

Chapter 11: 1990s

“Regaining Momentum in the Robinson Years”

Whitworth’s renewed initiative to confront racial injustice and create a more diverse student body had become clear in the 1980s. More faculty had engaged issues of racism and multiculturalism in class. Staff members, especially in Student Life, had addressed issues of student culture in residence halls. All of this set the stage for an even more robust diversity effort in the 1990s. Beginning in the fall of 1993, under the presidency of Bill Robinson, Whitworth elevated the issue of racial diversity on campus to an even higher level. Consequently, Whitworth was poised by the ‘90s to make more significant progress than at any point since the 1960s and early ‘70s.

However, the decade did not begin well in the sphere of race relations. In February 1990, Heidi Hellner, one of the student editors of the *Whitworthian*, wrote a column in which she lamented that Martin Luther King Jr.’s birthday was not a recognized holiday on the Whitworth campus. Hellner then shared her experience at a Whitworth basketball game. “I naively thought, until tonight’s basketball game, that racism no longer existed in such an enlightened, liberal environment. I was puzzled when minority students, quietly, but urgently told me that racism was all around. I searched for signs, but did not see the evidence. I didn’t believe.” Hellner,

however, reported an ugly moment at the game which altered her perspective. “I sat in the Fieldhouse, astounded as fans around me yelled at players from Central Washington University, ‘Hey boy, why don’t you go back to your watermelon and fried chicken?’ Or ‘Are you smiling cause you just found out you’re going to Kentucky Fried Chicken after the game?’” She reported that fans moved away from the heckling as much as possible, and “one person, gaining my instant and utmost respect, calmly asked one fan to stop making what appeared to be racist comments.” She finished with the following: “As long as hateful racist slurs continue to emanate [sic] from the esteemed liberal arts students and graduates of Whitworth college, we have not only failed to ‘make a world of difference’ [Whitworth’s motto at the time], we have failed, period.”¹ Unfortunately, there is no evidence that faculty, students, or administrators responded to Hellner’s account.

In that same year, however, discussions occurred around the wording of Whitworth’s mission statement. Those deliberations led to a change of great importance. For the first time, trustees approved the phrase: “Whitworth’s mission is to provide its diverse student body an education of the spirit and the heart, equipping its graduates to honor God, follow Christ and serve humanity.”² Although receiving little fanfare at the time, the insertion of the phrase “diverse student body” was significant. It not only underscored commitments that had begun in the late ‘60s, but provided important language in the mission statement for support of later efforts to create an inclusive community comprised of not only racial minorities, but students of religious difference, LGBTQ students, international students, and differently-abled students.

In 1991, the *Whitworthian* featured the comments of Andre Branch, hired in 1989 to be the director of Multi-Ethnic Affairs. He suggested that Whitworth still needed an explicit plan for recruitment and retention of students of color, as well as diversification of the curriculum.

“We need to decide what cultural diversity is, so we know when we get there.” Branch asserted that Whitworth’s curriculum fell short when addressing the history of racism in America.

“When you take a course in Roman history, it is offered because Roman history is a part of the human experience,” explained Branch. “Black people are also part of the human experience, but students are being denied learning about who they are.”³

Branch acknowledged that steps were being taken to raise faculty awareness. The previous Faculty Development Day in fall 1990 had been devoted to issues of cultural diversity. He also succeeded in establishing new student positions called Cultural Diversity Advocates for residence halls. This program became something of a cornerstone in Whitworth’s efforts to emphasize the importance of cultural diversity among its students.⁴

Nevertheless, Branch continued to press for increased commitment to issues of racial diversity on campus. In a column in the *Whitworthian* in March 1991, he spelled out the considerable efforts that had been made to promote events in the Spokane community related to Black History. He reported that in December 1990, all academic departments and other student groups had been invited to design an activity in February to help lead the college’s celebration of Black History Month. Yet only three groups had responded: Business and Economics, Theater Arts, and the Black Student Union. Branch also commented on problems related to the curriculum:

