Chapter 3: World War II until 1960

"An Awakening to Racial Conflict in America"

The fifteen-year period between the end of World War II in 1945 and the beginning of the 1960s was a remarkable period in both American and world history. One of the most racist regimes in history, Nazi Germany, had been defeated. At the same time, the world war unleashed economic and social forces that led to major changes for millions of African Americans. Military defense contracts for constructing ships and building aircraft at Boeing attracted hundreds of thousands of workers to cities up and down the Pacific Coast, and many of these workers were African American. Spokane, while not a major center for war-time employment, nevertheless benefitted from defense contracts for the production of aluminum and for its air force base at Fairchild. These industries and opportunities attracted new African Americans into the community.

The war, however, also highlighted the ongoing racial divide in America. The U.S. military remained segregated throughout the war. Only with the Korean War (1950-53) did President Truman order the end of racial segregation in the armed forces. World War II exposed

other inequities and unleashed expressions of racism in all parts of the country. African Americans had fought courageously in the war, as exemplified by the Tuskegee Airman where former Whitworth student Jack Holsclaw served. Yet African Americans were treated as second or third-class citizens throughout the war. Following the conflict, African Americans faced inadequate housing, limited employment, and segregated schooling. The Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union raised the issue of whether the United States could legitimately claim that its society offered greater freedom, at least in regard to African Americans, than in the Soviet Union under communism.

These realities led increasing numbers of Black and white leaders to advocate vigorously for a revolution in race relations. In the years following the war, desegregation of society became an increasingly important priority. In 1947, Jackie Robinson broke the color line in baseball. In 1954, the Supreme Court, with its famous *Brown vs. Board of Education* ruling, overturned the earlier *Plessy vs. Ferguson* decision that legitimized separate but equal schools. However, in the following year, Emmett Till's murder in Mississippi along with the struggle to desegregate the public transportation system in Montgomery, Alabama, elevated the nation's consciousness about ongoing discrimination and violence against African Americans. In addition, efforts to desegregate rest rooms, lunch counters, drinking fountains, swimming pools, and numerous other public facilities all highlighted America's underlying culture of racism.

If the West and specifically the Pacific Northwest had avoided some of the most overt institutionalized forms of segregation, discrimination and racism were still evident both above and below the surface of social practice. Employment limitations for African Americans remained a significant problem; housing also was in short supply, and restrictions on where

African Americans could purchase homes contributed directly to the concentration of African Americans in substandard housing in the decades following World War II.

At Whitworth, the culture regarding race remained complicated on a number of fronts. The acceptance of Japanese Americans from internment campus reflected an openness to persons of color, even persons who were being openly discriminated against by federal policies. Another minor example of interest and respect for African Americans occurred during the war when associate editor of the *Whitworthian*, Robert Ruby, published interviews he had done with major figures in Black entertainment when they came through Spokane. These included the great contralto, Marian Anderson, who in 1939, performed before the Lincoln Memorial in Washington D.C. before 75,000 people. Ruby also interviewed prominent Black singers Roland Hayes and Dorothy Maynor, who would later be the first African American to sing at a presidential inauguration.

However, Ruby's most stunning interview was with Paul Robeson. Robeson had come to Spokane and performed with members of the Washington State College choir. Ruby described both the concert and Robeson's hobbies and personal life for the Whitworth students. Ruby wrote, "Paul Robeson presented a concert not to be surpassed by many artists. . . . His program was opened with "Water Boy"—his favorite piece, he told me. . . . His encores were numerous and generous." [1] They included "Ol' Man River and "Wagon Wheels." At the time Ruby interviewed him in 1941, Robeson had emerged as one of the most recognizable African Americans in the country. He was one of the first Black men to play serious roles in the American theater and cinema. Known in the United States and Europe for his stunning voice

and interpretation of several genres of music, Robeson was an activist who fought against racism in the United States and fascism abroad.

