, O’Connell, like Reitz before him, faced a number of controversies. His presidency coincided with the height of student protests over the Vietnam War and civil rights issues. During his tenure, he saw not only the student demonstration that is discussed in this paper, but also political struggles with the campus newspaper, the *Alligator*, student protests against the war, and faculty unrest.⁴⁶

O’Connell was a self-identified conservative. He has been described as the second-most conservative justice on the court. O’Connell’s conservatism, he said, meant not “keeping the same order of things forever,” but “respect for authority; respect for the law once it is tested and found to be good; and respect for other people’s rights” as well as the opportunity to behave freely “so long as it does not harm anyone else.”⁴⁷ He concurred with Bryant, and many others, in his belief that the United States Supreme Court overstepped its bounds in the *Brown v. Board* case. Admitting that the legislative bodies were doing nothing to advance the cause of civil rights, and that the actions of the Court did improve the lives for many people, O’Connell maintained his belief that the Court acted wrongly in legislating.⁴⁸

Increases in Enrollment and Unrest

In 1968, the university’s black student population increased slightly. Sixty-one black students enrolled in the 1967-68 school year. The next school year the number increased by roughly two thirds, to 103 out of the total student body of roughly 22,000.⁴⁹

45. Wallenstein, “Segregation, Desegregation, and Higher Education in Virginia.” For more on Virgil Hawkins, see Larry O. Rivers, “Leaning on the Everlasting Arms: Virgil Darnell Hawkins’s Early Life and Entry into the Civil Rights Struggle,” *Florida Historical Quarterly*, 86, no. 3 (Winter 2008): 279-308.

46. Pleasants, *Gator Tales*, 55; and Boyd, “The Irony of Protest.”

47. O’Connell, interview, 92.

48. *Ibid.*, 94.

49. Memorandum, “Prepared Answers to Interview,” 18 August 1969, Stephen C. O’Connell Papers, University of Florida Library, Gainesville, FL.

This was the first year a full-time black faculty member was employed at the university,⁵⁰ and was also an important year for the integration of sports teams, following the threat of a Department of Health, Education and Welfare (HEW) investigation of the school's integration efforts.⁵¹ At the beginning of the 1969-1970 school year, black student enrollment was up to 156, a fifty percent increase from the previous year. The population remained a tiny fraction of the entire student body of over 20,000, but steadily climbed. The black student population more than doubled in the fall of 1970, to 350, and 548 black students registered for classes the following fall.⁵²

As the black student enrollment grew, so did the tension between the student body and the administration. Black students and many white students felt they did not have O'Connell's attention, and that he was less concerned for their welfare than he should have been. The students wrote letters to him asking for more attention to black students' needs, such as establishing a center for black culture. The school could no longer escape national attention as its black student population, while increasing, was still very low. Federal authorities from HEW and the Civil Rights Commission noticed the lack of black athletes. O'Connell felt pressure from within and without the school's brick walls. Here was a segregationist president who was increasingly at odds with his student body. Across the nation, universities saw their students move leftward and speak out, and the conservative rhetoric that forged a political base among non-college constituents failed to soothe these activists.⁵³ As a state politician, O'Connell's conservative rhetoric of slow change may have been effective. As a university president, the words rang hollow in the ears of the students of all races whose activism—be it pro-integration, anti-war, or in favor of women's rights or gay liberation—increasingly reflected their ideology.

50. O'Connell, interview, 147.

51. Memoranda to Coach Ray Graves from Head Coaches Jack Westbrook, B.E. Bishop, William E. Harlan, and Potter [no first name given], 5 June 1968. Stephen C. O'Connell Papers, University of Florida Library, Gainesville, FL.

52. Memorandum, "Prepared Answers to Interview." Some of this growth must, of course, be attributed to the number of newly recruited black athletes enrolled, and perhaps the recruitment searches themselves prompted some black students to apply. Those black students who had the grades to be admitted to the University of Florida but who did not demonstrate athletic skill great enough to participate in a sport may have been made aware of the possibility of attending the University.

