

Chapter 7: 1969-1970

“The Black Student Union and the Prospect of Black Studies at Whitworth”

Without question, the fall semester of 1968 proved especially difficult for students, faculty, and administrators at Whitworth. The Madrona Report underscored many of the problems facing the college. Lack of preparation prior to the arrival of a significant number of African American students from inner-city New York and Seattle proved costly. A memo from Project Opportunity director, Lewis Archer, to the dean of the college, Clarence Simpson, revealed significant discouragement:

I think our conclusions are that we should not be making and executing policy on our own. We also feel somewhat frustrated in that we do not have the knowledge to deal with ghetto students. We are also reaping the results of no advance planning on how these students will be cared for. We feel greatly handicapped [sic] by the fact that the advising system was completely unorganized and has led to impossible course loads for some of the Opportunity students. An advisor received no special information about these students. No testing program was available; no financial program was available,

and there was not clear policy as to whether these students were to be treated in some special ways or given no special treatment.¹

By any measurement, Whitworth's effort in 1968 to recruit and retain a significant number of African American students looked to be in peril. Black students generally were unhappy; substantial numbers of white students also seemed frustrated; the administration and faculty, with few exceptions, were discouraged as well.

Nevertheless, Whitworth administrators, faculty, and students, particularly the Black students who had come in the fall of 1968, were part of a much larger movement sweeping across the country. This movement centered on the rise of Black consciousness, Black pride, and Black Power. One can trace the roots of the movement to the Reconstruction period following the Civil War, the influence of Booker T. Washington, W. E. B. DuBois, Ida B. Wells, Marcus Garvey, and, of course, Martin Luther King Jr. However, Malcolm X, as well as Huey Newton and Bobby Seale with the rise of the Black Panthers, and Stokely Carmichael's spread of the term "Black Power" in 1966 had galvanized tens of thousands younger African Americans even before King was killed. Jeff Tucker was one of those students and had referred to Black Power in his chapel address in the fall of 1967.

In the wake of the King assassination in April 1968, the language of Black Power became increasingly common among younger African Americans across the country, and Whitworth was no exception. As noted in the previous chapter, Leonard Dawson authored a strong endorsement of Black Power in the *Whitworthian* during the fall of 1968. Dawson, a Seattle resident, most likely heard Stokely Carmichael bring the message of Black Power to his own Seattle high school, Garfield, the previous year.

The concept of a Black Student Union (BSU) began to emerge first at San Francisco State in 1966 and in the following year at the University of Washington. By May 1968, Black students at Washington State University formed a BSU.

At Whitworth, discussions regarding a Black Student Union began to take place during the fall 1968, now that a critical mass of Black students had enrolled. During that same fall, discussions with faculty centered on the need for a course in Black history and culture. There likely were additional discussions about the prospect of a fully developed Black Studies program.

Coincidentally, these discussions occurred just as faculty were developing courses to be offered in January 1969 as part of Whitworth's first Jan-Term. The newly-approved curricular reform stipulated that students would only take one course during the month of January. This course was intended to be something that was not a part of the regular curriculum but designed to be innovative and potentially team taught. Several faculty responded favorably to a course on Black history and culture. Initially, 150 students, roughly 12 percent of the student body, signed up for the class. It was slated to be taught by English professor and Project Opportunity director Lew Archer, Homer Cunningham in the history department, education professor Shirley Richner, and Ralph Ellensberger from the sociology department.²

While technically not being a course in Black Studies, Whitworth's offering was most likely one of the earliest attempts at Christian colleges across the country. It had only been in May 1968 that Yale University had held the first major symposium to consider the scholarly legitimacy of Black Studies. Black and white scholars fiercely debated the approach and content of any such program.

National attention on potential Black Studies programs erupted on the campus of San Francisco State University. On November 6, 1968, a student strike broke out on the campus. One of the demands was the establishment of a Black Studies program. The strike lasted until March 1969, when the university finally agreed to establish a Black Studies department.

Whitworth's course was launched during the middle of the strike at San Francisco State. As expected, the course proved compelling but divisive among students. Eventually, 130 students ended up enrolling, including fifteen African American students. The best description of interactions in the course was provided by the *Whitworthian* editor, Martha Harris. She reported that at least some students were quite uncomfortable, although in many people's minds that was the purpose of the class. "It isn't fair," one female student complained. "We're in there to learn about Afro-American history, and those black students keep disrupting the class." "But this is what's relevant," countered a Black classmate. "You whites aren't concerned with anything beyond what's going to be on the next test."

When asked his opinion of the course, instructor Lew Archer responded, "So far, the classroom encounters have been between the blacks and the teacher. White students have an entirely different concept of education. The blacks have been taught to question and challenge what they learn, while the whites are more passive." Professor Archer added that he did not feel the Black students were any more closed-minded than the whites, just more questioning.