The Black Student Union is very concerned about educating the community about our history and culture. However, unlike European Americans, we do not have the power to insist that our history and culture be a part of our college curriculum and classroom instruction – the obvious arena for education at college. As the present structure and system were designed and controlled by European Americans, African Americans can

only be concerned and hopeful that European Americans will raise African American culture and contribution – to American society and the world – to a level of importance.⁵

Whitworth's challenges regarding retention of faculty of color were magnified in 1991 when enrollment declines led to budget deficits that required the elimination of several staff and faculty positions. One of those positions was in the English Department. College administrators informed Professor Doug Sugano that his position would be cut, even though he was not the last person in the department to be hired. Thirty years later, in an interview, Sugano recalled that the administrator said that the reason that he was let go was because he was a racial minority and the administrator believed he would have a comparatively easy time finding another position. Sugano remembers simply being stunned at the explanation.⁶

In response, however, two members of the English Department found creative as well as sacrificial ways to buy time for Sugano and save the position until enrollment improved. Dr. Laura Bloxham, popular professor of English, took a one-year appointment at the University of Georgia in Athens. The following year, Dr. Victor Bobb took an unpaid leave of absence. Bobb, a person of uncommon generosity, was a prolific writer of short stories and chose to live off royalties from those stories, though they fell far short of matching his Whitworth salary.⁷

The plan worked and Sugano's position was saved. Sugano had already made an impact on the Whitworth campus and would continue to wield an outsized influence on Whitworth's approach to racial and cultural diversity for the next twenty-five years.

However, if the retention of Doug Sugano could be considered a success, the larger picture remained complicated at best and discouraging at worst in regard to race relations.

On the positive side, Associate Dean of Academic Affairs Tammy Reid and Associate Professor of Education Chris Meyer, who had grown up on the Coeur d'Alene Indian Reservation, developed an exchange program focused on cultural issues and teaching methods on the reservation and at Whitworth. Busloads of children from the elementary tribal school visited the campus; at Whitworth, they met students and faculty and heard science presentations. Over the next few years, several student teachers were placed in the tribal school. The hope was to encourage tribal children toward the pursuit of post-secondary education and to help Whitworth professors better understand Native cultures and peoples.⁸

In an additional effort to acknowledge Indigenous culture in the Pacific Northwest, ASWC (Associated Students of Whitworth College) and other contributors raised money to commission Michael Paul, an enrolled member of the Colville people, to carve a totem pole; the totem pole was then placed on the Whitworth campus and dedicated in September 1991. There was a bit of irony in the project given that Paul's tribe, as part of the Plateau culture, did not historically carve totem poles. However, it was thought that the icon would serve as a reminder of Native culture.⁹

On the negative side however, in April 1991, Andre Branch resigned his position. Branch, a controversial figure at times, had been candid and had pushed Whitworth to make significant changes. His confrontational style had created friction with several Whitworth administrators and faculty members. Branch indicated that he felt that during his short tenure (he had started in 1989) he had helped Whitworth develop "a more accurate perception of racism and its debilitating results." However, he said that the pressures of trying to bring about significant change with limited power and limited help, had become too great. Branch indicated that in his

opinion, “The college needs a diversity officer who has far-reaching power across the campus. The college needs to understand that it will be to all our benefit to work with such an officer.”¹⁰

Branch was succeeded by Diane Tomhave, a Native American. She was responsible for international students and national students of color. She also coordinated the Cultural Diversity Advocates and advised the educational support program. However, she too resigned after two years. In an interview in the *Whitworthian*, Tomhave cited a “lack of clerical support and inadequate resources” as the principal reasons behind her resignation. Her explanation for leaving touched on issues that have been frequently mentioned among faculty and staff of color. “What it comes down to is that I was just stretched too thin,” said Tomhave. “I’m really a people person, so it is frustrating having to deal with constant paperwork.” Tomhave said that because this part of the state has virtually no interaction with diversity, an even bigger effort needs to be made to interact with people of color. “Spokane is so isolated it seems to lump all people of color and international students together,” she said. “We need to start realizing that all these groups have different needs which need to be addressed individually. What better place to develop this than college?”¹¹

