

## Chapter 5: 1966-68

### “Change comes to Whitworth”

1965 marked the beginning of the most significant change in Whitworth’s history regarding race. James Farmer’s speech late in that year led to increasingly aggressive strategies toward recruiting students of color. National events in the civil rights movement created more interest in matters of race on the Whitworth campus. However, the immediate cause for a change in approach on the part of Whitworth administrators and faculty arose after the visit of activist theologian William Stringfellow, who came to campus during the week of November 14-18, 1966. It is not known specifically who invited Stringfellow to campus, but the invitation is likely to have come from the chaplain’s office.

Stringfellow, a lawyer and a member of the Episcopal Church, was one of the best-known lay theologians in the country. He spoke frequently on college campuses. His career as an activist began during his college years. He gradually evolved into one of the most outspoken critics of U.S. military and economic policies. Particularly motivated by the civil rights movement, Stringfellow advocated for civil disobedience and non-violence. He believed the Bible provided a lens through which to critique systemic evil that was embedded in American

social structures and policies. From his perspective, most Christians were shallow and uncommitted to the transformation and redemption of American society.

Stringfellow spoke on several occasions. By all accounts, students found him to be one of the most provocative presenters they had ever heard on campus. Speaking in a relative monotone, reading his text, and smoking a cigarette, he took aim at students whom he believed worried more about Whitworth's image than what the college was doing to address issues of urban life, the war in Vietnam, and racial prejudice. Bob Clark, a Whitworth student at the time and later a professor of sociology, recalls that he and others saw Stringfellow as a contemporary prophet. Clark remembers that Stringfellow challenged the notion of whether in fact there was any such thing as a Christian college. But Stringfellow's message that stood out most clearly was that he believed that Whitworth was simply too white.<sup>1</sup>

In an interview with *Whitworthian* editor Ross Anderson, Stringfellow exhorted students to “[g]et involved! Plunge in! Let yourself be guided by the urgent matters around you. Whitworthians must ask themselves how they are deprived as the result of the white ghettos they're involved in.” He continued, “Whitworth students don't have to look to Watts or Harlem to find the Civil Rights struggle. They must face the fact that there is a racial crisis *here* because this is a White school.”<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps no other speaker before or since Stringfellow exerted a greater impact on Whitworth. In response to Stringfellow, the dean of the faculty, Clarence Simpson, when interviewed by the *Whitworthian*, asserted, “I'd very much like to see Whitworth become known as a school which *actively* supports integration. It would be of great benefit to the school to bring in more Negro students as well as students of various other races and backgrounds.” Simpson acknowledged that the current strategies for increasing minority enrollment were

failing. In his interview, Simpson provided an in-depth description of current enrollment efforts as well as a candid description of why they were failing. He acknowledged that Whitworth was successful with clusters of white students from Walnut Creek, California, and Colorado Springs, Colorado. However, Simpson noted, “Because perhaps relatively few of the people who make these informal contacts work with groups in dominantly Negro areas, there is less opportunity for one of these clusters of people to form.” He also acknowledged that financial barriers were significant for many African American students. Simpson ended with these comments: “In any case, there seems to be a definite need to find some new way of operating in which we go beyond simply filing a quota of Negro scholarships . . . . A natural integration in a college community is an extremely valuable aid to alleviating the racial problem and we stand to gain from this trend. Bringing Negro students to Whitworth would be considered much more than just an obligation –it is a distinct *privilege*. We want to bring those who will profit most from our college, *whatever the racial background*.”<sup>3</sup>

Simpson’s statement appears to be the earliest substantive response in Whitworth’s history by a high-ranking administrator that explicitly mentioned the goal of integration. His remarks also convey that Whitworth was not being pressured into recruiting more students of color, but rather that this was a “privilege” for a predominantly white institution. Simpson would come to play a critical role in Whitworth’s response to the charge that the college needed to diversify the student body. A Stanford Ph.D. in English, Simpson was not only beloved by students but also highly respected by the faculty. His opinion carried enormous influence in all parts of the college.

However, in the same issue of the *Whitworthian* in which Dean Simpson emphasized the importance of diversifying the student body, African American student Jeff Tucker leveled a

searing criticism of Whitworth's racial climate. In an article entitled, "The White Fool's Dream 'Whitworth College,'" Tucker expressed his frustrations with anger and bitterness. Part of his response grew out of his reaction to what he had heard from fellow white students in reaction to William Stringfellow:

Most of you white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant, prejudiced, biased and don't-give-a-damn people were upset that William Stringfellow cussed Whitworth out. Mr. Stringfellow upset the status quo. He confronted you with questions and had the nerve to treat you as adults by not telling you what to do. For the Negro students, Mr. Stringfellow offered some humor. The verbal reactions and facial expressions of some of *our* white fellow students seemed both a comedy and a failure of Whitworth.