It seemed the class did little to break down stereotypes that white and Black students held of each other. Editor Harris reported the comments of Robin Sullivan, a sophomore from Calvin Hall: "Some of the kids in that class really have chips on their shoulders and it makes me mad. Dr. Cunningham was trying to present a historically accurate picture of slavery and some of those kids were being unjustly antagonistic." Other white students felt that some Black peers

tended to view the whites as ignorant children who had to be “educated.” “I can’t help but resent it when somebody keeps blaming me for all the injustices of the race situation –and acts like I’m the only one who needs to change,” said a first-year student.³

Harris observed that some students felt that increased emphasis on the race situation caused an unhealthy polarization and tended to encourage retreat into group identity. “Why is it always those blacks and us whites?” a student demanded. “Why can’t we just think of ourselves as Whitworthians. After all, we’re all in this together aren’t we?” Val Carlson, a senior who had spent a summer working in Harlem, suggested, “To run around talking about ‘the problem’ creates more problems. It is a very complex thing and dealing with it in simplistic terms caused people to retreat back into a group identity.”

Ernest Bligen, an African American student from New York City, commented, “Some professors relate to me as a black, not as an individual. They say, ‘Why do you people do that?’ not ‘Why do you, Ernest, do that?’ Indirectly, all these things are saying, ‘you’re not a person.’” Bligen added that the time had come to confront the problem openly. “This campus has beautiful potential, but it just doesn’t have the action yet. An understanding process has to come around and I think that it will get worse before it gets better.” Bligen further suggested, “Whites seem to avoid conflicts. If you have money you can avoid a lot of problems and that establishes a pattern. Life has been hard for many blacks. They have to face things realistically and honestly to survive.” Bligen went on to say:

Because the two cultures see things so differently, it is difficult to really tell if someone is making an effort. Some may feel that just speaking to me is an effort at reaching out. Whites seem to have a reluctance to speak at gut level. Maybe I’m prejudiced; if so, help me. Maybe you’re prejudiced—then maybe I can help you. But above all, you have to

be real yourself so you'll be in a position to help me. Like the Bible says, you have to take the log out of your own eye so you can take the splinter out of someone else's eye.⁴

Frenchy Lamont, who had succeeded Jeff Tucker as head of the Human Relations Council, reported that "People are afraid to be funky (gutsy, real, courageous). If white people can't even relate to each other, how can they hope to relate to the black man? We have to accept the challenge. If you can build a relationship with your black brother, it will be as easy as pie to have a good relationship with your white brother. And eventually you will be able to by-pass race al-together." Lamont asked rhetorically, "Do black students have chips on their shoulders? Unless you're reaching on a person -to-person basis, how can you tell?"⁵

Sue Stimson, a senior majoring in English, cautioned, "We're involved with people—complex, rational, emotional beings, inconsistent and ambivalent people. We can't deal with absolute answers. Some people are eager to do things, now. If they can, if that's their thing, that's fine—If they can act toward a meaningful end. You have to take a long-range look at things—and do research. The point is not just to act, but to act responsibly. We demand this in others and we have to do this ourselves."⁶

After Jan Term concluded, the *Whitworthian* reported Lew Archer's evaluation: "I'm not convinced that black or white students absorbed very much actual history or culture, rather the significant encounters had to do with the present situation. Dr. Cunningham has recommended to the administration that the course be continued and that if necessary we hire a special teacher for the course. But the history department has been, and is, looking for a full time black instructor for the history department."⁷ The Jan Term course in 1969 is likely the most intense direct encounter between a significant number of black and white students in

Whitworth's history. Realistically it went about as well as could be expected, but it also revealed many fissures and uncertainties between white and Black students.

During the same month that the Jan Term course was taught, students formed the Black Student Union at Whitworth. It has remained one of the most enduring groups in Whitworth's history. Whitworth's efforts occurred in the larger context of the formation of Black student unions around the country. By 1968-69, most public colleges or universities of any size with a critical mass of African American students had a Black Student Union. Whitworth's Black students asked professor of sociology, Bob Clark, to be their first faculty advisor.

The reaction from white students generally is difficult to ascertain, but white student Martha Harris, who had described so fully the first Jan Term class on Black history, also expressed her reasons for supporting the establishment of the BSU. She called it an "important step in dealing with many of the problems facing the black student today. Those who charge that it is a separatist group organized against white society fail to understand the basic aims of the BSU." She went on to state, "The Black Student Union will establish an organized base from which black students might better relate to the academic and social community as a whole and on the Whitworth campus. It must be all black because the inclusion of whites would tend to inhibit or intimidate members and would limit the amount of honest give-and-take necessary in dealing with problems of this kind." Harris believed that the "BSU is constructive in nature. A major role will be to work toward better understanding between the races through self-analysis and outreach programs. It is, presumably, based on the idea that a mature Whitworth—in which both blacks and whites can learn and grow, free from unnecessary pressures—is something worth looking for."⁸

Harris acknowledged that if an African American student came from the inner city there seemed little at Whitworth that was familiar; therefore one should acknowledge the challenges facing these individuals. Her extensive coverage and assessment of the original Black Student Union offers numerous insights into the moment in which it was created. Harris wrote:

Whitworth today has very little to offer the black student who has not been exposed to a middle-class environment. This student must constantly be relating back to what he is familiar with, that is – the culture in which he grew up. Like most college students, he is searching for his identity, his place in life. The BSU could help him find out about himself, could allow him to be proud of his own culture, and could help him discover his worth as a person.