53. Anderson, *The Movement and the Sixties*, 166; and Link, *William Friday*, 128.

Approaching the Tipping Point

From the beginning of O'Connell's presidency, students and faculty questioned him about the low numbers of black students. He believed that the programs implemented in 1968 and 1969 adequately addressed the issue, and that the school was an educational institution and not the place to prove a point. He wanted the university to "create an environment and cause to exist an environment where all kinds of views and positions could be heard and that the university should not align itself with any of those positions. If it did, instead of becoming an arbitrator or being in a position of hearing and allowing all to be heard, it was taking a position against that."⁵⁴ Taking a position of neutrality in this case, in which the equitable treatment of students and citizens asking for more representation and better treatment is the cause for which students were loudly declaring their stance, is, in fact, to side with the state. To remain neutral is to support the status quo. Passivity, however, would not be enough to create a more equitable campus. O'Connell knew that, and used the idea of neutrality to shield himself from criticism.

In 1968 Black students organized the Black Student Union (BSU). Although Sam Taylor, the first black vice president of the student body, led the effort, the university did not recognize the BSU. The group asked for the establishment of a Black Culture Center, a request they continued to pursue for the duration of O'Connell's presidency. Liberal white students followed suit by organizing the Union of Florida Students, who, together with the BSU, demanded the recruitment of black students and faculty, as well as a black dean. They also wanted to improve the working conditions and pay for black campus staff. O'Connell hired a coordinator for Disadvantaged Students and Minority Groups—a black man named Roy Mitchell—who worked under Lester Hale. Mitchell was meant to recruit black students and make them feel welcome on campus.⁵⁵

During the late 1960s, student activism increased nationwide. Students protested the Vietnam War and the draft, continued racial inequality, heavy-handed administrations, and a sense of alienation from the rightward-moving power structure. The black power movement also turned the public's perception of the civil

54. O'Connell, interview, 146.

55. *Ibid.*, 148.

rights struggle away from nonviolent protest to a more militant armed self-defense.⁵⁶ The University of Florida was no exception, as students on campus increased their efforts to make their voices heard to an administration that did not adequately address their concerns. O'Connell disliked protests and found them unproductive, as they certainly were counter to his goals of running the university in accordance with his value of societal orderliness. The activist students of all races, however, grew increasingly angry with an administration that failed to heed to their voices, particularly on the issue of racial integration on campus.⁵⁷

15 April 1971

April 15, 1971 was not the day O'Connell or Hale expected. O'Connell later recalled that the events of the day happened "without any warning at all. It was orchestrated this way."⁵⁸ Hale had a confrontation with an angry student in the parking lot. He then went to O'Connell's office in Tigert Hall to tell him the activist students would not be satisfied until they had a conversation with O'Connell. While Hale did not know what they wanted, he knew it was "a racial issue." According to Hale, O'Connell agreed to see a representative group.⁵⁹

O'Connell remembers things slightly differently. In his later interview, he does not mention the conversation he had with Hale. O'Connell's framing of the events has fifty or sixty black students walking into his office without warning. Hale's version implies O'Connell knew they were coming and agreed to speak with them ahead of time. O'Connell also says he "later found out that the girl who was on the telephone at the reception desk at the entrance to the office had some alliance with them, too. She had been in conference with them."⁶⁰ O'Connell's memory is of course constructed from his perspective on the events. He felt attacked by the students. Even in later interviews he held that his position on the issues was legitimate and theirs was built from a radical need to prove a point about faster progress. Their activism, their demands for increased enrollment, more black faculty, and acknowledge-

56. Anderson, *The Movement and the Sixties*, 166; and Link, *William Friday*, 128.

57. Boyd, "The Irony of Protest."

58. O'Connell, interview, 148.

59. Hale, interview, 55.

60. O'Connell, interview, 149.

ment of the contributions of black culture through the creation of a center, ran counter to his ideas about practical segregation. This was the opposite of slow movement. University presidents have structural, symbolic, and political power.⁶¹ O'Connell's aim in reconstructing this sit-in in his office was to de-legitimize both the activists and their goals through wielding the power of his office.