Some of you are all psyched out to spend your summer working with some Negroes and by this doing you're [sic] part. Forget it! Clean up your own back yard first. Whitworth has a white problem. There are too many white students and not enough Negro students. Because of this, the few Negroes here suffer.

Each Negro is put on display under the "*We got some too*" slogan. . . . Socially the Negro at Whitworth is tolerated, but not accepted. Athletically he is accepted whereas in a dating situation he or she is definitely *out*. Four of five of the Negro men here are on athletic scholarships. Without these scholarships at least three out of the five would not be here. The sixth Negro is a female and she is also on a scholarship and would not be here without her scholarship. All six Negroes have not and are not anticipating recommending Whitworth to other Negro students.

The feeling is that Whitworth discriminates directly or indirectly financially, in its recruiting, and in the offering of scholarships. Financially, the average Negro's family income cannot afford to pay \$2,000 a year for college. In recruiting, how many representatives try to find contacts or contact interested but financially-deprived Negroes? It seems our 'public relations or admissions' people are too narrow in their recruiting trips. Scholarships are awarded to athletes and scholars. What about the Negro high school student with eight brothers and sisters, no father, a sick mother, work at any kind of a job at any hours, not engage in athletics, and has very little time to study. With all of "Whitworth's Christian beliefs," where is the compassion and consideration of this human being? He is no proven athlete nor a proven scholar. He hasn't had the chance! But he does have the potential to make it as a college student. This is the same chance that all Negroes are being deprived of. But, more important to you white people is the fact you are being deprived.

The Negroes at Whitworth feel that this school and its doctrines or beliefs have so far been 'phony.' Since this is an educational system which leans on spiritual beliefs, this school should recruit Negroes who are financially-deprived and potential college students. They are pushed into the background when they can serve no basic use for Whitworth. Whitworth gives them four years of book learning and a degree.

But there is more needed. There is a need for a better understanding between Negroes and whites. There is a need for Whitworth to add to its class schedule a class on Negro history in the United States.

Whitworth should be the place where great strides are made in race relations. This can be done by creating a climate which would interest and attract to our campus more Negro students so that individual Negroes will not have to typify all Negroes. Also if the climate is warm to more Negro students, the chances of a 'Whitworth Negro ghetto' forming will be cut down. It's one thing to help more Negroes get an education, but it's another thing to make them feel really wanted.

After June, 1968, at this present rate Whitworth will have one Negro student left. I hope this does not happen. It is my hope that the college will allot funds, contact potential college-bound Negroes, and strengthen the doctrines and the name of Whitworth.

Whitworth could start a nation-wide revolution by this move. If the funds are made available, I know where the potential students are. Right now, Whitworth and places like it are poverty and prejudice builders. With an education, a Negro can help himself and others. The others being both white and black. Why don't you drop the don't-give-a-damn attitude and back up all this Christian 'bull-talk' with action! You asked Mr. Stringfellow what you could do. This is it: Push this idea with action, money, and pressure on our administration to help financially-deprived Negroes get a college education.<sup>4</sup>

Tucker's withering comments were the first by an African American student who directly challenged Whitworth's own sense that it was a good place for all students regardless of the color of their skin or ethnic background. Stringfellow had indicted Whitworth and Tucker gave powerful voice to the general truth of his allegations and admonitions.

The first student-organized response to Stringfellow's criticism of Whitworth resulted in the creation of the Human Relations Council. The *Whitworthian* published its statement of

purpose in February 1967. Walt Oliver and Jeff Tucker were co-chairs of the council whose aim was to create a student organization with a broad vision to enhance diversity in general; it was not aimed solely on issues specific to African Americans.

One of the ideas that has emerged from the discussion during the 1966 Spiritual Emphasis Week [Stringfellow] is meaningful integration of Whitworth College. The Whitworth Human Relations Council is the resultant manifestation of this idea in a constructive committee designed to do a meaningful job of educating individuals for involvement in a merging world of reality and life.

By learning to communicate effectively with all people, we improve the probability of surviving in this world. The present approaches of the Human Relations Council are threefold:

First, the education of all people concerned is of prime importance. The education of the present attitudes of the Whitworth community and the educating of the minority groups that would be apart from the Whitworth community is a major concern of the Council.