Socially, the BSU would sponsor activities in which the black student could really enjoy himself. It would be the answer for the freshman who complained, ‘The dances at Whitworth may be fun for people used to that kind of music, but we’re not. The music is different, the activities are different where I come from. I have to change completely if I’m going to enjoy it. And as long as there are stresses and strains of having to conform, there can be no peace for me and certainly no fun!’

Academically, the BSU would be involved in the educational process – recommending relevant courses, encouraging the hiring of black faculty. It would also provide tutors for those students who had not been prepared sufficiently for college work.

According to a BSU spokesman, the group would also try to break down stereotypes and generalization on both sides. It would strive to educate both blacks and whites to the idea that we all have a basic humanity and basic human emotions.

Despite its strengths, however, the group faces several pitfalls. It could easily become a place to retreat into, to avoid confrontation. It could, as a power structure, become just as inhuman and intolerant as the machine it opposes.

Organizers of the BSU movement have resolved to build on integrity and to keep human concern at the heart of the new machine. If this is done, the Black Student Unions could be a strong force for good here at Whitworth.⁹

Harris's editorial captured well the basic issues that had arisen during the first semester for many Black students at Whitworth. She saw the idea of the BSU in positive terms and yet also felt compelled to offer a warning of sorts about potential problems.

Just below Harris's editorial was a comment by either Harris or the other associate editor, Dave Wilkinson, (or perhaps both) that they had "irritated a number of readers" with their coverage of Black/white relations at Whitworth. They stated that "our preoccupation with the subject is not meant to aggravate the situation or blow it out of proportion."

We are merely focusing attention on what we feel is a major problem, hoping that it can be brought out in the open and confronted honestly. There seems to be, at the present time, an unhealthy tendency to get hung-up on non-issues. Whites whisper that the blacks are hostile and have a 'chip on their shoulder,' and blacks counter that whites can't be trusted. Whites shy away from gut-level encounters and blacks band more tightly together. And even as this apparent dichotomy is taking place, there are people—blacks and whites together--reaching out to each other, risking being hurt, and daring to be honest, in an effort to understand.

It takes real courage to confront someone honestly. It is much easier to condemn a group than it is to challenge an individual. It is much safer to write someone off as hostile—or unworthy of trust—than it is to ask for reasons. Yet the strength we need to overcome our race-consciousness lies in this kind of courage.

The *Whitworthian* does not presume to supply answers, or even to provide an undistorted look at the problem. We are merely a forum for discussion, just as the Human Relations Council's unstructured 'soul sessions' are a forum for discussion. Perhaps from this exchange we will learn to perceive each other as individuals, with individual human needs and opinions, rather than as 'black' or 'white.'¹⁰

As the spring semester unfolded, the Black Student Union sponsored a convocation on February 21 commemorating the life of Malcolm X.¹¹ In that same issue of the *Whitworthian*, Claude Brown, co-chairman of the BSU, wrote a letter entitled "BSU to Stamp out 'Negro.'" Brown reflected the shift that had taken place in the African American community over its own sense of identity. Largely influenced by Malcolm X and the Black Power movement, this rejection of the name "Negro" in favor of "Black" underscored the changing nature of identity on Whitworth's campus. Brown began, "The Whitworth Black Student Union has killed the NEGRO: this 'killing' of the Negro is a symbolic occasion designed to express our feeling towards the term itself and those things associated with it." Brown continued:

Today also marks the glorious birth of the black man. We black people in America have taken a new road in life. The first step has been by naming ourselves. . . . Today we have thrown off the title of Negro and are now calling ourselves Black-Americans. . . . Some of the things with which the BSU wished to disassociate itself are the thought of the

Negro as lazy, shiftless, ignorant, dirty, possessing low intelligence, and other traits implying subhumanism:

Here are a list of things that this dead Negro is guilty of:

- 1) Bleaching his skin because he was ashamed of his color.
- 2) Frying his hair with hot combs and processing grease, because he was taught that moppy, kinky hair was ugly.
- 3) Ashamed to identify with his forefathers in Africa because he thought that all they did was swing from trees, beat drums and eat each other . . .

We refuse to bleach our skin, and fry out hair [j]ust to be accepted. . . . The BSU also hopes that Whitworth and the World will soon understand that people are different but these differences will be accepted. In other words, open your hearts “CHRISTIANS.”

Yours in Blackness, Claude R. Brown Co-chairman of BSU¹²

Black student Bee Gee Bryant published an additional letter on the topic of Black/white relations entitled, “What Does Black Mean?” In one of the more poignant student letters to appear in that period, Ms. Bryant wrote on the topic, “What is it like to be Black?”