The group came to O'Connell's office around ten o'clock that morning and handed him a note from the BSU demanding he discuss hiring black faculty and funding the Black Culture Center. They had tried to meet with him earlier, but he had been unreceptive. This time was much the same; he dismissed the students, saying he would not agree to their demands and that they must make an appointment, at which time only a "reasonable number" of black students could attend, before he would speak to them. They came back twice that morning and were suspended the second time when they refused to leave. The suspension could not have been enforced because no effort was made to identify them.⁶²

About an hour later, the same group of roughly seventy staged a sit-in in the outer office. O'Connell asked Roy Mitchell to help remove the students, but he refused. When they refused to leave, O'Connell had them arrested.⁶³ After they were forcibly removed from Tigert Hall, he suggested to the judicial officer in charge of setting the bonds for the arrested students that he release them on their own recognizance.⁶⁴

Meanwhile, several hundred angry students, black and white, converged on Tigert Hall to demand an audience with O'Connell to discuss their classmates' arrests. O'Connell initially refused all contact with the protesters, but he eventually agreed to speak with the student body president. The students turned down this offer and the campus security forces called for police backup. At that point, the group said they would leave if O'Connell would speak to their leaders. He did, denying their demand to remove the suspensions and drop charges against arrested students. He also refused

61. Adrianna Kezar et al., "Creating a Web of Support: An Important Leadership Strategy for Advancing Campus Diversity," *Higher Education* 55 (2008): 69-92.

62. O'Connell, interview, 151.

63. Stephen C. O'Connell, Press Conference Statement, 15 April 1971, Stephen C. O'Connell Papers, University of Florida Library, Gainesville, FL. O'Connell stated that sixty-six were students of the university and six were not (O'Connell, interview, 152).

64. O'Connell, interview, 152.

to approve the list of demands handed to him by the BSU earlier in the day, but agreed to meet with a smaller number of black students to discuss their proposals. Many students moved behind the administration building at this point and were confronted by police; eight more students were arrested, and around \$2000 worth of damage to university property took place.⁶⁵ Students of many races felt the school had not taken the needs of minority students seriously.⁶⁶

The next day, it became clear that O'Connell had the support of the establishment in the state and the university. The Florida Board of Regents chairman issued a statement supporting O'Connell and his actions. The Chairman, D. Burke Kibler, III, called the methods used by the black students (avoiding implicating the several hundred white students involved) "improper and illegal." He refused to recommend to the Board or to participate in any action by the Board regarding an "artificial quota" being set for black students, "to give them status not earned, no matter how deprived or disadvantaged this group may be."⁶⁷ Kibler was freer to be outspoken than was O'Connell, who could draw an intensified investigation by HEW in light of the previous day's events.

On the morning of April 16, O'Connell met with numerous faculty members and administrators to apprise them of the events and to seek their opinions. He also met with black faculty members and with Roy Mitchell. He wanted to "establish effective communication links" to discuss and determine what had been and was being done for black students, "why other things [could not] be done" and to "encourage a responsible exchange of views on the matter."⁶⁸ O'Connell sought to reestablish the legitimacy of his conservative strategy. His actions make clear that he was not meeting with faculty and administrators to learn how to most quickly and effectively increase black student enrollment, or where best to locate funding for the Black Culture Center. He was acting to calm people and make the "problem" go away. Rather than placing value in increasing the diversity of the university to make it more representative of the state it was built to serve, O'Connell empha-

65. *Ibid.*, 152.

66. Hale, interview, 57.

67. D. Burke Kibler III, Statement, 16 April 1971, Stephen C. O'Connell Papers, University of Florida Library, Gainesville, FL.

68. O'Connell, interview, 153.

sized working within the established power structure. That power structure was meant to preserve the privilege of the elite, not to respond to student protest.

Activist students felt O'Connell had not done enough to establish links of communication or address the needs of black students. Over the next four days, students held numerous rallies and marches, but none resulted in violence or arrest. On April 19, the BSU and Roy Mitchell, who claimed to be speaking for the entire faculty, held a televised news conference in which they warned that black students would withdraw and black faculty would resign from the University of Florida if "full amnesty" was not granted to all seventy two students arrested on April 15. They also wanted an "acceptable commitment to resolve all other proposals."⁶⁹ O'Connell could not regain traction with the students, if he had ever had it. The students making demands of him would not be convinced that a slow-moving integration process was an effective one. It was not designed to be effective. It was meant to forestall genuine integration for as long as possible.

Over the days and weeks after the events of April 15, O'Connell claimed the students lacked restraint and judgment, and he praised the school for having recognized the problems of black students, faculty, and staff more in recent years than in the university's history. The strategies of slow movement on racial issues and token representation to avoid accusations of racism were not lost on the students and faculty, who were not satisfied with O'Connell's methods.⁷⁰ No matter how many students and professors asked him to reconsider, he did not give ground.⁷¹ This earned him the respect of many people across the state, including

69. *Ibid.*, 153.