Yet, at virtually the same moment that Ruby was sharing his interest and information through personal interviews of some of the country's most accomplished Black artists, and at the same time that Frank Warren was working to bring Japanese Americans to campus, Whitworth trustees in 1942 reflected deeply racist views. They decided to proceed with the sale of properties it owned just east of Division Street in order to support the college's endowment. However, the deeds carried a racial covenant that stipulated that no person of color could buy or rent these properties. The existence of these covenants underscored how deeply forms of structural racism existed throughout the city and country. Key board members approved of a practice that openly discriminated against persons of color, primarily African Americans. More will be said about the racial covenants and their discovery, as well as the response of Whitworth president Scott McQuilkin in the final chapter.

The racism that seeped into campus culture emerged just two years after the end of the war. In April 1947, the campaign to elect a student body president revealed persistent racial stereotypes. In describing the various ways in which students attempted to persuade their peers to vote for them, the *Whitworthian* took special note of two approaches: the first featured the use of a small airplane to drop leaflets on campus promoting the candidacy of Eldon Unruh. Lewis Bock, on the other hand "had two students, black-faced with burnt cork, pleading his case." The fact that students (and perhaps faculty) seemed to accept the Black-faced promotion without opposition suggests how racist culture permeated the campus and the country in the post-war period.[2]

As the decade continued to unfold, the handful of African American students as well as other minority students, were expected, as before the war to assimilate into the broader Whitworth culture developing in the post-war world. This culture naturally reflected white evangelical Protestant middle class values. Whitworth's residence halls and campus life, as at most American colleges public and private, reflected a belief in *loco parentis* where behaviors were closely monitored. Traditions such as Homecoming, campus beauty contests (always between white contestants), and other campus traditions, including pranks, dominate the memories of overwhelmingly white alumni from those years.

However, Whitworth made an interesting hire during World War II to teach in its sociology department--Professor Gustav Schlauch. Prior to coming to Whitworth, Schlauch had served as president of Spokane Junior College located on Spokane's South Hill. Beginning in 1941, because of financial reasons, Spokane Junior College began holding classes on the Whitworth campus. By the end of the school year, arrangements were made to absorb the Spokane Junior College students into the Whitworth student body.[3] During this period, Schlauch became involved in civil rights issues in Spokane. Specifically, he was elected chair of the executive committee of the Spokane Committee on Race Relations (SCRR) in 1945. Formed in late 1944, the SCRR consisted originally of approximately 100 civic leaders committed to addressing problems related to discrimination in housing, employment, and public establishments. Over the next few years, the SCRR worked with the NAACP to investigate incidents of discrimination and to offer clinics and workshops addressing racism throughout the city. Schlauch, more than any other faculty member at Whitworth, actively committed himself to civil rights issues in the years following World War II.[4] It is difficult to know for certain how his interest in racial issues translated into Schlauch's sociology classes. However, knowing his

convictions, he surely wielded an outsized influence on the few African American students who attended Whitworth in these post-war years.

The first student of color at Whitworth to have been deeply influenced by Schlauch was Frances Scott. Born in Spokane, Scott was the great-granddaughter of enslaved individuals. Raised by a single mother who was a trained nurse but could only find work as a cook or a maid, Scott had experienced various expressions of racism during her years in Spokane. These included not being allowed to speak at her high school graduation even though she was the salutatorian.

She began her college career at Spokane's Holy Names College, but had to leave after she got married. She matriculated at Whitworth and earned bachelor's and master's degrees in sociology under the direction of Schlauch by 1947. Her thesis was entitled, "A Study of Social Trends in Spokane from 1900-1945."[5] Fifteen years later she returned to earn a teaching certificate from Whitworth. She once said, "Whitworth gave this black woman an opportunity when it was far from commonplace. They gave it, I took it and I'm glad I did."[6]

Scott taught English, German, sociology, and African American history for 31 years at Rogers High School. During her time at Rogers, she attended law school at Gonzaga and passed the bar exam in 1979. She became the first African American woman to be qualified to practice law in Spokane. In 2005 she was honored by Whitworth as a Distinguished Alumna. In 1988, after her husband died, she moved to the western side of the state but would still travel back to Spokane to be keynote speaker at Martin Luther King Jr. celebrations. In 2021, the Spokane School District renamed Sheridan Elementary the Frances L. N. Scott Elementary School in tribute to her life and work.[7]