Second, the exploring and providing of financial aid for members of all minority groups to enter the fellowship of the Whitworth community.

Thirdly, the opening of new and expanding recruiting areas of appeal to all groups, thus affording more opportunity for people to experience the benefits of a higher Christian Education that Whitworth offers.

These methods or approaches will hopefully not only strengthen and reinforce the Christian doctrines in the Whitworth community, but will afford a genuine witness to the

world that Christianity is alive and real in a meaningful context to the situation of the world.

The Whitworth Human Relations Council is at present involved in the process of meaningful integration of Whitworth and the world.<sup>5</sup>

Unfortunately, little observable progress occurred during the spring of 1967, although the college sought to recruit students from Seattle's multi-racial Cleveland and Garfield high schools.

During the summer of 1967, two white Whitworth students, Tom Taggart and Val Carlson, spent their summer in New York City working with Bill Millikin and Harv Oostdyke in a Young Life program called Street Academies. Carlson and Taggart were sponsored by the Doulos Committee of the First Presbyterian Church in Colorado Springs, which was led by Ron White, associate pastor of the congregation (who later served as Whitworth's chaplain in the 1970s).<sup>6</sup> Carlson worked primarily that summer with elementary age children in East Harlem; while she was there, she witnessed a riot. She became convinced that the problems she observed required significant effort on the part of all involved if social conditions inhibiting the development of healthy children were to be addressed. Taggart also worked with young people in Harlem during that summer, which was a particularly violent summer with major rioting in Black communities in the North, particularly in Detroit and Newark, New Jersey.

Early in the fall of 1967, the chapel committee at Whitworth asked to hear from Taggart, Carlson and Jeff Tucker. A sense of urgency seemed evident during that fall with still so few Black students on campus. Both Carlson and Taggart shared their experiences of working in New York City during the previous summer. While Taggart's memory of what he said is less



clear, Carlson kept her written comments. With Aretha Franklin's iconic song "Respect" providing an introduction, Carlson began her remarks with an emphasis on the issue of respect for each other.

There is a crisis in our country today hinging on this very issue of respect. The 23 million black people in America are seeking respect, the opportunity to live with dignity. Unlike us however, society does not bestow respect upon them at birth. They must start without it and somehow prove that they deserve it. The great white society of which most of us are a part is essentially saying, "Black man, you are guilty until proven innocent."<sup>7</sup>

Carlson asserted that the problem facing millions in the inner city stemmed from socio-economic circumstances rooted in racism. She made an impassioned plea for the importance of understanding what it was like to be Black in America's inner cities. At the same time, she implored students to become familiar with what was going on in Spokane itself. "It is important for us here at Whitworth today to know about Harlem, Watts, Newark, the big city ghettos, but it is more important that we know about the place of Whitworth, Spokane, our home towns in this social dilemma [sic], and most important that we do something here."<sup>8</sup>

Tucker followed Carlson and, as expected, was by far the most provocative. He shared stories of his upbringing in Milwaukee where he had lived in a rat-infested house with his parents and brother. His first experiences in the Pacific Northwest had involved working for the federally-funded Job Corps in Randle, Washington in the southwest corner of the state; his primary task had been to clear forest debris. For Tucker, this experience reinforced his perception of the privileged position held by white people since his supervisors had all been white while 80-90 percent of the laborers were Black. However, Tucker directed his strongest

invective toward white Christians at Whitworth:

I've sat in this auditorium for almost 4 years [fall 1963] and I've watched you so-called Christian white people of Whitworth College pray together, sing together, and pledge to the flag. The Hell you're Christian -- The only Christians in this room or in this country are black. The black people in this country have peacefully, patiently, and lovingly waited for you dumb white people to wake up and give us our freedom.

He cited his heroes from Black history: Toussaint Louverture, Nat Turner, Denmark Vesey, Stokely Carmichael, Martin Luther King Jr., and Malcolm X. "It is safe to say that several of these names were totally unfamiliar to most every white student in the audience and probably to most faculty." Tucker further declared, "You talk about Black Power. Remember this. Black Power is the coming together of Black people to gain political, social, religious and economic freedom by whatever means necessary [Malcolm X's famous phrase]. First we ask what is rightfully ours, second we let the courts pass laws, third if you ain't done nothing yet, we attempt to take it, or force you to make the wrong right by any means necessary."<sup>9</sup>

