“God Carved in Night”:

The History of Bishop College

A Curriculum Guide

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Introduction

To a large degree, the history of Bishop College, a school founded in Marshall, Texas, in the 1880s and that closed in Dallas in the 1980s, is the story of black Texans. Former slaves bought the former Wyalucing plantation house in Marshall with the assistance of the Baptist Home Mission Society. In the late 19th and early 20th century, the school primarily provided grammar school education for black children and adults, but offered high school and college courses as well. The college and its teachers often faced the threat of terrorism from white racists in its early years. Yet the Bishop community persevered and by 1925, it offered a two-year training program for ministers. Soon, it offered graduate courses. The school relocated to Dallas in 1961.

Chronically battling for adequate funds and fighting off challenges to its accreditation, Bishop College nevertheless could claim a rich intellectual tradition that promoted the values first inculcated in slave times. Numerous prestigious students and first-rate intellectuals attending Bishop included Dr. R.H. Boyd (1843-1922), head of the National Baptist Publishing Board and founder of the National Negro Doll Company and the National Baptist Convention of America. Boyd, who never graduated from Bishop, nevertheless became a national civil rights leader and led a boycott of Nashville's segregated streetcars. Other notable Bishop alumni include:

- Lacey Kirk Williams (1871-1940), the son of former slaves who was a Republican Party activist, appointed by Illinois Gov. Frank Lowden to the Chicago Interracial Commission to study problems leading up to the deadly 1919

Chicago race riot, and who served as president of the National Baptist Convention, U.S.A., Inc., for the last 18 years of his life.

- Sutton E. Griggs (1872-1933), Baptist minister, and author of 33 books, including five novels. One of Griggs' more important novels was the Marcus Garvey-influenced *Imperium in Imperio.*

- William Nickerson (1879-1945), one of the founders of Golden State Mutual Life Insurance Co. (for whom the Nickerson Garden housing development in Los Angeles is named.)

- Lillian B. Horace Jones (ca. 1880- 1965), author of the utopian "Back to Africa" novel *Five Generations Hence.*

- Clifton Richardson, Sr. (b.d. unknown – 1939), the founder of the *Houston Informer* newspaper, a leader of the city's NAACP chapter and a fierce advocate of racial equality and opponent of segregation.

- Broadway composer and renowned baritone Jules Bledsoe (1898-1943).

In addition, the school trained several generations of the state's top African American public school teachers, lawyers, dentists and doctors. Bishop College attracted respected scholars to its faculty like Melvin J. Banks. Its Lacey Kirk Williams Institute, which trained Baptist ministers, achieved national renown, with later prominent civil rights leaders such as Martin Luther King, Jr. and Jesse Jackson attending programs there. (King also gave the commencement address to Bishop graduates in 1959.)

Bishop College was a place not just where African Americans in Texas trained for their professional careers and, in many cases, formed lifelong friendships and met their future marriage partners. It was a place where young African Americans and their professors debated the future of blacks in American society; the merits of capitalism vs. socialism as models for black economic progress; the "Back to Africa" movement articulated by Marcus Garvey that was promote by some Afro-Texan thinkers at Bishop; the importance of studying the African past and African culture; how to teach African American history; the Black Nationalism of the late 1960s and early 1970s; and whether integration of Texas colleges and universities was a boost or destructive of black education in the state.

Bishop College students and faculty organized black Texans politically, wrote socially provocative poems, novels, political tracts, editorials and sermons, and planned and participated in sit-ins. They helped forge a proud black identity for a community that endured slavery, lynching, disenfranchisement, segregation and poverty. Studying the history of this college is an excellent way to understand African American history in Texas, the civil rights movement in the Lone Star State, and African American religion and culture.

The following curriculum guide provides, in six brief chapters, a history of black education from the slavery era and Reconstruction to the 1980s with the rise and fall of Bishop College as the main focus. This guide will be useful in designing lesson plans. At the end of each chapter are open-ended questions that will stimulate classroom discussions and could be used as essay assignments. A suggested reading list and a list of possible class projects related to this history follows. It is hoped this guide will promote

not just historical understanding, but will also racial and religious tolerance, respect for diversity, an interest in African American art, and an appreciation of the connection between education and political freedom.

Chapter One

Black Education in Texas During Slavery

Before they even owned their bodies, African Americans in Texas jealously guarded control of their minds. The dominant white culture that surrounded them encouraged, at every turn, fear, self-hatred and nihilism. From the time of slavery, white society in Texas sought to turn African Americans against each other, and to undermine their confidence and their sense of self-worth in an attempt to keep them powerless and complacent. Afro-Texans, however, rejected the anti-black messages of the ruling Anglo elite and embraced education as a weapon in their war to win equal rights.

It was up to an extended network of African American elders – parents and grandparents, aunts and uncles, older family friends and even older siblings – to transmit these values from generation to generation. This Afro-Texan "village" was the first classroom for that state's black children, these elders the first teachers and folklore the first textbook. Even before Texas established its first schools for African Americans or colleges like Bishop existed, young African Americans received an extended curriculum on how to stay alive in a violent racist world. They were taught the self-assertion the Northern civil rights leader W.E.B. Du Bois so powerfully expressed in an 1899 poem:

I am the smoke king

I am black

I am darkening with song;

I am harkening to wrong

I will be black as blackness can

The blacker the mantle, the mightier the man . . .

I am carving God in night

I am painting hell in white

I am the smoke king

I am black.

In these few lyrical words, Du Bois inverted the associations Anglo created for "white" and "black." In his mind, a racist white society, with its emphasize on lonely individualism and brutal, Darwinian competition turned the United States into a hell for all, especially for its African American citizens. The country had become a "dusty desert of dollars and smartness." In contrast, "we black men seem the sole oasis of simple faith and reverence," Du Bois wrote in *The Souls of Black Folk.* Black is beautiful, he argued, and black culture not only deserved respect, but could infuse American culture with compassion and justice. Yet, a remarkable number of Afro-Texans proved successful at instilling pride in self and the black community. These values would shape the education blacks received as slaves and as freedman after Emancipation, and the Afro-Texan philosophy of education in both public schools and black institutions of higher learning like Bishop College and Prairie View A&M.

In slave times, young African Americans were taught by their elders the following lessons:

1. That in spite of how white society viewed them, they were humans with souls, with value beyond any sales prices their masters might attach to them.
2. That brains were more important than brawn.
3. That surviving the house of horrors that was slavery was more important than vengeance. Even the most sadistic treatment meted out by the master class degraded only slave masters, not the slaves.
4. Compliance in the face of overwhelming power was not the same as acceptance.
5. That there were many means of resistance short of violence. Slave culture itself – African American Christianity, folklore and spirituals were a form of revolution, a means of loudly saying no to white supremacy without endangering the lives of the slave.
6. Survival was impossible without loyalty to larger black family. The strongest must put the needs of the larger community ahead of themselves. Ever elder is a parent to every child.
7. Finally, justice was inevitable. God was on the side of the slaves, not the slaveowners. The divine plan works out on a time scale beyond human comprehension, but deliverance was certain, not just in the next life, but in the here-and-now.