It is like a sixth finger that is positioned in the middle of your hand. It’s like a two-headed baby whose parents are afraid, ashamed or will not accept it as theirs. Black to me is death. A completely unknown and permanent obligation. I think of death as being black. Death is what no one wants. Most people are afraid of it. Society says, ‘Stay away from me; I do not want it. I cannot and will not accept it.’ Some people try to put

the thought of death in the back of their minds. These people put us, Blacks, in the back of the bus. They say, ‘Stay away, keep back, I don’t want you, I cannot accept you.’

They leave us without opportunity for a really satisfying existence. Death is something we have to learn to live with. It is all part of life. We who are Black have to learn to live with our color; it is our life. So when the time arrives we all must accept death; we have to learn to live with this obligation. Therefore, death is all of us, and death is our end.¹³

These columns help provide context and insight into changes occurring not just at Whitworth but on hundreds of college campuses across the country. Both white and Black students at Whitworth found themselves engaged by one of the most profound social changes in American history. Many Black students expressly rejected the assimilationist and accommodationist culture that had permeated American society since the Civil War. Embracing an identity that emphasized pride and empowerment, Black students at Whitworth and elsewhere sought ways to express that identity. Thoughtful white students such as Martha Harris and others on the Whitworth campus exhibited efforts at empathy and understanding, but it was a daunting task.

Shortly after Black students expressed themselves in the *Whitworthian* regarding the nature of the BSU and the importance of Black identity, a major confrontation between Black students at Washington State University and law enforcement officials gained widespread attention and eventually involved six of Whitworth’s students. The conflict began with a fistfight during an intramural basketball game in January between members of an all-white fraternity and several Black students. Conflicting accounts make it difficult to know exactly what happened, but in subsequent encounters shots were fired with only minor injuries. In the end, five Black students were charged with either second degree or third degree assault and

convicted by the end of February. Washington State's Black Student Union charged racial bias in the case.

When it came time for the five Black WSU students to serve jail time at the Colfax courthouse, the WSU Black Student Union contacted BSU students at Eastern Washington and at Whitworth for support. A plan to block the jail entrance quickly developed. Six African American students from Whitworth's BSU (Ernest Bligen, Cheryl Botler, Frances Jones, Frenchy Lamont, Sylvia Spady, and Steve Viney) drove to Colfax to participate in the protest. These students joined approximately seventy other protestors. They linked arms, sang protest songs, and prevented the WSU students from being taken into custody. In response, white residents from Colfax and nearby communities descended on the courthouse and began threatening the protestors. Rock throwing ensued and the protestors, under the protection of the county sheriff Mike Humphries, found their way into a local Methodist church for protection. According to historian Marc Robinson:

Once the demonstrators were inside the church, their anxiety reached new heights as they heard a radio report that highway patrolmen and police from Spokane and across eastern Washington were racing to Colfax. Fearing a police assault, the protestors began stockpiling wet cloths to put over their faces if tear gas was used. Then, in another unexpected turn, the BSU got a call from a patrolman who explained that he and other officers were coming to Colfax to protect the BSU from 'fleets' of armed locals who were also amassing in the town.¹⁴

Once the threat from the local residents dissipated, the protest resumed against the incarceration of the WSU students. For twenty-one hours a standoff ensued between law enforcement authorities and the students. At the end of the confrontation, Whitman County

Sheriff C. A. Humphreys gave the protesting students from Whitworth the choice of either being arrested along with the WSU students or returning to their respective campuses. The students chose to be arrested. Offering no resistance, Whitworth's three male students were held overnight in custody in Colfax, while the three female students were bussed back to the Spokane County jail.

When interviewed by the *Whitworthian*, Frenchy Lamont asserted that the WSU students had been treated unjustly. "We heard the news of the arrest Thursday and met that evening with Jim Bell, head of the BSU at Eastern. We felt that the trial had been handled unfairly and that we should indicate our support by going to Colfax."¹⁵ "We did obstruct justice," Lamont acknowledged, "We hoped to be arrested along with the WSU students to show our identification with their predicament."¹⁶

Meanwhile, Cheryl Botler of the BSU acknowledged that "the incident was handled with the 'greatest understanding' by Sheriff Humphreys." Although some thirty-five Washington State Troopers, Pullman Police and Washington State University campus police were available, Humphreys had ordered them to stay inside the courthouse until he made the arrest. Botler told the *Whitworthian*, "We were there for just one purpose and so we were orderly and in control of the situation, and he just automatically gave us the same courtesy. He seemed to understand what we were feeling and he listened to what we had to say." Afterwards the students sent roses to Humphreys as a token of appreciation.¹⁷

As soon as news of the incident reached the campus, President Koehler dispatched Dave Morley to Colfax to represent the college and offer any assistance he could to the students, including the power to raise bonds if necessary. Morley, who was a special assistant to Dean Simpson and had worked closely with many of the African American students, obtained

permission to visit Whitworth's female students in the Spokane jail. On the advice of their lawyer, Carl Maxey from Spokane, the students agreed to refrain from further demonstration in Colfax and were released on their own recognizance, so that bail was waived.¹⁸