As expected, Tucker's address created quite a stir. Several students wrote letters to the administration complaining about the address.<sup>10</sup> Dean of the Faculty Clem Simpson, who would later play a vital role in Whitworth's efforts to recruit more African American students, wrote to President Koehler and suggested that Tucker's talk was so provocative that it was possibly "destructive to his cause which is in the best sense ours too." Simpson told Koehler that there was "educational value in seeing this 'black mood' directly. It is this national phenomena that we must cope with."<sup>11</sup> Whitworth's chaplain, the Reverend David Dilworth, also wrote a memo at Simpson's request to President Koehler in which he acknowledged that many students were

upset. He personally wished that Tucker had been more temperate in some of his remarks, but for many students (and perhaps for Dilworth himself), Tucker's comments were a "meaningful revelation."<sup>12</sup>

In the same week, Tucker made a presentation at a faculty luncheon and both Simpson and Dilworth told Koehler that it was a "fine presentation – much more moderate – and received an excellent hearing from the faculty."<sup>13</sup> It is difficult to know how the majority of faculty and students reacted to Jeff Tucker's public criticism of the Christian culture at Whitworth, but it is clear that administrators were committed to moving forward with the recruitment of more African American students from urban environments and lower socio-economic backgrounds. In fact, far from being marginalized, Tucker was funded by Whitworth in October to travel to New York City and Washington, D.C. There he visited Howard University (an all-Black university) and addressed a group of Black students.

Tucker's experience and role at Whitworth was multi-layered. By his and others' accounts, he frequently was at the center of controversy or disagreements that broke into actual fist fights. According to Tucker, he did not seek conflict, but he was not reticent about standing up for what he believed was right; he could not recall ever backing down when he was the object of a slight or slur. Fairly small in stature, he played defensive back on the football team and saw himself as a fierce tackler and competitor. However, Tucker was more than just an athlete. He took his studies seriously; he majored in history. He remembers with a certain amount of pride being in a history class where the professor stated that no African Americans fought in the Civil War. He raised his hand to object and the professor said that if he could prove his point, the professor would recant his statement. Before the next class, Tucker did his research, came back to class, demonstrated that 190,000 African American soldiers had fought on the side of the

Union in the Civil War--the professor recanted. In fact, Tucker came to believe that Whitworth provided a solid education. When asked in an interview why, in spite of being so critical of some parts of Whitworth, he continued to work on behalf of the college to recruit more Black students, he said, "Whitworth was a good school."<sup>14</sup>

Tucker remembered having only one other African American friend, Clavard Jones, who played on the basketball team. But he also respected and had great fondness for Val Carlson, who worked closely with Tucker to try and effect change at Whitworth. Other students' interest in Jeff Tucker was reflected in an interview that was published in the *Whitworthian*. When asked his opinion of what Whitworth students should do to improve the climate on campus, Tucker said the following:

I think that Whitworthians can help the racial problem by: 1. Stop stereotyping, lying, and spreading false rumors about black people and other minority groups; 2. Join the Urban League, C.A.R.E., [Tucker probably means CORE], NAACP, SNCC, etc. closest to their homes and send donations of money; 3. Join the Whitworth Human Relations Committee and pursue objectives like studying an Afro-American history course and significantly integrating Whitworth College; 4. Don't spend your summers going to a ghetto area to help because you're not qualified, able nor strong enough. You will cause more problems than help, and the fifth point is to examine your prejudices honestly and actually try to act, think and love like a Christian.<sup>15</sup>

The interview reflected Tucker's passion, frustration, and anger, as well as his growing sense of identity as a Black man in America at the height of the civil rights movement. Clearly, he was not afraid to press matters at Whitworth with hopes of initiating significant change. Behind the

scenes, Tucker's and others' efforts to recruit more Black students to Whitworth began to pay off.

The most promising collaboration for recruiting more African American students came through Young Life, a para-church organization. Bill Starr, who played a major role in the development of Young Life and served as its president for a number of years, fostered a connection with Whitworth beginning in the late '50s and early '60s. African American students Edker Matthews and Walt Oliver had both come to Whitworth through Young Life channels. Dick Silk, Whitworth alum from the class of '60, became the regional director of Young Life in the Spokane area in 1966 and facilitated a connection between Whitworth and Starr Ranch, one of the major Young Life camps in Colorado. Silk expressed a particular interest in attracting more African American students to Whitworth.