Most slaveowners feared that an educated slave would soon turn into a dangerous rebel. Nevertheless, "[m]any Texas slaves had some opportunity for education in reading and writing because the Lone Star State had no laws intended to prevent slave literacy," as Texas historian Randolph Campbell noted. In this Texas was an exception. In most other Southern states, teaching slaves to read was strictly forbidden because authorities feared that literacy might aid communication between slaves plotting rebellion or might become more resistant should they read anti-slavery literature. "Some owners deliberately sought to prevent any education of slaves because it would lead to running away and other expressions of discontent." Other masters refused to believe that their human property was capable of an intellectual life. "No, the white people did not learn me to read, said a dam negro was not worth that much trouble," recalled Parilee Daniels, a former slave, to a WPA interviewer in 1937, in Palestine, Texas.

Some slaves learned to read on the sly. "I learned how to read and write my name while they were teaching the white children their lessons at night in the home by the candle light as we had no schools," Lizzie Atkins remembered at age 87. Literate slaves in many cases faced brutal retribution for their accomplishments. "Squire Garner bought a man dat had his right fore finger tore off," Mollie Watson told a WPA interviewer. "He say he learned to write an' when his master found out he had his finger cut off." Even when masters forbade literacy for their slaves, sometimes their will was undermined. "Even in some of those cases, however, members of the white family, usually children, ignored the objections of the master and the mistress and tried to teach young slaves to read," Campbell writes. "Susan Merritt, for example, remembers being hit with a whip

when her mistress caught her being taught to read by one of the family's daughters." R.C. Smith was also taught, unsuccessfully, by his master's children. "Old Master's children went to school and they would come home and try to learn us every thing that they learned in school," Smith said. "I couldn't be still long enough to learn anything but my pappy and mammy both learned to read and write."

Some masters harshly punished their slaves who learned to read. "Them old white folks woulden learn us to read and write and woulden let they young'ns learn us," said Lewis Jenkins. "My younges' mistress, which is my antie 'mind you, was tryin' to learn me to read and write and was caught an' she sho' got whippin' an' almos' a killin'." Rosa Maddox recalled how her master "Judge Maddox" responded when slaves were caught reading. "Now on Judge Maddox's place if a Nigger was caught with a book he got whipped like a thief," she said. "He had one man named Allen who went to work for a man whose boys taught him to read. When he came back to Judge Maddox's place he would slip off into the woods on Sunday and read a paper or a book. I 'member he told me, 'It's a shame a man couldn't read like he wanted to, cheap as paper is."

Other owners, Campbell notes, saw an advantage in their slaves having at least a minimal education so they could help with the farm or plantation's recordkeeping. "On Sunday afternoon master used to teach us how to read and write," Andrew Goodman said. "He told us we ought to get all the learnin' we could." Blacks who could read or displayed intellectual sophistication in other ways, were often treated as freaks or entertaining oddities. Such was the case of a Texas slave named Solomon who worked as an overseer

at one plantation. "[H]e sure was a smart man," a former slave, Eva Strayhorn, said. "When he was a young boy he used to take his young mistress, Miss Liza, to school. She was just a little girl and if the road was muddy he would carry her on his shoulder . . . They would sit down to take a rest by the roadside and she would learn him out of her books.

> They would do this every day and soon he could read as good as she could. As she growed up she kept learning more and Solomon had married and Miss Liza would go down to his cabin and teach him some more. His wife learned to read a little.
>
> Miss Liza finally married and went away and nobody knowed Solomon could read as Miss Liza never had said anything about teaching him for she was afraid her Pappy wouldn't like it. One day old Master went down to his house to give him orders for the day and there set Sol with the Bible on his lap. Old Master said, 'Sol, what are you doing with that Book?' Sol says, 'I'ze reading it, Marse Bill. I ain't going to tell you no lie about it.' Marse Bill said, 'How on earth did you learn to read?' Sol told him that Miss Liza learnt him when he used to tote her to school. Master sit there a second and he said, 'I want you

> to read it to me.' Sol read it to him just like he was talking it off. This sure did tickle Master Bill band he told him that he wanted him to practice up good that he was going to have his head examined on Sunday. This sort of scared ol Sol but he went ahead and sure enough on Sunday they was several men come out from town and old Master had Sol read for them. A Dr. Weems was in the crowd. He had Sol set down in a chair and he felt all over his head and talked all the time he was examining him. He told old Master that Sol was an uncommonly smart man.

Whites thought Solomon was odd enough that they had the slave examined by a phrenologist. The master class could not accept that intelligence was a common trait of their slaves because to do that would be to fear that those slaves might be fully conscious of how badly exploited they were and that they might plot rebellion. Literate slaves like Solomon were the exception, according to Alwyn Barr, who noted that only 2 percent of Texas newspaper advertisements bought by owners seeking runaway slaves mentioned that their escaped servants could read. He estimated that 95 percent of slaves in Texas could not read or write by the end of the Civil War.

In an attempt to increase their safety while enhancing their self esteem, slave elders taught their children numerous ways to fight back against oppression, including arson, running away, sabotaging and stealing equipment, "careless and sluggish work," the theft

of hogs and other farm animals and using them for food, and ridiculing masters behind their backs or in their company through the use of metaphorical stories and songs. Slave folktales and songs typically portrayed masters as greedy, ruthless killers and often included fantasies about their grim deaths. Here, slaves were able to exploit the racism of the master class, which assumed that slaves were too dimwitted to use symbols and allegory. As one slave song put it:

I fooled Ole Master 7 years
Fooled the overseer three

Embattled by white exploitation and intense prejudice, the black community put a premium on loyalty from its members and sanctioned selfishness, greed, and failure to respond when fellow slaves endured misfortunate. These ideals found perfect expression in the folktale cycle featuring B'rer (Brother) Rabbit. In places like Texas, B'rer Rabbit represented a blend of African concepts of social justice and humor with Christian concepts of virtue. Boldly acting outside the hypocritical values of the oppressive dominant society (represented in the folktales as large, carnivorous creatures like bears, wolves and even dragons), B'rer Rabbit turns his comparative smallness and weakness to his advantage, beating the stronger through intelligence and love of community. Through such folktales, black listeners learned the world is a dangerous place, but survival was possible if one behaved ethically and kept the larger African American family in mind at all times.