Dave Morley's involvement in the Colfax incident underscored his critical role in those first few years when Whitworth recruited a significant number of African American students. As assistant director of admissions, director of student activities and later as director of admissions, Morley developed strong relationships with many of them. He often invited them over to his home for barbeques and social events. Gerald Toney, one of the African American students from New York, stayed with the Morleys in their basement. Frequently, Morley intervened when students struggled in class or had encounters with police (even on occasions other than the Colfax incident). Among all Whitworth administrators from that era, Morley had the best relationships with the majority of African American students.¹⁹

In the end, the Colfax incident reflected the complexity of race relations not only on the campuses of WSU and Whitworth, but also the volatile racial environment in eastern Washington. In retrospect, Koehler's decision to send Dave Morley for the purpose of supporting Whitworth's African American students proved helpful—it very easily could have turned out much differently.

Another effort to try to ameliorate conditions on campus between Black and white students was the formation of a group called "Concerned White Students." The *Whitworthian* reported:

The purpose of the CWS is primarily to increase communications and the understanding

between white and Black students with the hope of killing some of the indifference yes, the racism, at Whitworth. This group, independent of, yet interacting with, the members of the BSU, will meet at least once a week to discuss its problems, its discoveries, and its plans. They will concentrate on understanding themselves, the members of the Black community, and the whole racial situation in a way that they were not able to before.

The *Whitworthian* further stated, “The CWS, however, is not just another long-winded but ineffective organization. It is already taking definite steps to counter prejudice and apathy; it is going to visit the ghettos of Spokane and Seattle next month to expose interested students to the problems there; it will be helping the BSU recruit a higher population of blacks on campus next year. It plans to act, not just talk.”²⁰

In the midst of these events, the *Whitworthian* reported that Edker Matthews, the one African American on the teaching staff, had resigned in order to move to Seattle. Matthews had been one of the most popular Black students on campus during the early ‘60s. He had served as advisor to the BSU and Project Opportunity. When asked about the race problem, Matthews said, “I have learned this year that the Black students here have legitimate arguments about certain things. They have a valid reason for their actions and many of my own attitudes have changed concerning this situation. I also feel that part of a person’s education should include getting to know members of different races. A school that is all white for example is culturally deprived if they are not able to meet students from the black race.”²¹

In April, President Koehler also offered his resignation after seven years as president. How much was related to the stress associated with Black/white relations is difficult to say. Koehler noted recent accomplishments, including the new core curriculum, the 4-1-4 calendar, and unqualified accreditation. He mentioned that one of the strongest challenges facing the

college was securing financial support. He did not mention Project Opportunity or any issues associated with the recruitment and retention of African American students.²² Dr. Clarence Simpson was appointed acting president by the Board of Trustees and took office after commencement.²³

On April 21st, the Black Student Union sent a letter to President Koehler and Dean Simpson charging Whitworth administrators with failing “to inspire the trust of the Black students by keeping promises made last year.” The next day, the BSU distributed a list of demands to the public and called a press conference to explain its position. Demands included bringing in a recruiter who could relate to non-white students and insistence that Kenneth Proctor be replaced as director of admissions. Students also called for more recruiting in Spokane and simplified financial aid procedures. They mandated that admissions files of all Black students denied admission be made available to the BSU. Students clamored for a full-time Black professor as well as the right to veto the selection, and for an Afro-American history course taught during the regular semester. Other demands included initiation of inter-cultural sensitivity groups, work on the Martin Luther King fund, the return of Dave Morley (who had temporarily accepted a job at Lewis and Clark College), permanent hiring of sociology professor Robert Clark (who had been on a temporary contract), and cultural orientation for faculty members. Students also insisted that all currently enrolled Black students, including those on academic probation, should be permitted to return to Whitworth next year.²⁴

The administration issued a five-page response indicating that several demands had already been met. These included the scheduling of the Afro-American history course, the return of Dave Morley, and the hiring of Bob Clark. Admission records could not be made available to the BSU because of confidentiality, but the names of those Black applicants denied admission

could be provided to the BSU advisor. The administration denied a veto vote to the BSU in the hiring of a Black professor although they promised that students would have influence on the selection.²⁵

The BSU rejected the administration's reply to the demands, calling them "evasive and wishy-washy." The intensity of the confrontation was captured in protests by primarily African American students and their supporters outside of the administration building. The students picketed in front of Cowles Auditorium, holding signs that read, "Blacks can't be white," an apparent reference to the belief that Whitworth was still pushing African American students to assimilate into a white dominant culture. A smaller group of white students staged a counter-protest and held up signs urging students to "Support the administration."²⁶

An open forum was held the same afternoon as the protest, and attendance reached near-capacity in the student center; faculty as well as a large number of students were present. Leonard Oakland from the English department attended and said, "I came expecting hostility." However, Oakland, who became a teaching icon and continued to work at Whitworth for the next fifty-two years, told Black students that he was "impressed by the kind of conversation you have brought instead. It may be a little stronger than is comfortable, but thank God for that!" As described in the *Whitworthian*, murmurs of approval or disapproval, and occasional applause punctuated the comments of various speakers; however, the general tone of the hour-long meeting was one of open exchange.