70. Black students, faculty and staff wrote a letter to O'Connell ten days after the incident. They pointed to a recent incident involving white fraternity members damaging university property with bulldozers who were not punished. The letter writers asked that the punishments for the students involved be lifted, and that the university commit to trying to find a director, dean, or vice president of Minority Affairs (Anonymous African Americans Students to Stephen C. O'Connell 25 April 1971. Stephen C. O'Connell Papers, University of Florida Library, Gainesville, FL).

71. The Arts and Sciences Faculty passed a resolution on April 21 to ask O'Connell to drop the charges against the students and work to implement their proposals, but he replied that he could not drop the charges and had already been working on their proposals. See Arts and Sciences Faculty to Stephen C. O'Connell, 21 April 1971 and Stephen C. O'Connell Letter to CLAS Faculty, 24 April 1971, Stephen C. O'Connell Papers.

some white students, who wrote letters praising him for not allowing the “negroes” or “communists” to take over.⁷² O’Connell served the anticommunist base of the conservative movement by not heeding students who opposed the status quo. He was unwilling to allow disorderly student conduct to complicate the running of the university.

On April 24, O’Connell and Mitchell met with the parents of the arrested students. O’Connell’s purpose for the meeting was to “assure them that the University, in accordance with its usual policy, had acted reasonably to prevent permanent interruption of the students’ educational opportunities, while at the same time insisting on observance by the students of the University rules.”⁷³ The group was interested not only in the fate of the arrested students, but also in the school’s plan for providing for the welfare of black students going forward.

Mitchell’s views of the events provide a contrast to O’Connell’s. Mitchell explained that O’Connell grew up in Florida believing in segregation and had a change of heart as an adult, although Mitchell was quick to point out that O’Connell still belonged to the whites-only Gainesville Golf and Country Club. Mitchell stated to the parents and others in attendance that it was their obligation to work with O’Connell “only if” he would work with them. He also said that the black students made reasonable, minimal requests of their president, asking him to be fair. He reminded the audience that O’Connell, when a judge, had concurred in the opinion in the *Hawkins* case.⁷⁴ Mitchell felt calling the police and declaring the area a riot zone had been unnecessarily provocative, partly because police held symbolic value in the South after the violence of the civil rights movement. He advised parents not to accept probation for their children, believing that to do so would contribute to racial polarization. Rather, the state of Florida, he felt, would benefit from such biracial cooperation as had been displayed on April 15.⁷⁵

O’Connell later claimed that this meeting with parents was unsuccessful because of Mitchell’s “obstruction.”⁷⁶ Mitchell would be accused of conspiring with the students and inciting the demonstration, which he denied, insisting that the student action

72. O’Connell, interview, 153.

73. *Ibid.*, 155.

74. Partial Transcript of Meeting, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL, 24 April 1971. Stephen C. O’Connell Papers.

75. *Ibid.*

had been self-directed.⁷⁷ Hale and O'Connell had few qualms about firing Mitchell after the Tigert demonstration.⁷⁸

In the midst of this, the BSU and others asked O'Connell to withdraw his membership at the racially exclusive Gainesville Golf and Country Club. He refused: "Those who demand that I, and other University officials, cease to be members of the Gainesville Golf and Country Club seem to argue that by our membership we support as a matter of principle the segregation of the races. This is neither a correct or a logical conclusion." O'Connell said he saw no difference between his membership in the segregated golf club and some students' participation with the BSU.⁷⁹ Cries of reverse racism became a major component of the conservative movement in the 1970s. Those who used this rhetorical device adopted a firmly presentist mindset and overlooked the hundreds of years of oppression and hegemony faced by black people. Participating in a group formed by and limited to members of a group who have caused oppression is a limiting of resources and a deliberate attempt to exclude those found less worthy based on race. Participating in a group formed by—but not always limited to—members of a group who have historically suffered from oppression is a form of cultural solidarity and is not about seeing oneself as superior to another.

The University Senate also spoke out against O'Connell and in support of the BSU and appealed to the Gainesville city officials to help make the community more attractive for the black students.⁸⁰ The BSU also wanted a department of minority affairs under the direction of a vice president. However, O'Connell exhibited a sharp example of his own beliefs when he said constructing such a depart-

76. O'Connell, interview, 161.

77. Hale claims to have hired Mitchell so he could help with "the transition of absorbing blacks" and advise the administration on providing programs for black students. Then, Hale says, Mitchell "turned activist, and probably had that intention when he was hired to begin with." Soon after he was hired, Hale says, he was out "making speeches in high schools and stirring up blacks." Hale regretted hiring anyone, given how Mitchell organized black communities around the state against the university (Hale, interview, 54). See also Partial Transcript of Meeting, University of Florida, 24 April 1971.