In one representative B'rer Rabbit story, "B'rer Tiger and the Big Wind," a drought strikes community and all the creatures hover at the point of death except a tiger that lives under a pear tree situated near a spring that never runs dry. When the other creatures come near to beg for water and food, the Tiger growls, "I'll eat you up if you come here!" They tell Rabbit of their plight. Rabbit, in his typical role as leader, once again declaims against injustice. "It's not right for one animal to have it all and the rest to have nothing." Rabbit concocts a scheme in which the other animals make the sounds of a terrible wind "that's going to blow all the people off the earth!" Some of the creatures, within earshot of Tiger, beg Rabbit to tie them down so they won't be blown away. Frightened, Tiger begs to be tied down and Rabbit complies. Rabbit castigates the now-helpless Tiger for his selfishness. "So now, B'rer Tiger, you just stay there until those ropes drop off. And you, children, gather up you crocus sacks and water buckets. Get all the pears and drinking water you want, because the Good Lord doesn't love a stingy man."

Afro-Texan children were repeatedly reminded that one way or the other the wolves in human society, the abusers and sexual predators, would get their just deserts, whether through divine judgment or human action. Slaves sang:

Abe Lincoln freed the nigger
With the gun and the trigger;
And I ain't gonna-get whipped any more
I got my ticket,
Leavin' the thicket

And I'm a-headin' for the Golden Shore!

Afro Texan children were cautioned to be patient and that, in the words of 19th century Unitarian minister Theodore Parker, often quoted by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., "the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice." As a spiritual sung in Texas put it:

> Walk, walk you nigger walk walk
> De road am dusty, de road am tough
> Walk 'til we reach dere, walk or bust –
> De road am long, we be dere by an' by

At each Texas plantation, individuals assumed the role of slaver preachers, who promised their congregation and taught the young that God actively took the side of the downtrodden. The God who freed the Hebrew slaves in *Exodus,* these preachers proclaimed, would not abandon his African children in America. The informal African American Christian church in Texas from 1836 to 1865 constructed a universe that was morally self-correcting, a world where "many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first." They gathered in circles, called "ring shouts," a continuation of worship practices in their ancestors' West African homeland. Lonely slaves who felt powerless forming in circles were reminded of the larger world of the African Diaspora and of the family formed by the larger slave family. Here, in a circle, there was no top and no bottom. All were equal. A circle also represents eternity. A slave participating in a ring

shout could be reminded that the Afro-Texan society would endure against all odds and that the love of God was forever.

Slaves worshipped in ring shouts throughout Texas. Lewis Jones, who was 86 when interviewed by the WPA at his Fort Worth home, recalled ring shouts at his Colorado River plantation birthplace in Fayette County, southeast of Austin. "Old Tom was the preacherman and musician, and he played the fiddle and banjo," Jones remembered. "Sometimes they had a jig contest, that when they put the glass of water on the head and saw who could jig the hardest without spilling the water. There was enjoyment in the singing. Preacher Tom set all of us niggers in the circle and sang old songs."

In this ceremony, we see Texas slaves worshipping in the traditional circle and participating in a celebration involving two musical instruments of venerable African heritage - the fiddle and the banjo. According to Jones, the slaves would sing, "I'm in the new Jerusalem/In the year of Jubilee." The song is both a celebration and a prophecy. In the book of Leviticus, the Jubilee was described as a year of rest held every fiftieth year in which the Israelites were commanded to "neither sow thy field, nor prune thy vineyard." During this celebration, bondservants were allowed to leave their masters and return to their families. The slave could return "unto the possession of his fathers."

The ring shout served as a prediction of slavery's end and the return of Africans to their larger family, where they would be in "the possessions of their fathers." Undoubtedly, these celebrations provided an escape from daily cares and woes, but in the Texas context

the ring shout and dance represented deeper metaphors. The participant not only reconfirmed his ties to his African past, his dance represented endurance in the face of current hardships. Those who survived such tests of perseverance, "jigging hard" without spilling a drop of water, would also survive slavery, lynching, poverty or segregation to experience paradise in the "new Jerusalem." Afro-Texan culture taught the community to view the struggle for justice as a battle over the *longue durée.* Such a worldview built an inner defense against nihilism in the face of repeated, cruel disappointment.

Afro-Texan slaves were particularly clear on one point. Besieged and outgunned at every turn, the black community could not survive unless every member stayed loyal to each other and resisted the pressures the master class imposed to divide Afro-Texans against each other. The danger of selling out, of succumbing to pressure, is metaphorically expressed in the most famous, and one of the most understood, B'rer Rabbit stories of all time, "B'rer Rabbit and the Tar Baby."

A former slave, Mary Kindred, told an interviewer from the Works Progress Administration (which during the New Deal in the late 1930s recorded the recollections of surviving freedmen) a variation of the story. "One time dey was B'rer Rabbit and B'rer Fox and B'rer Wolf," Kindred began. "Dey uster git dey drinkin' water outn' de branch. But they 'cide to mek a well. B'rer Fox an' B'rer Wolf dey dig de well cause B'rer Rabbi he mek 'scuses an' ain' dig none. W'en dey git de well done dug dey all glad dat dey don' hafter go to de branch no mo' for de water.

Eb'rey night B'rer Rabbit he sneak to de well an' steal all de water he want. B'rer Wolf he fix a trap to ketch de t'ief. He fix up a tar baby an' put him in de way w're B'rer Rabbit hafter pass to git to de well. Dat night B'rer Rabbi go to git he water an' dere de tar baby in de way. He say, 'Git outn' de pa'f (path), an' lemme go git some water.' But de tar baby didn' say nothin'. B'rer Rabbit he say, "I gwine slap you ifen you don' git outn' de way,' an' he haul off an' slap dat tar babya soun'in' (sounding) an' dere he han' stick. Den he say, 'T'un me a-loose, t'un me a-loose.' Iffen you ain', I slap you 'gin.' Den he slap de tar baby with he other han' an' dat stick too. Den he say he kick him iffen he don't t'un him a-loose, and he git fus' one foot an' den de other one stuck. Den he say, 'I still got my tail lef.' I slap you wid dat iffen you don' t'un me a-loose.' So den he flap he tail again' de tar baby an' dat stick too.

When B'rer Wolf come 'long in de mawnin' to git he water dat de fus' t'ing he see, B'rer Rabbit stickin' agin de tar baby. He say, 'So, you're de one been stealin' my water. I gwineter git rid of you right now.' So he stick a stake in de groun' an' tie B'rer Rabbit an' b'un him up. An' dat da on'ies' time dat anybody git de bes' of B'rer Rabbit."