These Young Life connections led several African American students to spend summers at Starr Ranch and likely became familiar with Whitworth while there. Two of those students, Rauleign Lamont, better known as "Frenchy," and Gerald Toney visited Whitworth during the fall of 1967 and enrolled for spring semester in 1968. Jeff Tucker remembers meeting Frenchy during his recruiting trip to New York and Washington that fall; likely there were multiple contacts with these students. Things went well enough to encourage other Black students from New York City to come west to Whitworth beginning in the fall of 1968.<sup>16</sup>

Frenchy Lamont and Gerald Toney had grown up in New York's inner city. When they arrived at Whitworth, they signaled that they would assert their own Black identity. Dave Morley, a Whitworth graduate from 1961, who worked as assistant director of admissions, recalled meeting Lamont at the Spokane airport. Lamont was dressed in a full dashiki and Morley remembers learning that Lamont's parents were good friends with Malcolm X. Both

Lamont and Morley would go on to play important roles in the next few years regarding race relations on the Whitworth campus.<sup>17</sup>

The spring of 1968 was exceptionally volatile from a racial perspective at the national level, and these events roiled the Whitworth campus. On April 4, 1968, the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr in Memphis, shocked the country. Riots in many of America's major cities prompted the United States Congress to pass the Civil Rights Act of 1968; this legislation included the Fair Housing Act in an effort to address at least some of the issues that plagued Black communities in America. Across the country, African Americans hotly debated what tactics and strategies should be used to achieve social justice and institutional change.

President Koehler as well as other Whitworth administrators and faculty were clearly worried that unsettledness and protest might reach the campus as well. Several students, both Black and white, were demanding that the administration do something to bring more African American students to Whitworth. President Koehler reached out to Jeff Tucker and asked him if it sounded like a good idea to establish a scholarship in Martin Luther King's name that would be used to supplement the financial needs of African American students. Tucker welcomed the proposal.

On the Whitworth campus, Jeff Tucker continued to play a significant role. Two weeks after King's assassination, Tucker, as chair of the Human Relations Council, wrote a strongly-worded letter to "Concerned Alumni of Whitworth College." He began with the phrase, "Forget the epitaph; take up the song." With the recent death of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and with violence spreading throughout the United States, it is time for action." Tucker's letter highlighted the idea of the Martin Luther King Scholarship, with a goal of establishing a \$120,000 endowment (\$1,027,000 in 2022 dollars). He suggested that the scholarship could

provide roughly \$500 each year for sixteen students. Tucker wrote, “More than helping disadvantaged non-whites obtain educations we are strengthening the ideas and concepts of brotherly love that Whitworth does and must stand for. Whitworth should be a pioneer on projects such as this.”<sup>18</sup> Tucker was clearly referring to Whitworth’s Christian mission as a rationale for this effort. This idea was embraced by the administration and a week later, details were communicated in a press release to the Spokane media.<sup>19</sup>

Tucker’s comments caught the attention of the *Spokesman-Review*. Interviewed by a local reporter, Tucker underscored the growing tension between white and Black individuals across the country. “Anybody who’s black is a black power advocate. The question (now) is violence. More and more people my age believe that if a white man hits me, I’m going to hit him back. . . . White people can’t dig on this, because in fact they expect us to be a Bill Cosby. Nice guys. When we tell white people how we feel, they can’t take the truth. They can’t dig it.”<sup>20</sup>

In those same few weeks after King’s death, the Human Relations Committee, led by Tucker, formed the Committee for Action Now (CAN). In April, the committee presented a five-page proposal to the administration. Roughly thirty points were made around issues of recruitment, admissions, financial aid, and academic issues. The document began with the condemnatory statement: “Realizing that Whitworth’s present situation is one of token integration only, we suggest that the Administration announce the commitment of the college to work toward significant integration of non-whites (black, Spanish American, Indian, etc.)” Under the heading of “recruitment,” committee members stated “that the present recruitment policy is explicitly prejudiced because of its failure to actively recruit non-white students and that there exists further implicit prejudice because of the vast differences in cultural heritage

between those recruiting and the disadvantaged non-whites who must be re-recruited.” The committee recommendations included hiring a staff member who could “relate specifically to non-white students.”