Two other resignations occurred in the early ‘90s that underscore Whitworth’s challenges. The history and political science department hired an African American faculty member, Nola Allen, who had an extensive career in the national Republican Party; she too resigned after a short stint. In 1994, Ed Miller, popular professor Spanish, left to take a position at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Throughout the mid-‘90s, Whitworth faculty and administrators brought numerous speakers to campus to address racial issues and the importance of cultural diversity. These included in 1993, James Cone, the best-known advocate of Black Theology in the country. Cone

challenged white students at Whitworth to recognize that Christianity as practiced by the vast majority of white people had been complicit in America's racist culture. Black theology focused on the liberating message of Jesus Christ from the bondage of white supremacy in America.¹²

A year following Cone's presentation, Sherman Alexie, nationally known Native American writer from Wellpinit, Washington, spoke at Whitworth's Forum and presented a poetry reading before an estimated 300 people.¹³ Alexie challenged Whitworth students to become conscious of their racial biases and to confront others when they expressed racist views. He pushed students to refrain from using stereotypes of Native Americans and other groups of people. Alexie described Whitworth as "a very isolated and conservative community. My intention was to challenge their beliefs about everything."¹⁴ One alum, nearly thirty years later, recalled campus dialogue that followed Alexie's Forum and poetry reading. In this person's memory, the responses foreshadowed discussions that continue to the present day. Some students understood Alexie's comments to highlight a necessary reckoning with privilege well before these terms evolved to their current prevalence. Others felt offended by accusations of racism, which they did not believe were accurate or fair. In these ways, Alexie's presentation echoed some of what William Stringfellow had said to Whitworth students nearly thirty years earlier.¹⁵

In fall 1993, Bill Robinson began a remarkable tenure as president of Whitworth College. Having previously served as president of Manchester College in Indiana, Robinson proved to be enormously popular among students as well as faculty and staff. He was legendary for his ability to remember people's names. His roots included both conservative evangelical elements as well as progressive influences. He breathed new life into Whitworth's mind and heart mission and articulated a vision for the college that he characterized as walking the

“narrow ridge”; he was also attentive to community culture, advocating for a campus grounded in “truth and grace.” For Robinson, the narrow ridge meant that Whitworth should not become too conservative or too liberal. He hoped that the campus would be welcoming, an excellent place for both Christian and non-Christian students. He also encouraged Whitworth to be a place where Christians of varying perspectives could discuss difficult topics; therefore, the institution should avoid taking institutional positions on controversial issues.

However, he was clear in his commitment to the promotion of racial and ethnic diversity on campus. Even prior to coming to Whitworth, Robinson had been proactive in hiring administrators of color at Manchester. Yet, a year into his presidency, the overall composition of the student body reflected how far Whitworth was from actually being a diverse community. That year, Whitworth enrolled 163 Asian/Pacific Islanders, the largest group of students of color (8.1%); 21 Black/non-Hispanic students, a drop of six from the previous year (1.0%); 30 Hispanic students (1.5%); 22 Native American students (1.1%); and 1695 Caucasian students (84.6%). In an interview in the *Whitworthian*, Robinson stated, “At this point I am unsure of why Whitworth has not been able to obtain many U.S. minority students. Is it a chilly climate on campus? An inability to effectively recruit?” asked Robinson. “The fact is the problem is self-perpetuating and we must break the cycle.”¹⁶