The tar baby, of course, is black and B'rer Rabbit himself represents the typical slave. As the scholar Bernard Wolfe points out, in this tale, Rabbit responds like a typical white man towards black slaves, demanding deference and resorting to violence when disappointed. Rabbit, representing a type of slave, divorces himself from his community, mimics the savagery of slavemasters, but ultimately cannot escape his identity. No matter how hard he tries, Rabbit's blackness "sticks" to him. Rabbit suffers one of his rare defeats. If Rabbit is a slave Everyman, it follows that occasionally he depicts the less noble responses to slavery. No doubt, the keen moral critics who created B'rer Rabbit had in mind the type of slave who acquiesced, the "Uncle Tom" who betrayed his brethren for marginally improved living conditions. B'rer Rabbit, for once, loses his sense of community and he suffers for his foolishness. Loyalty, the elders taught their children, is necessary for anyone in the slave community to survive.

Even if only a small number of slaves learned to read, write, add and subtract, they had a full moral curriculum at the hands of their elders long before they learned of Abraham Lincoln's "Emancipation Proclamation." They learned of the beliefs, traditions, and achievements of their African ancestors. They learned that they had worth. They learned of the dangers of living in a white society. They learned non-violent ways to resist oppression. They learned that intelligence can prevail over brute force. They learned the value loyalty to their community and that the moral decisions made by individual Afro-Texans shaped the destinies of the entire extended black family. These moral lessons aid a foundation for the black philosophy of education when blacks were suddenly thrust in a world where they could finally enjoy freedom.

Questions to Think About

1. Why did slaveowners fear slaves who could read and write? How do you think educated people are seen today?
2. Slave parents wanted their children to be proud, but at the same time safe from the possible violence of racist whites. What do you think are the most important lessons about life that your teachers and other elders try to teach you?
3. Slave parents used folk stories like B'rer Rabbit tales to teach their children lessons about doing the right thing and how to survive. What folk stories have elders told you and what were the main lessons they taught?
4. B'rer Rabbit is almost always loyal to his community, looks out for those smaller and weaker than him and uses his mind to beat those who bully him and his loved ones. What characters in stories you've read, movies and TV shows you've watched, and songs you've listened to, act like that and how are they like and how are they different than B'rer Rabbit?

Chapter Two

"Aroused to the Possibility of Educating Their Children": Black Education During Reconstruction

On June 19, 1865 Union General Gordon Granger came ashore in Galveston, Texas, and issued General Order No. 3, which read in part, "The people of Texas are informed that, in accordance with a proclamation from the Executive of the United States, all slaves are free. This involves an absolute equality of personal rights and rights of property between former masters and slaves, and the connection heretofore existing between them becomes that between employer and hired labor."

The emancipation of African Americans across the South launched the era known as "Reconstruction." The federal government would attempt to piece back together the Union, to rebuild a Southern economy devastated by the Civil War, and to somehow bridge the bitter divides between black and white Southerners. Former slave masters saw the surrender of the Confederacy as a catastrophe. Afro-Texans believed they had reached the Promised Land.

"Everybody went wild," said former slave Felix Haywood in an interview conducted by the Works Progress Administration during the Great Depression in the 1930s. "We all felt like heroes and nobody had made us that way but ourselves. We was free. Just like that, we was free . . . right off colored folks started on the move. They seemed to want to

get closer to freedom, so they'd know what it was – like it was a place, or a city . . . We knowed freedom was on us, but we didn't know what was to come with it. We thought we was going to get rich like the white folks. We thought we was goin' to be richer than the white folks, 'cause we was stronger and knowed how to work, and the whites didn't and they didn't have us to work for them anymore. But it didn't turn out that way. We soon found out that freedom could make folks proud but it didn't make 'em rich"

Former slaves can be forgiven if they expressed a sense of triumph at justice served when hard times fell on their former masters after the Civil War. As one post-Civil War rhyme collected by Texas folklorist John Mason Brewer exuberantly declared:

Missus an' Mosser a'walkin' de street
Deir hands in deir pockets an' nothin' to eat.
She'd better be home a-washin' up de dishes,
An' a-cleanin' up de ole man's raggity britches.
He'd better run 'long an' git out de hoes
An' clean out his own crooked weedy corn rows;
De Kingdom is come, de Nigger is free
Hain't no Nigger slaves in de year Jubilee.

Such open enjoyment was dangerous, however, after the Civil War. For slaveowners, sudden emancipation meant the sudden financial loss of their human property. For struggling whites, the world also turned upside down. In antebellum times, white skin

had provided a status independent of actual wealth or economic autonomy. Poor or not, white men were citizens, theoretically equal with their racial peers regardless of class. The institution of black slavery reminded politically powerless, working class whites that they had a higher place on the society's racial ladder, perhaps the only comfort offered in an economically ruthless society. Texas freedmen were quickly taught that whites would not accept black emancipation gracefully.

Annie Row, who was 86 when WPA interviewers found her at her Fort Worth home, recalled the end of the Civil War years with horror. Row was born on a plantation in Rusk, Texas. She recalled that when "Marster Charley" received a letter informing him that his son John had been killed in the war, he "started cursing the war, and he picked up the hot poker and said, 'Free the niggers, will they, I'll free them.' Then he hit my mammy on the neck, and she started moaning and crying and dropped to the floor. . . He took the gun off the rack and started for the field where the niggers were working. My sister and I saw that, and we started running and screaming, because we had brothers and sisters in the field. But the good Lord took a hand in that mess, and the master hadn't gone far in the field when he dropped all of a sudden. The death set in on the marster, and the niggers came running to him. He couldn't talk or move, and they toted him in the house. The doctor came, and the next day marster died."

Not all slaves were so lucky, rescued from certain homicide by the heart attack of an enraged former master. The Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, began operations in Texas in September 1865, and was handed many assignments, but

never had enough personnel to provide the freedmen their most basic need, physical safety. There, blacks were "frequently beaten unmercifully, and shot down like wild beasts, without any provocation." Historian Eric Foner quotes Susan Merritt, "a freedwoman from Rusk County, Texas" who "remembered seeing black bodies floating down the Sabine River, and said of local whites, 'There are going to be lots of souls crying against them in Judgment.'"