The committee also recommended that admissions forms and procedures be simplified and streamlined. In addition, there were several suggestions related to academic support and a recommendation that Professors Dean Ebner, Harry Dixon, and Ron Short serve as directors of the academic support system. The document ended with a demand that the Whitworth administration respond in writing by May 13 and that the president address the college in chapel on the same day.<sup>21</sup> The letter to the administration was signed by twenty-two students who comprised the Committee for Action Now (CAN). Along with Tucker, the names included Carlson and Taggart, Frenchy Lamont, Gerald Toney, and a broad range of other white activists, many of whom had been opposing the Vietnam War. Among these were Keith Benson and Dwight Morrill, who later went to prison for turning in his draft card to his draft board.<sup>22</sup> In an interview, Benson recalled that pressure to recruit more Black students came as much from white students on campus as anyone, and the list of signees to the letter to the administration supports his assertion. He also underscored the role that the Presbyterian Church and Young Life played in providing financial support.<sup>23</sup>

The demands expressed by Whitworth students were in line with the demands that were being made on campuses across the country. For example, at precisely the same time that Whitworth students, white and Black, demanded more effort be made to recruit more Black students, the same demands were being made by students at the University of Washington.<sup>24</sup>

Archival records reveal that President Koehler and Dean of the Faculty Clem Simpson considered the points very seriously. Koehler’s hand-written comments beside each of the points



reveal a genuine desire to address as many as he possibly could. Simpson provided Koehler with the April 1968 copy of the *Stanford Observer* in which Stanford's plans for addressing many of the same issues that confronted Whitworth were outlined. Simpson wrote, "Our situation is somewhat like Stanford's. Maybe we can learn something."<sup>25</sup>

Even prior to giving his full response, Koehler stated that he was "thoroughly in sympathy with the general goals."<sup>26</sup> He acted quickly to establish four committees designed to address the issues raised by the Committee for Action Now – recruiting, admissions, financial aid, and academic matters. One of those committees, the Special Committee on Admission, met at least three times and explored various admissions strategies for low-income and minority students. They carefully studied recent efforts by the University of Washington to recruit low-income minority students from the Central District in Seattle. In the end, their study yielded a variety of proposals intended to simplify the admissions process, but major debate occurred over admissions standards.<sup>27</sup> The committee recommended that policies be more flexible and that students be admitted on the basis of the "potential to succeed." The benchmark 2.5 grade point average was also reconsidered with the recommendation again that admissions officers have greater latitude. At the same time, concerns were expressed regarding the possibility of lowering Whitworth's standards of admissions.<sup>28</sup>

The response of the greater student body to these proposals is hard to discern. The *Whitworthian* published two student letters to the editor in the May 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. Jerry Van Marter warned that even though President Koehler appeared to be acting swiftly, this may still be "another case in the human rights movement of too little too late." He ended his letter by saying that "We have shown at Whitworth that we can be pacesetters in the field of higher education.

All our pacesetting is for nought [sic], however, if we don't stand up and take action on the most pressing needs of our society. Whitworth is not fireproof!"<sup>29</sup>

On the same page, student Kenneth Beck wrote a long letter in which he questioned a number of points in the proposal--most notably the approach to financial aid. Beck said that in his opinion, "All considerations, inclusive of financial aid and admissions, should be made without any consideration of race, color, or creed beneficial to any group." Editors felt compelled to respond to Mr. Beck with this rejoinder: "The only problem arises when we consider that throughout her history, America has blessed her white populations with the fruits of democracy, leaving the non-white minorities to make out as best they could. Non-whites have not been getting equal consideration for so long that we feel they should be getting more-than-equal consideration now, even if we whites have to sacrifice to make it work."<sup>30</sup>

One suspects that these two letters and the editors' response reflect the general divide that existed in the Whitworth community. They also provide a sense of how seriously Whitworth students considered the complexity of issues related to the challenge of integrating a critical mass of Black students into a predominantly white institution. One week later, one other white student, Bob Ensign, felt compelled to write a letter:

I feel that the Negro has a right to have all that the white man has and that an integrated Whitworth is a necessity in this day and age. Also, I feel that the Human Relations Council is showing a fine Christian attitude in its program. But the HRC seems to be using some very questionable methods in its program.

First of all, in the statement of its program, there is the vicious, unfounded, and stray statement that the recruitment policy of this college is 'explicitly prejudiced.' I feel that

the HRC owes Mr. Ken Proctor a formal apology. As Mr. Proctor explained last year which apparently fell on deaf ears most ‘recruitment’ is by personal contact and not by the Admissions Department.<sup>31</sup>

These initial responses from white students at Whitworth reveal some of the urgency and anxieties as well concerns regarding the substance of proposed reforms in the spring of 1968.

On May 10, Koehler addressed the Whitworth community at the morning convocation of students with his response to the five-page proposal by CAN, now supplemented with additional information provided by the committees that had been at work during the previous three weeks. Koehler’s nearly nine-page response is preserved in the university archives. He began by acknowledging that the entire Whitworth community had received the petition from a group of students concerned with the “recruiting, admitting, financing and academic life of minority groups at Whitworth.” He stated that the administration was in “general agreement with the goals and with a substantial number of the proposals.” He went on to say that “We have never been fascinated by the method [referring to the petition and demands] but we are attempting to overlook it in light of the fact this is a significant issue nationally, locally, and on our campus.”