The student reporter noted that Robinson had been at the forefront of campus discussions about diversity. He had appointed a cultural diversity task force the previous year and had recently named Gordon Watanabe, who had returned to Whitworth after completing his Ph.D. at Washington State University, to the president’s cabinet. Watanabe, one of three full-time minority faculty members at Whitworth, was the first cabinet officer in Whitworth’s history with the specific assignment of overseeing issues related to cultural diversity.¹⁷

After meeting with members of the Black Student Union, Robinson heard ongoing concerns about the curriculum. As a result, he supported five Whitworth faculty who attended an eight-day seminar held at Evergreen State College in Olympia that addressed cultural diversity in the classroom.¹⁸

As the decade wore on, frustration continued regarding lack of representation of persons of color in both the faculty and student body.¹⁹ In order to address the lack of racially diverse faculty members, the college established “The Employment Diversity Committee” in 1996. When hiring, each search committee was required to include a representative from the Diversity Committee. In addition, the committee implemented a diversity training program for the purpose of facilitating communication and understanding between ethnic, age and gender groups. Doug Sugano expressed optimism that this was an important step forward. He also voiced his belief that a diverse faculty was absolutely essential in order “to ensure that multiculturalism can be taught by people with first-hand experience.”²⁰ Sugano’s comment was one of the first to raise an issue that would become more pronounced over the next few decades: could white professors legitimately teach about non-white experiences?

In 1995, the trial of O.J. Simpson provided a window into racial issues both at Whitworth and across the country. The former NFL football player, one of the most recognizable African Americans in the country, was accused of murdering his former wife, Nicole Brown Simpson, and Ron Goldman. Riveted by both the trial (much of which was televised) and the announcement of the verdict of Simpson’s innocence, the campus and nation divided largely along racial lines. Television sets on campus allowed students to watch the verdict. When the jury announced that Simpson was not guilty, the few African American students on campus expressed a combination of excitement and sympathy for Simpson, however, most white students

expressed shock or cynicism regarding the outcome. The president of the Black Student Union, Makeba Andrews, was quoted in the *Whitworthian* as saying, “It’s important that people let him go on with life. People are being very insensitive. . . I feel sorry for the victims’ families but he’s a victim too.” According to Andrews, the verdict surfaced a number of racial issues. “I [heard] negative things on campus [as a result of the verdict]. It is definitely a race thing.”²¹

The second half of the 1990s found Whitworth students, staff and faculty engaging issues of race both on and off campus. One of the most visible students of color was Moses Pulei, a student from Kenya. A charismatic figure, Pulei was elected student body president in 1996. After graduating from Whitworth, Pulei attended Fuller Seminary and returned to Whitworth for a short time to teach in the religion department. Eventually, Pulei moved to Africa and co-founded Better Harvest Agricultural Company, a nonprofit that works with small-scale farmers in Tanzania to produce crops that can be sold at a profit.²²

Professor Don Liebert in sociology continued to take Whitworth students to African American religious services and to teach multiple courses dealing with race-related issues. Arlin Migliazzo in history offered courses that addressed issues specific to minority groups and racial prejudice. Raja Tanas in sociology focused on prejudice against Palestinians in the Middle East. Doug Sugano continued to advocate for adding more multi-cultural voices in the curriculum and more persons of color in the administration, staff, and faculty.

In 1996, Professor Jim Waller from the department of psychology initiated one of the most significant efforts by a faculty member to engage issues of racism and prejudice. After reading historian Douglas Brinkley’s book, *The Magic Bus*, which detailed Brinkley’s six-week bus tour with seventeen students across parts of the United States, Waller decided to try something similar during Whitworth’s Jan Term. Named “Prejudice Across America,” the class

was comprised of twenty students in addition to Waller. The experience began in Los Angeles and ended in Washington D.C. In Los Angeles, students visited the Los Angeles Museum of the Holocaust, the Mexican American Legal Defense Fund, the Japanese American National Museum, the Latino Museum of History, Art and Culture; and the House of Blues. The group then traveled to San Francisco and visited the Tenderloin District. From there they traveled to Chicago and celebrated Martin Luther King's birthday. After Chicago, they visited New Orleans, Memphis, Birmingham, Atlanta, and Washington, D.C. Waller told the *Whitworthian* that "I want [tour participants] to always hold firmly to the thought that each one of us can do something to bring some portion of misery to an end in whatever corner of the world we find ourselves."²³