Relations were particularly poisonous in the town of Marshall, in Harrison County near the Louisiana state line. About 61 percent of the heads of households there owned slaves according to the 1860 U.S. Census, the last before the Civil War, and the county's 8,874 slaves – the largest number in any Texas county – constituted 59 percent of the population. One master, William Scott, owned more than 100 slaves, as historian Randolph Campbell points out, and 145 masters owned 20 or more each. The financial loss suffered by these masters because of emancipation seemed to inspire great bitterness. In a typical incident in 1866, two discharged former Confederate soldiers beat a freedwomen named Lucy Grimes to death and were never charged because the only witnesses to the crime were other African Americans. U.S. Army Captain Charles F. Rand reported that "Outrages [against freedmen] are committed daily with impunity and all pass unnoticed for lack of assistance." Whites murdered ten African Americans in Marshall in February 1867, with two locals offering to shoot blacks at random for a fee of 75 cents.

Conservative Democrats for a time held political power in Texas just after the Civil War ended in the spring of 1865. They attempted to re-codify white supremacy in state law. Applying for re-admission to the Union, Texas adopted a new state constitution in 1866. Ex-Confederates joined with conservative pro-Unionists to write a document that tacitly recognized the 13th Amendment to the United States Constitution, which banned slavery. The new state charter, however, denied freedmen the right to vote, hold public office, testify in court, serve on juries, or attend public schools. Voters approved the Texas Constitution and the 1866 Legislature subsequently rejected the Fourteenth Amendment, which granted citizenship rights to African American men. Former slave owners sought to maintain the pre-war racial status quo and labored to keep their emancipated chattel shrouded by ignorance. "It looks like the white folks can't git over us being free, and they do everything to hold us down all of the time," former slave Allen Manning said of Reconstruction Texas when he was interviewed during the Great Depression in the 1930s. "We don't git no schools for a long time, and I never see the inside of a school. I jest grow up on hard work."

These measures, plus the anti-black violence in Texas, pushed the Republican majority in the United States Congress over the edge. So-called Radical Republicans realized that their party was likely to lose control of the Congress if blacks could not act as a political counterweight to the cotton planters who had led Texas and other Southern states to secession. The Congress would not seat the Texas delegation elected under the 1866 Texas Constitution.

Evan in the face of intense white opposition, however, from their earliest moments of freedom, African Americans in Texas gave education central significance as they planned their uncertain futures. Denied education as slaves, the freedpeople in Texas saw formal education as a gateway to economic independence, which they understood as a necessary first step to genuine, as opposed to symbolic, emancipation. The Freedmen's Bureau provided the first schools open to African Americans in Texas. Unfortunately, the bureau's assistant commissioner, Edgar M. Gregory, "did not stress black education," according to Barry M. Crouch, a leading historian of Texas during the Reconstruction era. Gregory counted on the state government to create and fund a sustained system of public education rather than counting on the Army to provide this service. Nevertheless, by the spring of 1866, the bureau supervised education in 90 schools for freedmen, including 42 day schools, 29 night schools, 19 schools that taught lessons on Sundays and about 20 private schools for freedmen with African American teachers. Together these schools, staffed by 29 white and 14 black men and women, provided an education for 2,830 black children and 1,760 African American adults. In spite of underfunding and white harassment, through 1867 a small but growing number of freedmen were educated in Texas. By mid-1867, about 6,000 African Americans attended day, night and Sunday schools.

These schools, according to historian Alwyn Barr, generally existed in "rough frame buildings with log desks and benches. Some even had tent ceilings. Black churches housed some classes and by 1870 a few brick buildings had been constructed or purchased." Barr noted that the days at the Freedmen Bureau schools were filled with

studying “reading, writing, arithmetic, geography and needlework with Bible stories used frequently to teach grammar.”

"The free people are aroused to the possibility of educating their children," William H. Horton, the Sub-Assistant Commissioner for the Freedmen's Bureau in Dallas, wrote just two years after the Emancipation Proclamation was first read in Texas. Yet, Texas whites would not financially support black schools and in some cases threatened violence to prevent them from opening. White animus towards black education developed in part, as Horton observed, because the "majority of people here scoff at the idea of a Negro being susceptible to receiving an education, that the . . . black can not be taught to read and write, &c."

Bureau Superintendent of Education Edwin M. Wheelock was forced to concede that the bureau’s insistence that schools be “self-sustaining” – meaning supported by local taxes or by tuition paid by students – meant that many poor freedmen would be denied an education. As Crouch notes, some upper-class whites supported limited education for Afro-Texans to turn blacks into “profitable laborers,” but saw little use for black education beyond that self-interested reason. The Freedmen’s Bureau began to funnel funds derived from renting lands confiscated from absent and unpardoned Confederates to the black schools, allowing the bureau to hire more teachers and reduce tuition to “a nominal sum” that made the schools “substantially free.” Crouch argues that through the summer of 1867, bureau schools “grew in numbers and improved in quality” until a yellow fever outbreak from July until November shut down campuses across the state.

“By the latter month,” Crouch wrote, “scarcely 10 percent of the schools continued in operation, teachers had died, and others had left the state adamantly refusing to return.”

Fear of the epidemic, violence and poverty motivated the departure of many teachers. Texas Anglos sought to make life financially impossible for the teachers, black and white, who traveled South for the opportunity to bring literacy and other liberating skills to eager former slaves. One such idealist was M.L. Capell. A widow supporting a child, Capell arrived in Dallas County in 1867. She learned of an order from the Superintendent of Freedmen's Schools that teachers' salaries would be suspended only when she read about the policy in the newspaper. "[M]ost of the Freedmen . . . whose children I taught are very poor and unless they receive assistance from the government or some other source I don't think it will be possible for them to keep up a school," Capell wrote to the Freedman's Bureau in Dallas County. "If I was in a situation to do so I would devote all my time for the next twelve months gratis to the education of the blacks; but I am a widow and a very poor one at that and I have myself and child to take care of and am therefore compelled to charge in order to sustain myself." Former slaves pooled their meager financial resources to help fund the schools but the withdrawal of federal financial support, even to pay teachers, undermined the effort. "The Freedpeople," Horton observed,” . . . really are too poor to help themselves."

The education fund derived from land rents had largely been exhausted by the end of 1867. Schools again began to charge their penniless students tuition or raised fees where they already existed and “many students withdrew.” Intimidation also kept freedmen and

their black and white instructors away from bureau-supervised schools. "In some areas, school for blacks could not be maintained because there were no soldiers to protect the teachers," Crouch wrote. Owen F. Baker, the first Freedmen's Bureau teacher in Marshall, told agents that on January 1, 1867, "an 'enraged rebel mob' had attacked his house, smashed all the windows, and fired numerous bullets in it." Many "nigger teachers" (as white women who taught black students were called by the locals), were systematically denied room and board. Women teachers in particular were not only threatened with violence, but were demeaned in Texas newspapers. "It had become quite common for the newspapers to insinuate that women teachers could not be looked upon in any 'other light than Common Prostitutes," Crouch notes.