A few years later, Schlauch played a role in mentoring Eugene Breckenridge, another African American student who eventually made a significant impact on public education in Spokane and Tacoma. Breckenridge's path to Spokane and Whitworth revealed challenges facing African Americans in Spokane and across the country during much of the 20th century. Born in Texarkana, Arkansas, Breckenridge served in the segregated Army during World War II as a master sergeant. After completing his undergraduate degree at the all-Black West Virginia State College, he was accepted into the graduate program at Whitworth where he earned a Master's degree in Education. His thesis, under the influence of Schlauch, was entitled "Employment of Negroes in Spokane." He also earned the distinction of being named Whitworth's outstanding student teacher in 1951. Yet, the Spokane School District initially did not hire him because at that time the district did not hire anyone who was Black.[8]

Seeking employment in any line of work he could find, Breckenridge worked as a window washer and head waiter at the Spokane Press Club, but also became involved in the Spokane chapter of the NAACP. His plight drew the attention of Spokane's most effective civil rights attorney, Carl Maxey. Maxey threatened a law suit against the district on the charge of racial discrimination. Rather than challenge the suit, the district hired Breckenridge to teach math and English at Havermale Junior High School making him the first African American to teach in the Spokane School District. He thrived in the classroom, and in 1957 Shadle Park High School hired him to teach history. Breckenridge continued to be active in Spokane regarding racial justice issues. He gave hundreds of talks to local civic and church groups. In 1967, the Washington Education Association recognized him with its first Educator-Citizen of the Year award. In 1969, Whitworth awarded him an honorary doctorate. Toward the end of his career, he moved to Tacoma and served as the Assistant Superintendent for Affirmative Action and

Community Affairs where he implemented a plan for hiring minority candidates. Breckenridge was the Tacoma School District's highest-ranking Black administrator.[9]

Schlauch also influenced Sam Gulley's experience at Whitworth. Born in 1937 in the small town of Huttig, Arkansas, near the Louisiana border, Gulley took a circuitous route to Whitworth College. Against great odds, Gulley eventually became one of the leading dentists in Atlanta, as well as a state legislator, civic activist, and trustee of Whitworth College.

Growing up in the segregated South, Gulley experienced multiple forms of discrimination, the inequities of Jim Crow, and occasional threats to his personal safety. His family moved to Oakland, Las Vegas, El Paso, Kansas City, and back to Arkansas. Always a curious student, Gulley knew that he wanted to attend college. He expected to return to California, but his older brother Napoleon, who had played on several teams in the Negro Leagues, convinced him to come to Spokane where "Nap" currently played. He convinced his younger brother to stay and matriculate at Whitworth beginning in 1955 on a baseball scholarship. Gulley soon came to the attention of Dr. David Cowen, a longtime state legislator and philanthropist. Cowen found several ways, including financial, to help Gulley through his college career.[10]

However, all did not go smoothly at Whitworth. As a student, Gulley developed an interest in the sciences that eventually led him to dental school. Science labs always occurred in the afternoon, and in Gulley's case they conflicted with baseball practice. One particular lab made him late by ten minutes to practice. The baseball coach refused to make an exception for him and the professor also held firm. Gulley was forced to choose between baseball, the reason for his scholarship, and his science class. Gulley chose science, not knowing what would

happen. Fortunately, one of his roommates had seen him casually doing some high jumping. He convinced Gulley to try out for track coach Sam Adams, who saw his potential. With some additional instruction, Gulley had a spectacular season. He long jumped twenty-four feet and amazingly high jumped 6' 10" winning the 1958 NAIA national championship in that event.

Although Gulley loved his experience at Whitworth and later served as a trustee, in an interview nearly sixty years later he remembered an incident in one of professor Schlauch's classes. Dr. Schlauch had asked Gulley if he would talk about some of his experiences growing up in the Jim Crow South. Gulley shared some of his childhood memories, only to be challenged by more than one student for what they thought was his "exaggeration." Gulley was justifiably taken aback by the discounting of his life experience by some of his peers, none of whom apparently had ever been in the South. Gulley recalled with appreciation Dr. Schlauch's defense of him before the entire class.[11]

After graduating, Gulley set his sights on a career in dentistry. He graduated from the University of Tennessee and ended up first in South Carolina, where not only did he establish a respected dental practice, but he ran for public office and served as a state senator. Eventually, he and his wife Linda moved to Atlanta. Gulley became a consultant to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and was an active supporter of Black colleges in the Atlanta area. In 1991, President Art DeJong asked Gulley to join the Whitworth Board of Trustees where he served for ten years.