The class proved enormously successful. The experiences and conversations were informative and powerful; many students commented that this was the most significant experience of their college career. The trip received significant national attention: *The Chronicle of Higher Education* published an article describing the class, and local news stations interviewed Waller at various locations along the way.

As a follow up, Waller organized a campus-wide simulation in February 1996. Signs separated students by eye color, telling those without brown eyes they must use the least convenient door, bathroom stall, or drinking fountain. Students were forced to sit in separate sections based on eye color in the auditorium for the "Prejudice Across America Forum" given by the students who had participated in Waller's study program the previous month. According to the *Whitworthian*, "some students responded by vandalizing the posted signs; others made signs of their own that said 'Fight the Brown-Eyed Power!'" Shondra Dillon, coordinator for Cultural and Special Events, reflected upon the event: "The cool thing is that it is showing how

we develop labels, call names, and make jokes based on appearances different from our own. . . . Our goal was not to have this be a black-white racial thing, but to remind us of all the different kinds of prejudice that are happening in the world today.”²⁴

Waller began offering the trip every other year and it became one of the most popular Jan Term courses on campus. All told, he took students on six trips between 1996 and 2007. Gradually, more students of color signed up for the class, that added a dynamic where Whitworth students were forced to confront more directly the different experiences regarding race and prejudice that each of them had experienced. Waller ended up publishing two books regarding racial issues: *Face to Face: The Changing State of Racism Across America* in 1998, and then two years later, *Prejudice Across America*, based on his student trips at Whitworth.²⁵

An unusual story of an African American student who came to Whitworth occurred in the mid-‘90s when David Casteal enrolled in the graduate program in education in pursuit of a teaching degree. Casteal had grown up in Florida and attended the University of Alabama on a football scholarship; in one game, he had tied a school record with four rushing touchdowns. He contemplated standing for the National Football League draft but ended up desiring to pursue a career in education. He also wanted to leave the South and move to the Northwest. He applied to several schools and Whitworth was the first to grant him admission. He drove to Spokane and matriculated into the graduate program in teaching. However, his experience in Spokane did not go well. With Florida license plates, Casteal attracted the attention of Spokane police; over the course of one year he was stopped fourteen times. Finally, after several meetings with city officials, including the police chief and mayor, the harassment stopped. Casteal, however, liked his experience at Whitworth. He particularly appreciated the support of Randy Michaelis, one of Whitworth’s professors of education.²⁶

After earning his master's degree at Whitworth, he began teaching at Cooper Elementary in east Spokane where he remains today. Over the years, Casteal traveled extensively and developed a keen appreciation for African culture and history. He learned the art of African drumming and brought that interest back to his students who formed drumming groups; these groups have performed throughout the Northwest. He also became an actor; Casteal, along with local playwright Bryan Harnetieux, developed a one-man show. Casteal performed as the historical figure York, the only slave on the Lewis and Clark Expedition. The play was performed in many parts of the country including Whitworth and New York City.²⁷

One addition to the student life staff proved to be significant in terms of its impact on the campus through its international students. In 1996, Dr. Kathy Storm, Vice President for Student Life, hired Lulu Gonzalez to oversee international student programming. Gonzalez, who was raised in Mexico and had taught Spanish for Whitworth, moved into the role and remained for twenty-six years. Gonzalez was much loved by international students and helped orchestrate an annual International Banquet/Festival. Her gracious spirit and infectious enthusiasm provided an important source of support for the roughly 75-100 non-U.S. students each year.²⁸