Leroy Brown, a Black student living in Alder Hall, drew the most applause when he said, "I'm above the color thing. I'm Leroy Brown. I've found my own identity, and if some cat walks up to me and says 'Hey, [N],' well, I just figure that's his hang-up." Gerald Toney, another Black student, suggested that people were getting too hung up on words. "Try to listen

to what's being said, not how it's being said. The word 'demands' upsets many of you. Try to get off the reactive level and try to communicate." A faculty member observed that "This is the first time I've seen so many white students really open up."²⁷

The tenor of the atmosphere surrounding the meeting in the student union building and the nature of student involvement was perhaps best captured again by *Whitworthian* editor Martha Harris:

Remember when being involved in the RACE PROBLEM meant sitting around with friends singing protest songs? Or knowing somebody who knew somebody who marched in Selma? Or more recently, spending your whole Easter vacation trying to convince your parents that Blacks are black, not 'colored' and that they don't *have* to earn their rights on white terms?

Somehow it was more comfortable then. You could always end the evening with a little self-righteous sigh of 'well what can I do anyhow, I'm just one person.' It was somehow easy to forget the Stringfellows and Jeff Tuckers of our past who called us racists just because we chose to come to an all white college (A white ghetto, Stringfellow called it, remember? You are culturally deprived, and you chose deprivation, remember?)

But that was two years ago. It bothered us then, but we sat up all night arguing about Stringfellow's 'approach,' and somehow pushed the problem away from ourselves for a little while longer. Later, we gave money to the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Scholarship Fund, and were relieved that no one pressed for what we *felt*.

But that was before yesterday. Yesterday our Black brothers picketed the Administration Building for failing to take a gutsy stand on the issues which are of vital concern to the future of this college.

And some of us lowered our heads and hurried by, because we had the uneasy feeling that they were pressing us to take a stand, that they were accusing us of failing to do more than accept the problem theoretically.

We came to the rally, and some of us listened and some of us even found the courage to respond to the challenge and declare what we believe. Some said 'we're with you,' and some said 'go to hell,' but it was a beginning.

The challenge remains and instead of squirming uncomfortably and saying, 'huh? Me?' why don't the rest of us take a public stand?

The procedure is simple. Take a piece of paper, write in big bold letters I BELIEVE THAT . . . and pin to your coat. This doesn't mean you have to whole heartily [sic] embrace or reject the Black demands; if you agree with one thing and disagree with another, you can write that down.

At this point, failure to make a commitment is a stand in itself. It is not enough to accept something in theory. It is not enough to sit around singing protest songs. If we can't stand behind what we believe, then perhaps we don't believe it after all.²⁸

Harris continued to be one of the most insightful students from that period in Whitworth's history, More than once, she went well beyond the surface of a particular event whether that be the Jan-term class earlier in the year, the formation of the BSU or the protest against the administration in April.

Four other white students—Tim Wyre, Carol Bryan, Robin Sullivan, and Laura Bloxham (who later returned as a beloved long-time member of Whitworth’s English department) co-authored a letter to the editor:

We view the present confrontation between the BSU and Drs. Koehler and Simpson as more than a hastily devised conspiracy against Whitworth College administration, faculty and students. This confrontation is of vital significance to the future of Whitworth College and the existence of minority groups on campus.

Some students have expressed the view that Whitworth would have been better off to have never been confronted with Blacks, but we feel continued confrontation is the only way to face and begin to resolve the issues. One of the purposes of a liberal arts education is to give an increased awareness and appreciation of cultural differences.

. . . . We do not view the BSU demands as the entire issue, however. The administration is being asked to take a stand on whether Whitworth College will be known as an upper-middle class white, [A]nglo-[S]axon Protestant institution or as a liberal arts college.

We feel the administration needs to take definite steps to explain certain unclear issues: 1) recruiting procedures, 2) tutorial programs and Project Opportunity under which many of the Black students came to Whitworth, 3) hiring and firing procedures for faculty and administrators, 4) the financial situation of our college, 5) responses to BSU demands.

We would appreciate direct dialogue and confrontation between all interested students and the administration.²⁹

In an effort to lessen the intensity of confrontation, members of the administration and members of the Black Student Union met in order to try to reach agreement regarding student demands.