In spite of the experiences of Scott, Breckenridge, and Gulley, Whitworth only gradually awakened to the civil rights movement that was unfolding in the South with *Brown vs. Board of Education* in 1954, the murder of Emmett Till in 1955, the Montgomery Bus Boycott in 1955-56, and the 1957 integration of Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas. For most students,

these events seemed far away and confined to the South. Spokane itself claimed only a very small percentage of Black residents, generally less than 2 percent. In some ways, Spokane was a relatively safe place for African Americans, but there were many unspoken rules and some obvious forms of discrimination in the city. According to historian Jim Kershner, the Inland Northwest was far from immune to the racism and white supremacy of the 30s, 40s, and 50s that plagued not only the South but much of the nation. In multiple interviews, Kershner was told that African Americans needed to understand what it meant to "stay in their place." Kershner documented "No Colored Patronage Solicited" signs in Spokane restaurants and the whites-only swimming pool at Natatorium Park, and, most egregiously a "[N], Read This Sign and Run" posting at the edge of Wallace, Idaho.[12]

At Whitworth, one indication of change and of heightened race-consciousness appeared in February 1957 in a piece by the student editor of the *Whitworthian*, Gary Heilsberg. He shared a report of a student at Florida State University who had invited three African American exchange students to attend a Christmas party. Clearly that had not been well received, and the Florida State student was subject to unidentified threats and intimidation. Heilsberg wrote that the Florida State student "dared to follow the integration decree of the US Supreme Court." At the end of the brief editorial, Heilsberg wrote, "Human dignity and individual rights are at stake."[13]

However, that one article seemed to be the only occasion in the middle to latter part of the '50s when the Whitworth student paper directly engaged civil rights issues. Indirectly, Whitworth students confronted issues of racial and ethnic diversity when they formed the "Cosmopolitan Club." Active from the mid '50s through the early '60s, the club proved popular

among Whitworth's international students. Student leaders organized social activities around food, song, and international costumes.

As was the case with most colleges and universities during the late '50s, students at Whitworth did not focus on issues of domestic diversity but on world events. The Cold War between the Soviet Union and the United States attracted the most attention. Fear of the spread of communism occupied students and faculty during these years.

In spite of the focus on world events, and in particular on the Cold War, social forces that impacted race relations were present throughout the country, and these forces began to reflect themselves on the Whitworth campus beginning in the 1960s. The next decade, at Whitworth as across America, became a turning point in the struggle for civil rights and the growing recognition that racism had taken a terrible toll on African Americans throughout the country.

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[1] *Whitworthian*, December 12, 1941, p. 2.

[2] *Whitworthian*, April 11, 1947, p. 1.

[3] Dale E. Soden, *An Enduring Venture of Mind & Heart: An Illustrated History of Whitworth University* (Spokane: Whitworth University, 2010), 79.

[4] Dwayne A. Mack, *Black Spokane: The Civil Rights Struggle in the Inland Northwest* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2014), 35-36.

[5] Frances L. Scott, "A Study of Social Trends in Spokane from 1900-1945," Master of Arts Thesis, Whitworth College, 1947, Whitworth University Library.

[6] Whitworth profiles book https://www.spokesman.com/stories/2021/may/25/school-name-finalist-frances-scott-spokanes-first-/

[7] *Spokesman Review*, May 25, 2021.

[8] Eugene Hamilton Breckenridge, “The Employment of Negros in Spokane, Washington,” Master of Arts Thesis, Whitworth College, 1949, Whitworth University Library Special Collections.

[9] Mack, *Black Spokane*, 82-83.

[10] *Spokesman Review*, May 16, 2010.

[11] Author interview with Sam Gulley March 2, 2022,

[12] Jim Kershner, “Segregation in Spokane: Longtime Black Residents Recount the Injustices and the Victories,” *Columbia: The Magazine of Northwest History*, Winter 2000-01: Vol. 14, No. 4.

[13] *Whitworthian*, February 18, 1957.