The overall situation for many students of color, however, continued to be challenging. One story in the *Whitworthian* revealed a number of details that underscored difficulties faced by many students of color. The story featured comments by an African American woman, Stephanie (Stephy) Beans, who had been hired in 1996 in the Student Life Office as an administrative assistant. Beans went on to serve over twenty-five years at Whitworth, largely out of the chaplain's office. To many students she was best known as "Mama" Beans for her willingness to listen and exhibit extraordinary care for all students, particularly students of color. Over her several decades at Whitworth, "Mama" Beans," according to Dean of Spiritual Life

Terry McGonigal, served in a significant pastoral role for countless students, including both white and students of color. An accomplished preacher in one of Spokane's predominantly Black churches, Beans took an increasing role in Whitworth's chapel programs with her praying and preaching.²⁹

Interviewed by the *Whitworthian* about her observations of African American students, Beans suggested that "Black students often do not feel welcome at Whitworth. One female Black student mentioned being given extra room while walking on the sidewalk." Beans told of another student who had a nice new car. Some white students asked him if he sold drugs to get his car. On another occasion, a Black male student walking back to his dorm from the bus late at night encountered several white females in front the Campus Center and the women "took off running in hysterics."³⁰

Beans's comments underscore the many challenges facing Whitworth relative to the retention of Black students specifically and minority students in general. In spring 1997, a significant number of ethnic minority and international students expressed dissatisfaction with what they found to be a "non-supportive" campus climate. By fall 1997, only 25 percent of first-year Black students had returned to school. The call for a person of color in the admissions office continued.³¹

In response to multiple indications that Whitworth was struggling with issues related to diversity, President Bill Robinson, in October 1997, organized what he called a "Diversity Summit" in the Hawthorne House where the Robinson family resided. Led by Gordon Watanabe, Special Assistant to the President for Diversity and the first cabinet officer of color, the summit hosted approximately sixty people from across campus to provide input regarding where Whitworth was falling short and what might be done about it. "The purpose was to see

what actions we could take to make this campus a more supportive and better climate,” said Robinson. Priorities identified at the summit included creating a diversity venture fund for recruiting faculty of color, offering a Core 200 class on multiculturalism, and developing a mentoring program for students of color. Continued emphasis was placed on academic departments developing their diversity plans and providing diversity training across the campus.³²

Student leaders also attempted to make an impact on increasing racial diversity on campus. In the month following President Robinson’s Diversity Summit, the student council passed a resolution that called specifically for another minority admissions counselor to be hired before August 1998. In response, student Hanna Ganser wrote a critique of the resolution that focused on what, in her opinion, was more important than simply hiring another admissions counselor. According to Ganser:

Whitworth does need to address the relatively low numbers of the particular minorities enumerated in the resolution [African American, Hispanic, and Native American]. However, the first step suggested is one which will only be effective if the students are willing to overstep their comfort zones. This includes crossing barriers between different social groups, geographical areas, lifestyles, experiences, countries and religions—not just racial categories. The issue of diversity is not exclusively about availability but includes our deepest fears about people we don’t understand. Divorcing ourselves from negative reactions to unfamiliar things is a better first step than hiring a second minority admissions counselor. Another counselor could only bring students to MacKay House. The more important question is whether students will want to stay once they cross the street.³³

The last few years of the '90s reflected a consciousness regarding the importance of racial and cultural diversity on the Whitworth campus. For a short time, Whitworth succeeded in hiring an African American admissions officer, James Bledsoe, though he left after two years.

In 1999, Whitworth hired Esther Louie out of Washington State University to give direction to student life initiatives regarding cultural diversity. Louie, a long-time colleague of Gordon Watanabe, brought substantial experience in multicultural work from her time at Washington State. She focused on the importance of cultural competency and insight. She emphasized that each individual is grounded in a specific culture, and drew on a “culture of one” activity to increase people’s understanding of their own cultural influences.