As the semester wound down, negotiations between the Black Student Union and the administration continued. On May 18, at the close of the school year, dean of the faculty and now acting president Clem Simpson submitted his own response to the BSU and the Whitworth community. Simpson made clear that he believed “your primary concern is . . . the effective recruitment of black students.” Much of the statement acknowledged the difficult relationship between many Black student leaders and admissions director Kenneth Proctor. Simpson defended Proctor, but indicated that Dave Morley would be responsible for selecting Black students to assist him in ongoing efforts to recruit more students of color.³⁰

At the same time that tensions were high between representatives of the Black Student Union and the administration, English professor Lew Archer took the lead in attempts to organize an entire Black Studies curriculum. Black Studies had emerged as an important agenda for Black student unions around the country. However, Archer and other faculty at Whitworth increasingly believed that Black Studies could help distinguish Whitworth from other small colleges and in particular Christian colleges around the country. Designated as the Black Studies coordinator, he met with several African American students who had formed a subcommittee of the nascent Black Student Union. Most notably, Ernest Bligen from New York took a leadership role.

By May, with the support of dean of the faculty Clarence Simpson, Archer sent a proposed draft to all faculty “vitaly interested in Black Studies.” The proposal indicated that any course that included a unit on Black history or culture could be included in the Black Studies program. The intent was to have a brochure to present to students by fall 1969. For faculty members who conveyed interest, Archer indicated that “a black student will visit you and be of help if that help is needed.” His enthusiastic invitation stated that “As far as I know there is no

college or university in the United States attempting the kind of program we have outlined. If our program succeeds it will offer a significant and intelligent option to all the small colleges and universities who do not have the resources for a major effort but, like us are interested in meeting a need of our era.”³¹ Archer explained that the instructor “may introduce some of the material into his regular course or lecture schedule, or he may plan the unit as part of the term paper or the library work of the course.”³² Archer hoped that each semester would result in a growing body of resources that could be utilized in more courses.

The reality of actually launching a whole program of studies proved more difficult than Archer hoped. The vision exceeded both capacity and student interest. In an effort to generate interest in the program, Archer and Simpson indicated that African American student Frenchy Lamont would take responsibility for teaching a course in Jan Term, 1970. Lamont proposed a course that would meet three evenings each week during the month of January and be directed to trustees, administrators, faculty members, and a few select students. Lamont’s memo highlighted the struggles: “At various levels, a few Whitworthians see an extreme dilemma developing around Black Studies. . . .Whitworth’s attempts at incorporating Black Studies and students into its curricula and community respectively have been frustrated and seem futile. We have tried to build on an unstable base, one of rhetoric (simply b. s.) spoken from ignorant and sometimes apathetic voids. Something must be done.”³³ Numerous obstacles prevented Lamont’s course as well as the overall program in Black Studies to gain traction although as late as 1973-74, Black Studies was listed in the Whitworth catalogue as an academic area of concentration.

No semester in Whitworth history witnessed more conflict over race relations than the period between January and May 1969. Beginning with the most intense course on Black and

white relations in the college's history, the emergence of the Black Student Union and its demands to Whitworth administrators, the arrest of African American students, and the year-end protests that led in part to the resignation of President Koehler, events of that semester provide a window into anxieties and frustrations that permeated virtually all parts of campus life. Further exacerbating the emotional tension of that term were the events in Vietnam. Whitworth students, like others around the country, began protesting the war more vigorously after 1968. In April 1969, Dwight Morrill, an advocate for Whitworth's Black students, was convicted for returning his draft card. Subsequently, he was sentenced to a two-year's long imprisonment in federal penitentiary.

Near the end of fall semester 1969, although the document is not dated, Professor Lew Archer offered observations to the Whitworth faculty regarding the experiences of Black students; his apparent aim was to develop empathy for the difficulties they faced. As director of Project Opportunity, Archer's first-hand account of the year led him to say the following:

Black students live under extreme psychological pressure. They know they are not welcome; they experience daily injustices, daily antagonism, daily distrust; and daily they experience rage and frustration. . . . most of them lead lives of intense repression in order to go on competing in some way within the dominant culture. We can expect to see frequent irrational or violent responses from them when they can no longer hold in their repressions. Our mutual task is to remove those things which cause this psychological repression. . . . Black students want to participate in the American culture, but are not permitted to do so. I use American here as a larger term than "white culture."

Black power and Black pride is an interim position. The present generation of black students is attempting a breath-taking revolution; they seek a self-identity adequate to face the modern world; . . . They see themselves in the role of the vanguard. . . . When the black man and culture achieves power and pride, then black and white will be equal and the present interim position will be replaced by a healthier cultural symbiosis in which each makes his vital contribution.³⁴

Archer's comments regarding struggles faced by Black students are among the most direct and insightful of any observations made about race by a faculty member or administrator in Whitworth's history. What faculty thought of Archer's observations is hard to know, but clearly, his remarks conveyed empathy for Whitworth's African American students, as well as guarded hope for America's racial future.