Another freedman, Samuel Taylor, said that his education was brief and interrupted by a work injury. "I didn't get but a little schooling, for my father used to send me after the mules," he told a WPA interviewer. "One day the wheelbarrow had a load of bricks on it. It was upset. They had histed the bricks up on a high platform. It turned over as I was passing underneath, and one fell on me and struck my head. It was a long time before they would let me go to school again. After that, I never got used to studying any more." Taylor said he also received some education from his grandfather, but he received formal schooling from the "Capitol Hill" and "Union Schools" only "as far as the eighth grade." In spite of his interrupted education, Taylor remarked, "They all said I was one of the brightest scholars they had."

For many freedmen, their scholastic careers were over in two years or less. “I was the only one of the chil’ren that got any schooling and that was just two years after surrender,” said former slave Alex Jackson. “Mistress sent me to school with her chil’ren after the War, but we moved off the place and never seed a school again. When I got old enough to go out for my self, I never studied anything but labor.”

Some freedmen improvised to continue their studies after local opposition and a lack of funding for Freedmen Bureau schools closed the local campus. “I went one week to a school and the teacher said I learned the fastest of any boy she ever see,” said Mose Hursey. “She was a nice white lady. My maw took me out of school ‘cause she needed me at home to ‘tend the other children so’s she could work. I had a powerful yearnin’ to know to read and write. I studied out’n my books by myself and my friends helped me with the cypherin’. Once I went to sleep and the book fell out of my hands into the fire and burned up.”

Republican efforts to gain a foothold in post-bellum Texas provoked terrorism. Whites between 1865-68 murdered about 1 percent of Afro-Texan males between the ages of 15-49, a higher murder rate than in modern-day Dallas or Houston. In response to violence in Texas and other Southern states, the Congress passed the Military Reconstruction Act over President Andrew Johnson’s veto in March 1867. The law placed Texas under army command, and declared that officials elected in the aftermath of the Civil War were subject to removal by the United States Army. The Congress also required Texas to hold another constitutional convention before it could rejoin the Union. The delegates for the

new constitutional convention would have to be elected by all male citizens age 21 and over, regardless of race, color, or previous condition of servitude. An election boycott by ex-Confederates combined with new black voters created a disproportionately pro-Union and Republican electorate. For a time, Republicans dominated the state Legislature, and two members of the party, Elisha M. Pease and Edmund J. Davis, occupied the governor's mansion from 1867-1874. This period marked one of the most progressive eras of reform in Texas history.

Voters approved another state Constitution in 1869. The 1869 Texas Constitution explicitly outlawed slavery for the first time in the state's history, provided for black citizenship and mandated the legal equality of all persons regardless of color. In addition, it provided for free public schools that were open for at least four months a year, for all children ages five to 18, regardless of race. Sales of public land, a $1 poll tax, and state tax revenues funded the schools. The law allowed local school boards to decide whether or not to implement a school system (segregated, of course), which became the norm across Texas. These state schools allowed some African Americans to continue receiving education in the state even after the Freedman's Bureau ceased operations in 1869.

Public schools expanded quickly, reaching an enrollment of 125,000 in 1872 to 1873, but white Texas voters quickly objected not only to educating African Americans but to the cost of public education. The impact of black schools in Texas in this period varied from county to county. According to Texas historian Randolph Campbell, as late as 1880, 41 percent of African American families with children between the ages of six and 16 had at

least one child enrolled in school in Colorado County in Southeast Texas.

Opposition to Republican school reforms was strong. "Many believed it to be too costly and some refused to pay taxes for its support," Alwyn Barr wrote. "Others disliked the Northern teachers . . . Still others opposed compulsory attendance as undemocratic and a threat to private schools. Perhaps as pervasive as any criticism, however, remained the fear of black education because it might make Negroes harder to control and because the federal government might require integrated schools." In spite of this, 56 percent of all school-age children attended Texas public schools in the 1872-73 school year, about 129,542 in all. African American children made up between 25 and 33 percent of that number.

The first African American institutions of higher learning in Texas also formed in this period. As Alwyn Barr noted, the Freedman's Aid Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1873 founded Wiley College in Marshall. Wiley became the first black college west of the Mississippi. At Wiley, white missionaries served as administrators and teachers for the first 20 years. The school also offered education below the college level until 1922. Paul Quinn College in Austin, Texas, was established in 1872 as an elementary and secondary school. Teachers conducted classes in basic courses such as reading and vocational subjects as carpentry and blacksmithing in churches and people's homes. The college moved to Waco in 1877 and moved into a permanent building. By 1882, the college had obtained a state charter and a three-story building and was offering college courses.

Black literacy dramatically climbed in this time period. Illiteracy fell from 95 percent in 1865, the year that the Civil War ended, to 89 percent five years later, to 75 percent by 1880. As Alwyn Barr observed, this was "primarily as a result of Freedmen's Bureau schools of the late 1860s and the public school system instituted by the Republicans in the early 1870s."

Elite white anger over black enfranchisement, Gov. Davis' crackdown on terrorist groups such as the Ku Klux Klan, the taxes raised to support education not just for African Americans but also poor whites, and other reforms seen as threatening to the planter class made the collapse of Republican rule inevitable after the withdrawal of Union Army troops from Texas by the early 1870s. In the gubernatorial election of December 1873, the Democratic gubernatorial candidate Richard Coke overwhelmed Davis, carrying 66.7 percent of the vote in an election where the black turnout was heavily suppressed through white intimidation and violence.

With unrepentant Confederates now in possession of the Texas House, the state Senate and the governor's mansion, so-called "Redeemer Democrats" now sought to roll back the reforms enacted during the brief reign of the Republican Party. The enactment of yet another state Constitution in 1876 severely handicapped education in Texas for decades. The 1876 Constitutional Convention provided that the Legislature would meet only once every two years, instead of annually as in the 1869 constitution, and could incur no more than $200,000 in indebtedness.

As a result of the spending cap, legislators slashed funding for schools even as they abolished the office of state superintendent of education. The Constitutional Convention specifically wrote the 1876 document to hamper government's ability to raise revenues by setting strict debt limits and requiring voter-approved amendments in order to impose new taxes. As author John E. Bebout noted in 1971, the 1876 constitution "was deliberately written to prevent active government, by men who felt they had suffered from too much government and felt the need for relatively little government action, even in the field of education."

The new Constitution required that voters approve any enactment of an income tax, a difficult requirement that still in modern times bedevils attempts to provide adequate public school funding, as well as decent investment in universities, health care and prisons. By 2005, Texas was one of the states most dependent on sales taxes. Such taxes disproportionately affect lower income people, meaning that by the mid-1990s the poorest 20 percent of the population spent 13.8 percent of their income on various taxes while the richest 1 percent spent only 4.4 percent of their income in this way. More heavily taxed, the poorest Texans in the future often sought work rather than school.