Koehler made a point of stating that Whitworth was a “particular type of college.” He identified it as a college engaged in:

Christian higher Education and it is a liberal arts college. . . . Whitworth College has open doors to all those who want this kind of education with these particular goals. I see as one of our significant failures to this point and one of our most significant contributions for the future of this discussion to be in the area of stimulating in minority groups the desire to want our kind of education then to make it more readily available to them.<sup>32</sup>

The president's response suggests that he, along with most other faculty, was generally confident that the problem was primarily centered on the need for better communication to minority groups regarding the quality and type of Christian education at Whitworth.

Koehler also acknowledged that a great number of individuals voiced grave concern that Whitworth might lose its accreditation. He reiterated that Whitworth would "in no way . . . abandon its standards." He noted that in several places in the petition, advocates for reforming the admission policies were calling for the college to use "potential to succeed" as the basis for admission. Koehler added:

I must also say that if Whitworth admits a student then all of us must accept some of the responsibility for keeping that student here. This involves the areas of financial aid, academic support, and social and spiritual climate. Let me assure you that Whitworth does not propose nor do I interpret the committee's request to propose a double standard. The exit requirement for all students will be the same. The entrance requirements may be flexible according to the situation as we find it. We intend to be more resourceful to discover the potential to achieve in minority people and we will not be rigid about arbitrary cut-off points when we seek to admit them.

Koehler spoke in even more specific terms about the admissions process. "The special admissions committee recommends further that we be sure that we seek out and find students who have a potential to succeed at Whitworth." Koehler addressed the issue of an acceptable grade point average for entrance: "I want it clearly understood that the G.P.A. is only one standard of admission and has always been only one." Koehler further added that the Board of Trustees has approved flexibility not only in terms of "potential to succeed [but also] to the payment of fees." Koehler proceeded to detail for the Whitworth community that while grade

point would continue to be used, “a variety of method[s] will continue to be used . . . for determining the potential to succeed.” Koehler spelled out in some detail how financial aid would be determined and described the new Martin Luther King Scholarship Fund. However, he rejected a recommendation from the Committee for Action Now that a suggested donation of 1 percent of one’s salary by faculty and staff be made, as well as a 10 percent departmental cut, in order to fund financial aid for minority students. He also rejected a suggestion/demand that the budget be reallocated to provide funds for students of color.

The president’s emphasis on the importance of providing academic support for incoming students reflected a stereotype that students of color would necessarily need more academic assistance. Koehler further indicated that the administration would commit to a special orientation for faculty and staff regarding “disadvantaged people.” Koehler went on to say that if this effort is to succeed, “Minority people must continue to feel welcome and a part of all that we do. I realize that friendship is a two-way street but perhaps the majority can take the initiative in seeing that lasting friendships and spiritual and personal interchange take place on our campus.”

Koehler finished his address with a poignant and impassioned plea that the time was right for Whitworth to step up and be a part of the process of empowering students of color with a first-rate college education. “Whitworth, like all other social institutions, is not perfect. None in it is. Let us not be afraid of change and improvement. . . . Actions will follow as they have in the past, not rapid enough for some, too rapid for others.” Koehler ended his address to the faculty and student body with an appeal: “With mutual respect, acknowledgement of common goals, by open communication, and by prayer and hard work, we will continue to have a better Whitworth. I believe that is what the vast majority of you want and I encourage you to move forward with us on this particular area of our concern and other areas as they will relate to our future.”<sup>33</sup>

This extended description of President Koehler's response reveals several things: first, Koehler, other administrators, and most faculty felt that adding more African American students was the right thing both for Whitworth and for African American students. There was an underlying confidence that a Whitworth education was something to be prized. Koehler's comments also reveal nervousness at best and prejudice at worst existed in the concerns that Whitworth might be lowering its admission standards. In addition, Koehler, and likely the majority of Whitworth students, staff, and faculty felt that the solution to racial prejudice lay largely in simply getting Black and white students to know one another. The general expectation was that African American students would willingly assimilate into Whitworth's broader culture. All of those assumptions would be seriously challenged as Whitworth moved forward with plans to recruit more African American students.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Author interview with Bob Clark February 4, 2022.

<sup>2</sup> *Whitworthian*, November 18, 1966.