78. Hale, interview, 54; and O'Connell, interview, 161.

79. Stephen C. O'Connell, Country Club Membership Statement, Gainesville, FL, 12 May 1971, Stephen C. O'Connell Papers, University of Florida Library, Gainesville, FL. The irony that O'Connell belonged to a segregated country club but long refused to consider a Black Culture Center built on "racist or group lines" was not lost on all observers.

80. University Senate Meeting, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL, 29 April 1971, Stephen C. O'Connell Papers, University of Florida Library, Gainesville, FL.

ment would be to “build a structure on racist or group lines.” He also refused to establish a department of minority affairs on the grounds that “it is obvious that such an office would interfere with the normal processes of existing departments and colleges whose task is to plan and execute educational programs for all students. It would do irreparable damage to the operation of the colleges and departments and cause conflicts that could not be lived with.”⁸¹ He did not further elaborate what that irreparable damage might be, given that universities are known for expansion and rearrangement. Reitz, of course, had undertaken a very large project doing just that not long before O’Connell became president. It was not the very idea of change that O’Connell opposed. He did not want to disturb the education for white students by diverting more resources to minorities: the very basis of segregationist principles. He used his power as a university president to stall the progress of desegregation and racial equality at the state’s largest university, without taking the overt stance of someone like Alabama governor George Wallace, who proclaimed, “Segregation now, segregation forever.” O’Connell instead employed the principles of practical segregation, but the students at the University of Florida opposed the tokenism and clear racial inequality promoted by the university’s administration.

Aftermath

The events of April 1971 brought HEW’s attention to the school. Additionally, seven United States Senators sought an investigation into the race relations at the school in June of 1971.⁸² They urged the Civil Rights Commission to immediately investigate the situation fully.⁸³ HEW was concerned with the low black

81. O’Connell, interview, 158.

82. The senators who asked for the investigation of the school included Birch Bayh, George McGovern, John V. Tunney, Fred R. Harris, Walter F. Mondale, Philip A. Hard, and Adlai E. Stevenson, III.

83. The United States Senate Committee on Labor and Public Welfare to Reverend Theodore M. Hesburgh, Chairman, US Commission on Civil Rights, June 10, 1971, Stephen C. O’Connell Papers, University of Florida Library, Gainesville, FL. O’Connell wrote a letter of his own to Hesburgh, objecting to the investigation and criticizing the commission for relying solely on information supplied by Roy Mitchell, who by this point had been fired. O’Connell complained that the Commission never requested the details of the events of April 15, of the aftermath, or of “the sincere and successful efforts to enlarge the educational and employment opportunities for blacks on our campus, efforts which we intend to continue and improve.” (Stephen C. O’Connell to Theodore Hesburgh, 18 June 1971, Stephen C O’Connell Papers, University of Florida Library, Gainesville, FL).

student population. It followed up on its earlier investigation in 1972, and included the events of April 1971 in its conversation with O'Connell. They found that the school had made such symbolic gestures as creating a statement of equal educational opportunity and included pictures of minority students in the literature it distributed. HEW advised O'Connell to make more funds available to the Office of Minority Affairs to provide for a stronger recruitment program, which needed efforts beyond those HEW described as "minimal." HEW also suggested the university establish an Advisory Group to the President to prevent a recurrence of the April 15 activities.⁸⁴

Quite a lot was done in the wake of April 15, 1971 in terms of recruitment efforts and minority affairs.⁸⁵ By this time, Minority Affairs responsibilities were given to key black administrators in the major divisions of the university.⁸⁶ Additionally, the office of Student Affairs established a budget specifically for the recruitment of minority students.⁸⁷ Various assistance programs were implemented at the university. Project Upward Bound was a pre-college program designed to help students from low-income backgrounds and underprivileged schools acquire the necessary skills and motivation to survive a college environment.⁸⁸ The second assistance program, the Expanded Educational Opportunities Program (EEOP), was a compensatory program for low-income, low-achieving students, and the main agent for helping black students gain admission to UF.⁸⁹ Finally, the Carnegie Program was designed specifically in response to racial problems. It was meant

84. William R. Thomas, Regional Director of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare to Stephen C. O'Connell, 28 January 1972, Stephen C. O'Connell Papers, University of Florida Library, Gainesville, FL.