In spite of the many challenges, hope for a more successful future remained intact. In the spring of 1969, in an effort to strengthen the reach of "Project Opportunity," a board of directors had been selected with Leonard Oakland from the department of English as chair. Dave Morley, as well as professors Harry Dixon, Ron Short, Keith Pierce served on the committee. Edker Matthews, Whitworth's African American alum and now teaching assistant, and white student Vicki Carlson, and two Black students Cheryl Botler, and Leonard Dawson agreed to join the group. The committee made recommendations regarding recruitment, financial commitment to Project Opportunity, the tutorial program, and the orientation program. They hoped to pair a returning Black student with an incoming one. However, the committee recognized the fragility of the whole enterprise. They realized that it was significantly under resourced and that would be difficult to change. The committee acknowledged that the challenges associated with bringing Project Opportunity students up to an academic level that would allow them to succeed

were significant. In addition, since not all African American students were part of Project Opportunity, unfortunately many faculty as well as many white students often stereotyped all Black students as being academically underprepared. That occasioned a good deal of resentment on the part of many Black students. The committee admitted the pervasive challenges: “If Project Opportunity survives as a significant aspect of Whitworth’s life, there will be implications creeping into all parts of the college community. In some areas these implications might be very challenging. Therefore, we need to be aware of the degree of commitment to its members are to be treated as special students during the first year in college.” (letter, Spring 1969)

As difficult as the 1968-69 school year was, much changed regarding race relations at Whitworth as a result. At the very least, Whitworth was no longer the “white ghetto” that William Stringfellow had described in 1966. Recruitment of African American students continued, although fewer came from New York.

The following year, in the fall of 1969, the number of African American students increased from twenty-three to thirty-three. Meanwhile white administrators, faculty, and students had become much more aware of issues facing Black students and Black Americans in general.

Despite Professor Archer’s hope for the future, few could predict what direction events would take during the next school year. The general failure of the Civil Rights movement to effect major change, the rise of Black Power, and frustration over the Vietnam War all contributed to uncertainty that left administrators and faculty, as well as new and returning students anxious about what to expect in the fall.

¹ Letter, Lewis Archer to Dean Simpson, December 17, 1968 Project Opportunity file?

² *Whitworthian*, November 22, 1968.

³ *Whitworthian*, January 17, 1969, p. 1.

⁴ *Whitworthian*, January 17, 1969, p. 1.

⁵ *Whitworthian*, January 17, 1969, p. 1.

⁶ *Whitworthian*, January 17, 1969, p. 1; author interview with Martha Harris, February 2, 2022.

⁷ *Whitworthian*, February 14, 1969, p. 3.

⁸ *Whitworthian*, January 17, 1969, p. 2.

⁹ *Whitworthian*, January 17, 1969, p. 2.

¹⁰ *Whitworthian*, January 17, 1969.

¹¹ *Whitworthian*, February 28, 1969, p. 2

¹² *Whitworthian*, February 28, 1969, p. 2.

¹³ *Whitworthian*, February 28, 1969, p.3

¹⁴ Marc Robinson, *Washington Rising*, 150-151.

¹⁵ *Spokesman Review*, March 2, 1969.

¹⁶ *Whitworthian*, March 7, 1969, p. 1.

¹⁷ *Whitworthian*, March 7, 1969, p. 1.

¹⁸ *Whitworthian*, March 7, 1969, p. 1.

-
- ¹⁹ Author Interview with Dave Morley, February 3, 2022.
- ²⁰ *Whitworthian*, March 20, 1969 p. 2.
- ²¹ *Whitworthian*, March 14, 1969, p. 1.
- ²² *Whitworthian*, April 25, 1969, p. 1.
- ²³ *Whitworthian*, April 25, 1969, p. 1, 4.
- ²⁴ Letter, "Black Student Union to Dr's Koehler and Simpson," April 21, 1969, Black Student Union Papers, Box 1, Folder 2, Whitworth University Archives.
- ²⁵ "Statement to the Black Student Union by Dr. Koehler and Dr. Simpson," April 23, 1969, Black Student Union papers, Box 1, Folder 2, Whitworth University Archives.
- ²⁶ *Whitworthian*, April 25, 1969, p. 4.
- ²⁷ *Whitworthian*, April 25, 1969.
- ²⁸ *Whitworthian*, April 25, 1969, p.2.
- ²⁹ *Whitworthian*, April 25, 1969, p. 3.
- ³⁰ Letter, Clem Simpson to Black Student Union, May 18, 1969, Edward Lindaman Papers, Box 1, Folder 32.
- ³¹ Memo, Lewis F. Archer to all faculty members," May, 1969; Edward Lindaman Papers, Box 1 Folder 36, Whitworth University Archives.
- ³² Lewis Archer, "Black Studies Plan Unique," *Campanile Call*, June 1969, p. 8, Black Student Union Files, G-3 Box 1, Folder 15, Whitworth University Archives,
- ³³ Memo, Rauleign C. Lamont Jr. (Frenchy) to Faculty, January 1970; Edward Lindaman Papers, Box 1, Folder 32.
- ³⁴ Lewis Archer, "Observations on Black Students at Whitworth College," Black Student Union Files, Box 1, Folder 5.