<sup>3</sup> *Whitworthian*, Dec. 14, 1966.

<sup>4</sup> *Whitworthian*, Dec 14, 1966.

<sup>5</sup> *Whitworthian*, February 18, 1967, p. 3.

<sup>6</sup> Author interview with Ron White, January 1, 2023.

<sup>7</sup> Author interview with Val Carlson, February 24, 2022; author interview with Tom Taggart, February 15, 2022.

<sup>8</sup> Val Carlson, Whitworth Chapel Address, October 2, 1967, in author's possession.

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- <sup>9</sup> Jeff Tucker, “The Message – Chapel Address,” October 2, 1967,” in author’s possession.
- <sup>10</sup> Letter, Albin Fogelquist Jr. to Board of Trustees, October 11, 1967, Edward Lindaman files, Box 1, Folder 24, Whitworth University Archives.
- <sup>11</sup> Memo, Clem Simpson to Mark Koehler, October 5, 1967, Edward Lindaman files, Box 1, Folder 24, Whitworth University Archives.
- <sup>12</sup> Letter, David Dilworth to Mark Koehler, October 6, 1967, Edward Lindaman files, Box 1, Folder 24, Whitworth University Archives.
- <sup>13</sup> Letter, David Dilworth to Mark Koehler, October 6, 1967, Edward Lindaman files, Box 1, Folder 24, Whitworth University Archives.
- <sup>14</sup> Author interview with Jeff Tucker, March 17, 2022.
- <sup>15</sup> *Whitworthian*, October 27, 1967, p. 4.
- <sup>16</sup> Author Interview with Dick Silk, February 15, 2022; author Interview with Jeff Tucker, March 17, 2022.
- <sup>17</sup> Author Interview with Dave Morley, February 3, 2022.
- <sup>18</sup> Letter, Jeff Tucker to Concerned Alumni of Whitworth College, April 18, 1968, Mark Koehler papers Box 2 Folder 23, Whitworth University Archives
- <sup>19</sup> *Whitworthian*, April 26, '68 p. 2
- <sup>20</sup> *Spokesman-Review*, April 21, 1968.
- <sup>21</sup> *Whitworthian* May 3, 1968 p. 1
- <sup>22</sup> Dale E. Soden, “Whitworth College and the Vietnam War: ‘Just Take a Stand,’” in *Denominational Higher Education During the Vietnam War*, ed. by John J. Laukaitis (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave/Macmillan, 2022), 148-149.
- <sup>23</sup> Email Keith Benson to Elizabeth Strauch, November 3, 2015; author interview with Keith Benson, February 9, 2022.
- <sup>24</sup> Marc Arsell Robinson, *Washington State Rising: Black Power on Campus in the Pacific Northwest* (New York: New York University Press, 2023), 91.

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<sup>25</sup> Copy *The Stanford Observer* April 1968; note Clem Simpson to Mark Koehler on copy, Edward Lindaman files, Box 1 Folder 24, Whitworth University Archives.

<sup>26</sup> *Whitworthian*, May 3, 1968, p. 1.

<sup>27</sup> Minutes of Special Admissions Committee May 6 1968 (Koehler papers?); letter, David Gronewold to Dean Simpson April 23, 1968 (Koehler papers or PO files)

<sup>28</sup> Minutes of the Special Admissions Committee – May 6, 1968, Project Opportunity files) (*Whitworthian* April 26, '68 p. 3 – this is a letter to Dr. Koehler)

<sup>29</sup> *Whitworthian*, May 3, 1968, p. 3.

<sup>30</sup> *Whitworthian*, May 3, 1968, p. 3.

<sup>31</sup> *Whitworthian*, May 10, 1968.

<sup>32</sup> Koehler address, “Speech on Minority Issues,” May 10, 1968 – Black Student Union Papers Box 1 Folder 13, Whitworth University Archives; *Whitworthian*, May 17, 1968 p. 1

<sup>33</sup> Koehler address, “Speech on Minority Issues,” May 10, 1968.

<sup>34</sup>As indicated above, students at the University of Washington were making similar demands at precisely the same time that Whitworth students were making demands on the institution. President Koehler responded on May 10. The president of the University of Washington, Charles Odegaard, continued to negotiate with students in the first few weeks of May, but on May 20<sup>th</sup>, the Black Student Union (which had yet to be formed at Whitworth) decided to forcibly occupy Odegaard’s office for four hours. In the end Odegaard did agree to student demands, much as Koehler had at Whitworth. Robinson, *Washington State Rising*, 86-115.