85. "Report on Minority Affairs, March 1972," University of Florida, Gainesville, FL, 1972, Lester Hale Papers, University of Florida Library, Gainesville, FL.

86. Lester Hale. "Student Affairs Annual Report, July 1, 1971 - June 30, 1972," Lester Hale Papers.

87. *Ibid.*

88. Project Upward Bound began in June 1971. It was based on the assumption that talented students may be restricted by some sort of deprivation. The language describing this program considers both class and race. It had nearly \$100,000 in funding, three-fourths of which was supplied by the federal government. As of the time the report was written, the program had forty minority students out of sixty total participants. "Report on Minority Affairs, March 1972", 3-5.

89. The 1972 Minority Affairs report claimed that the EEOP made "tremendous impact on the total educational program of the University of Florida." *Ibid.*, 6.

to help students from diverse backgrounds with a variety of needs meet their educational goals.⁹⁰

Conclusion

The experiences of Reitz and O'Connell speak to the larger roles of university presidents in furthering—or, in their cases, forestalling—diversity agendas at public institutions of higher education.⁹¹ At the University of Florida, President Reitz worked to build consensus among various constituent pressures—students, community, and state—to integrate the university quietly, but did not use this gathered force to further a diversity agenda. President O'Connell appeared less interested in consensus and commitment to diversity, preferring instead to forestall integration. University presidents function within a political framework and with scarce resources.⁹² Reitz and O'Connell favored the conservative agenda of preserving the state university's resources for their traditional recipients rather than integrating the campus and diversifying the student body.

This attitude was not uncommon to those concerned with public schooling, and public universities specifically, during the times of enforced desegregation. Rarely did desegregation of public universities happen without any violence or discomfort.⁹³ Historians of higher education have shown how students have assumed active roles in the desegregation efforts of their universities. Robert Pratt and Peter Wallenstein have taken the students' perspectives and illustrated how they changed the school environment and forced a reevaluation of segregationist positions. Their scholarship, along with that of other historians of education in this area, also provides a nuanced view of the civil rights movement and student involvement. Examining the role of university presidents permits a different perspective. It allows a view of the forces opposing student

90. *Ibid.*, 7.

91. Diversity issues, whether directly related to desegregation or raising an integrated university's profile as a place friendly to a variety of student backgrounds, are pressing and attention-drawing. They can harm an otherwise-successful president's reputation, particularly, as Adrianna Kezar et al. point out, when "attacks on campus affirmative action efforts bring off-campus politics onto the campus, compounding the difficulty of leading diversity initiatives." Kezar et al., "Creating a Web of Support," 70.

92. Kezar et al., "Creating a Web of Support," 69-92.

93. Pratt, *We Shall Not Be Moved*; and Wallenstein, "Black Southerners at Nonblack Universities," 43-44.

demonstration and how the conservative rhetoric employed by this opposition specifically applied to the university setting. Reitz and O'Connell were not merely academic figures, they were politicians in the state of Florida, with a vested interest in the status quo. Their role in higher education history was one of recalcitrance and forestalling, not of furthering democratic ideals.

Finally, the roles Reitz and O'Connell played in relation to the desegregation of the University of Florida, as well as in postwar conservatism, speak to the history of desegregation as a whole. In particular, it extends the scholarship presented by William Link, who focused on one university president, as well as Wallenstein and Pratt, who concentrate on higher education desegregation from the students' perspectives and student activism. Presidents and students played important roles in university desegregation and both deserve examination. Reitz and O'Connell were forces not only against student activism but also against the desegregation of the university and, hence, Gainesville. Their role as players in state politics was not one of passive carriers-out of gubernatorial decrees. They had daily roles to play in the process of desegregation and adopted practical desegregation strategies, as did the politicians in Mississippi about whom Joseph Crespino wrote.⁹⁴ Historians of desegregation might look to southern university presidents to gain a better understanding of how these important and powerful figures led state institutions through these chaotic and confusing times. Whether they did so against the grain of the state's conservative structure or in the service of it is indicative of how postwar conservative rhetoric affected the university community and the larger ideas about desegregation.

94. Crespino, *In Search of Another Country*, 19.