When interviewed by the *Whitworthian* in 2000, Esther Louie explained her approach to fostering cultural awareness and diversity. “Do you feel comfortable here?” asked Louie. “Do you feel accepted – that you belong? Can you be your own person? Do you feel included in the community or do you feel excluded? Are your academic, social, spiritual and personal needs met? Do you feel supported?”³⁴ Nearly twenty-five years later, Whitworth, as well as countless colleges and universities across the country, has reemphasized the importance of helping students feel that they “belong” in their respective communities.

As the new millennium dawned, the interest in cultural diversity as well as education regarding racism in American society continued to grow on the Whitworth campus. Much of this was spurred by the faculty and staff in the Student Life division under the overall leadership of Dr. Kathy Storm, who provided support for staff doing front-line multicultural work, including continuation of the “Cultural Diversity Advocate” program in each of the residence halls.

Meanwhile, one overseas academic course, beginning in January 2001, and offered several times in following years, focused specifically on the reality of racism internationally. Professors John Yoder from Political Science and Gordon Jackson from Communications took a group of students to South Africa. They visited Cape Town, Hermanus, George, Umtata, Durban, Pretoria, and Johannesburg. Upon returning to Spokane, students spoke of their direct experiences of racism in South Africa and the shocking disparity in wealth between the white and Black communities.³⁵

Stephy Nobles Beans continued to expand her role among students of color. As the advisor to the Black Student Union, Beans helped Black students organize several events around Black History Month. In February 2001, the BSU brought L. D. Williams, an activist in the Civil Rights Movement, to campus. In that same month, the BSU provided a venue for Ms. Nobles Beans to read her own poetry reflecting many of her experiences as a Black woman. Students also invited the Rogers High School dance team along with singer Nikita Hill and a relative of visiting Fulbright scholar Nichols Sironka's from Kenya, who is a Maasai dancer.³⁶ In addition, Ms. Nobles Beans led efforts to celebrate Kwanzaa, and initiated the Gospel Explosion, which featured predominantly Black church choirs from Spokane.

Toward the end of the spring semester 2001, twenty Whitworth students, led by Assistant Dean of Diversity Esther Louie, acted as group facilitators at the Fourth Community Congress on Race Relations at Gonzaga. Facilitators helped lead discussions in groups of twelve on issues that included personal bias, cycles of oppression, and standing up against racism.³⁷

The growing emphasis across the campus on confronting racism was reflected in the fall play, *God's Country*, directed by Professor Diana Trotter. The play focused on the crimes and court trial of *The Order*, a Pacific Northwest white supremacy group affiliated with the Aryan

Nations. The Order had been responsible for the murder of Jewish talk-show host, Alan Berg in Denver in 1984. Eventually, the leader of The Order, Robert Matthews, was killed in a shootout with FBI agents near the small community of Freeland on Whidbey Island.

One student, Sydney Baird, who acted in the play, was quoted as saying that she was appalled by how few Whitworth students knew that white supremacy groups existed near Spokane. Professor of Political Science Julia Stronks commented, “The play itself asks us to think about what it means to be a nation and what it means to pledge allegiance to a united America with liberty and justice for all. Who should be included in the ‘for all’? Americans of Arab descent? Gay Americans? Racist Americans? These are critical questions for us to think about at any time.”³⁸ The seriousness with which Whitworth leaders took this issue is reflected in the fact that Professor Trotter hosted four free public events before and after the play to facilitate discussion about racism, white supremacy, and terrorism. In addition, Whitworth invited Reverend Jerome Walters, author of the white supremacist ideology-exposing book, *One Aryan Nation Under God*, to give a lecture on “American Racial Extremism.”³⁹

The 1990s proved to be an important decade in the history of race relations at Whitworth. President Bill Robinson clearly signaled that becoming a more diverse and more hospitable community toward students of color was an important objective. He initiated a review process of all his vice presidents regarding their efforts to promote diversity in their respective areas. Strategic plans clearly identified increasing Whitworth’s diversity as a major goal. Academic Vice President Tammy Reid and Vice President of Student Life Kathy Storm also reinforced the importance of the objective. Faculty such as Doug Sugano and Jim Waller provided academic leadership, while Gordon Watanabe, Stephy Beans, and newly hired Esther Louie injected new energy into programming around diversity.