The new state Constitution mandated segregated schools. Public schools were hit with further belt tightening because the new Constitution prohibited the raising of local taxes to pay school expenses. The state provided for day-to-day operating expenses but set aside nothing for school building or maintenance or the purchase of equipment. In 1879,

Gov. O.M. Roberts demanded further cuts in state spending which reduced school budgets even more, a move popular with voters "who opposed public education in general and Negro education in particular," as historian Alwyn Barr wrote. Throughout the school segregation era until the 1960s, black schools would be overcrowded, lacking in basic equipment like chalk, provided out-of-date and dilapidated textbooks, and receive fewer funds. These schools would be staffed with teachers with less training than teachers at white schools.

As a result, the elders in the freedmen community would still have to play a major role in the education of their children, teaching them as in slave times how to maintain self-esteem, the importance of intelligence, the brain over physical might, the centrality of community and standing as a witness to injustice.

Freedmen supplemented the rich array of "B'rer Rabbit" stories with "John tales." The hero of these stories, John, is clearly an ex-slave negotiating his way through the hazardous postbellum world. The John stories portray a brutal world of life-and-death competition and unequal privilege. Ostensibly, the hero of these stories falls short of "victory," but rather than reacting with resignation, he makes wise, realistic appraisals of a racist, materialistic world.

John is a rebel engaged in constant resistance whose chief weapon is his mouth, which he uses to subtly condemn hypocrisy and injustice. Like B'rer Rabbit, John uses his wits to frustrate the powerful, but John tales contain an important difference. Many of

the B'rer Rabbit legends end with the hero killing his oppressor. When they don't die, the villains in B'rer Rabbit stories suffer grave misfortune. In the John stories collected by Brewer, the hero often wins the battle of wits, but there is no dramatic reversal of fortune. This perhaps reflected the even greater violence that African Americans faced at the hands of whites during the Reconstruction era. Parental figures felt even more fear and wanted to underscore the need for their children to find an alternative to responding to violence in kind.

In "John and the Two White Men in Court," the hero finds himself facing charges of stealing. In the tale, the court system and circumstances invariably favor white men. The judge calls up the first white defendant, who is accused of stealing a horse, and asks for his plea:

"'Not guilty,' replied the man, 'I've owned that horse ever since he was a colt.' The case was dismissed.

Then the Judge called the second man to the stand. He was accused of stealing a cow. 'Guilty or not guilty?' asked the Judge.

'Not guilty,' replied the defendant. 'I've owned that cow ever since she was a calf.' The case was dismissed.

Then John was called to the stand. He was accused of stealing a wagon. 'Not guilty,' replied John. 'Ah's owned that wagon ever since it was a wheelbarrow.'"

John's response could be interpreted as mere foolishness, but what is telling about the tale is that the excuses of the white defendants are accepted without question. John's alibi could be responding to an inevitable guilty verdict for the black defendant with wry wit, a burlesque of white alibis. Any African American, guilty or innocent, was bound to be found guilty by established white authority. African Americans had no illusions about white gratefulness or generosity in the days after slavery.

When circulating in the white world, John tales suggest, black people needed to remember that intelligence, talent, humor, and hard work would more than likely be met with indifference, fear or disrespect by the city's ruling class. With material benefits small or non-existent, achievement must be its own reward. "The Hays County Courthouse Janitor." In this story, "Unkah Sug Miller," a janitor at the Hays County Courthouse in the Central Texas town of San Marcos, is confronted by a county judge who hates him. The judge warns the janitor, even though he has never missed a day of work in 25 years, that he will be fired unless if he learns how to read and write. The judge see to it that Sug gets sacked and four years elapse before the two confront each other on a San Marcos street.

The judge, to his great surprise, learns that Miller has become a wealthy farmer. He praises Sug, who has "come up in de worl' fas' — 'taint no tellin' what you'd of been sho

'nuff, if'n you'd of knowed how to read an' write.'" Sug is unimpressed with the Judge's reaction. "Ah knows zackly what Ah'd of been," Sug says. "Ah'd of still been de janitor at the Hays County Coa'thouse."

Sug knows that white society has set a low upper limit on black prestige. The mythic American land of opportunity has no place for African Americans. A literate janitor will still be nothing more than a janitor to the white world. The Afro-Texan community, however, would not remain satisfied with the status quo. All work had dignity, black folklore suggested. Elders and their children, however, demanded the same opportunities enjoyed by Anglo Texans. As they always had, they fought for the right to be not only janitors or farmers, but to be doctors and lawyers, musicians and philosophers, professionally trained ministers and authors. With their own hands, beginning in the 1880s, they would build institutions like Bishop College and other black institutions of higher learning across Texas.

Questions to Think About

1. Reconstruction, the time right after the Civil War when slavery was ended, was the first time many African Americans got to go to school. Can you remember your feelings the first time you went to school? Do you know anyone in your family or in your friends' families who were the first to go to college? What did they feel about being the first?
2. Freedpeople, as former slaves were called, were willing to die for the right to go to school. Why do you think education was so important to African Americans at that time and how has education been important in your life?
3. For most of its history, Texas, like other Southern states, has been poorer than states in the Northeast like New York and in the West like California. How do you think Texas history might have been different if Texans had spent more money on schools for all children, black and white, beginning in the 1860s and 1870s?
4. Black parents continued to tell their children folk stories during Reconstruction and afterward, as they had during slavery. How are the "John" stories similar and different from the B'rer Rabbit stories?

Chapter Three

Buying Back What Was Always Theirs

Bishop College had several fathers. Pamphlets and catalogues and official histories of its namesake, Nathan Bishop, sang his praises as a white man who did good things for Negroes. He was important because he was able to donate $10,000, a whopping amount of money for the late 19th century and a sum that went a long way in rural East Texas.

Nathan Bishop was a man of means, and although money has always talked, it's the boots on the ground that walk. What is often lost in the rhetoric is that the first piece of property for Bishop College was bought by former slaves. And the piece of property they bought was an East Texas plantation mansion complete with imposing columns. It is entirely possible that they themselves had worked on that plantation. It is even possible that their ancestors had built the big house.

It was called Wyalucing, and it was built by slaves in 1848-1850, the first brick home in Marshall, Texas. It was on the Holcombe Place. Later, Texas historians would not know the names of the slaves who built it, but they erected a historical marker noting that it was the home of Beverly Lafayette Holcomb and that Lucy Petway Holcombe was married there on April 24, 1858, to Francis Wilkinson Pickens, Minister to Russia.