Yet the decade revealed ongoing chronic problems with recruiting and retaining faculty and staff of color. More troubling was the continued failure to retain students of color in significant numbers. This combination of increased awareness as well as an institutional commitment to diversity set the stage for one of the most significant decisions in Whitworth's history.

¹ *Whitworthian*, February 20, 1990, p. 2.

² *Whitworth College Catalogue*, 1991-93, p. 2.

³ *Whitworthian*, February 19, 1991, p. 8.

⁴ *Whitworthian*, February 19, 1991, p. 1.

⁵ *Whitworthian*, March 12, 1991 p. 2.

⁶ Author interview with Doug Sugano, June 15, 2022.

⁷ *Whitworthian*, March 12, 1991.

⁸ *Whitworthian*, April 16, 1991, p. 4; author interview with Tammy Reid, February 22, 2023.

⁹ *Whitworthian*, October 11, 1994, p. 4.

¹⁰ *Whitworthian*, April 23, 1991, p. 1.

¹¹ *Whitworthian*, April 27, 1993, p. 8.

¹² *Whitworthian*, October 28, 1993.

¹³ *Whitworthian*, April 5, 1994, p. 4.

¹⁴ *Whitworthian*, April 5, 1994, p. 4.

¹⁵ Author interview with Scott Hansen, March 1, 2023.

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- ¹⁶ *Whitworthian*, November 9, 1994, p. 1.
- ¹⁷ Author interview with Bill Robinson, June 15, 2022; *Whitworthian*, November 9, 1994, p. 1.
- ¹⁸ *Whitworthian*, November 9, 1994, p. 1.
- ¹⁹ *Whitworthian*, Oct. 3, 1995 p. 1.
- ²⁰ *Whitworthian*, April 27, 1993, p. 8.
- ²¹ *Whitworthian*, October 10, 1995, p. 1.
- ²² <https://a-cbo.org/2021/07/12/moses-pulei-chairman-and-co-founder/>
- ²³ *Whitworthian*, February 20, 2001, p. 9.
- ²⁴ *Whitworthian*, February 27, 1996, p. 1.
- ²⁵ Author interview with James Waller, August 11, 2022.
- ²⁶ Author interview with David Casteal, May 4, 2022.
- ²⁷ <https://www.spokesman.com/stories/2021/may/23/school-name-finalist-enslaved-explorer-york-was-cr/>
- ²⁸ Author interview with Lulu Gonzales, November 28, 2022.
- ²⁹ Author interview with Terry McGonigal, December 12, 2022.
- ³⁰ Author interview with Stephanie Nobles-Beans, September 30, 1997, p. 1.
- ³¹ *Whitworthian*, September 30, 1997, p. 1.
- ³² Author interview with Bill Robinson, June 15, 2022; author Interview with Gordon Watanabe, June 15, 2022; *Whitworthian*, October 14, 1997, p. 1.; “Diversity Initiatives” Doug Sugano Papers, Whitworth University Archives, Box 3, Folder 12.
- ³³ *Whitworthian*, November 18, 1997, p. 3.
- ³⁴ *Whitworthian*, Sept. 26, 2000, p. 6.
- ³⁵ *Whitworthian*, February 20, 2001, p. 9.
- ³⁶ *Whitworthian*, February 20, 2001, 9.
- ³⁷ *Whitworthian*, May 1, 2001, pp, 1-2.

³⁸ *Whitworthian*, October 9, 2001, p. 3.

³⁹ *Whitworthian*, October 9, 2001, p. 9