In 1947 the historical marker stated,

> WYALUCING. Built in 1850. One of the first brick houses in Marshall. Purchased for Bishop College in 1880 by illiterate ex-slaves of this county.

Wyalucing had been the scene of much Confederate activity during the Civil War. The mansion was headquarters for the Trans-Mississippi Agency of the Confederate Post Office Department. Confederate General Joseph O. Shelby addressed soldiers of his Iron Brigade from the veranda of Wyalucing just before their departure on the Shelby expedition in early 1865.

The Holcombe family tradition said that “Wyalucing” was an Indian word for "home of the friendless"; other sources say it meant "home of the warrior."

The Holcombe property had been 100 acres, with a second smaller residence linked to Wyalucing by a street lined with slave cabins.

The freedmen purchased this first building for Bishop College with money raised through extraordinary efforts by their churches, plus loans they were able to obtain, and donations mostly from Northern whites.

We can imagine the steady decline of family fortunes that led to the sale of the Holcombe. Meanwhile, Texas freedmen were struggling to educate themselves and their children. In 1869 the Texas Constitution mandated free schools for all—a mandate that caused considerable white resentment and stood stand for only two years.

The year 1871 brought the virtual repeal of Texas' constitutional guarantee of free education. It was left up to each county whether to provide education (this prevailed until 1905). Thus, private organizations such as churches filled the need (if it were filled at all) for the education of freedmen, which was otherwise nearly nonexistent.

In 1880, 75 percent of Texas African Americans remained illiterate. Harrison County, where Marshall is located and where Bishop College would be founded, had 17,000 African Americans and 8,000 whites.

A black man from Indiana, S. H. Smothers, built interest in education among Harrison County freedmen. As county surveyor, he was a man of substance and urged property-owning African Americans to organize a school to teach children and to train Baptist ministers. The school was established in Marshall and called Centennial College. As would also be true of Bishop, "College" is an honorary title, since most of the students who entered had to begin with the elementary grades.

Centennial College was on a piece of property called the Rainey Estate, a half-mile north of the Harrison County courthouse. Centennial was soon to close, due to money problems.

It is hard now to imagine the strength and depth of white opposition to the education of blacks in the post-Reconstruction era. It was necessary for missionaries from the North to found schools for freedmen. The missionaries taught in these schools at considerable risk of violence from local whites who opposed educating freedmen.

White Baptist missionaries who visited form the North considered East Texas the most logical place to found a school, as it is the region where the majority of black Texans resided. Public health considerations played a large role. It was thought that a site on high ground, being well-drained and less hospitable to mosquitoes, was less susceptible to malaria. And Marshall, Texas, was said to be at the highest part of the divide between the Sabine and Red rivers.

The amount needed to purchase 10 acres and Wyalucing for Bishop College was $6,900. The freedmen who led the project to raise money to help purchase the property were "Father" Yates, Fred Lights, L. M. Luke, Sandy Isaac, Rev. C. B. Martin, A. R. Griggs, David Abner Sr. and Rev. P. C. Cooper. All own property in Harrison or Marion counties.

Ministers and their congregations were enlisted to raise the money. This fundraising effort fell short by $3,100. Moore, Abner Sr. and F. W. Gross, all freedmen, were able to borrow the money.

The namesake of Bishop College was Union Army Col. Nathan Bishop, an educator on the East Coast who considered it his duty to found a college for freedmen.

He had a long and strong association with the American Baptist Home Mission Society. In 1871, Rufus C. Burleson, who was Baylor University president, asked Bishop, corresponding secretary of the Mission Society, for a $25,000 contribution toward the founding of a black college. Bishop, who had given large sums to other Southern black

colleges as well as to Vassar, agreed. Nathan Bishop died before making the actual donation, but his wife, Carolina Caldwell Bishop, sent $10,000.

Nathan Bishop has been widely quoted as to his motivation:

> I expect to stand side by side with these Freedmen in the day of judgment. Their Lord is my Lord. They and I are brethren; and I am determined to be prepared for the meeting.

A search committee visited several towns in East Texas and decided Marshall was the best place to found the college. The committee included a distinguished Dallas minister, pastor Allen R. Griggs of New Hope Baptist Church.

The school was temporarily named South-Western Baptist College. Forty more acres were bought in 1880 by Mrs. Bishop and donated to the school, which was then named Bishop College.

Meanwhile, Centennial College closed in 1880 due to financial difficulties. Its building was moved to Bishop's location.

On September 26, 1881, Bishop College opened with 298 students. The building, brick and stone, was three stories tall, with classrooms and dorm space for 56 students.

Questions to Think About

1. While some whites used violence to close down black schools and threatened African Americans and their teachers, many whites risked their lives to teach at black schools; and some, like Nathan Bishop, generously gave money to support black colleges. What do you think motivated these whites?
2. What do you know about the history of your school?
3. In many communities, many children and adults still have trouble reading and writing and have trouble with basic math skills – even adults. Others have trouble learning because of poor health or because they are hungry. What projects could your school do to improve education in your community?

Chapter Four

Reaching a Higher Plane

On Jan. 30, 1919, Bishop College President C. H. Maxson sat down and wrote a letter to philanthropist George W. Breckenridge of San Antonio. He was hoping Breckenridge would make a large donation to the college. Breckenridge already had made a pledge to Guadalupe College in Seguin, another Baptist-supported black school. Breckenridge had promised $35,000 to Guadalupe if that college could raise $10,000.

It was Maxson's dream to increase Bishop's student body to something between 1,500 and 1,800. In his letter, he appealed to Breckenridge's moral sense:

> In fifty years Christian America has made no adequate effort, and is not now making an adequate effort to meet the educational need of the Negro race.

It would take decades for Bishop to grow to the size Maxson envisioned. But the years 1919 to 1929 saw great growth of a different sort: Bishop steadily raised the bar for its students, and added faculty with more impressive credentials. In 1929, the year of the Stock Market crash, Bishop appointed its first black president. It also became the first black college in the Southwest to discontinue high school courses and offer only college-level work.

This achievement was reached after a steady series of small steps forward and a few setbacks.

In the same year that Maxson wrote to Breckenridge, Bishop suffered a setback when fire destroyed the chapel building, Morehouse Hall, and also the entire library collection. But a white English professor, Miss Mariet D. Barker, started a project to restock the library and had little trouble obtaining more than 1,000 books in a fairly short period.

By that year, 1919, the faculty had grown to 26; and Bishop graduates were beginning to make their mark on the world. Among the illustrious graduates of the time was Clifton F. Richardson Sr., who had graduated from Bishop with a journalism degree. In 1919 he co-founded the newspaper the *Informer* in Houston, and in the 1920s he became a labor leader.

In 1921 the college department enrollment stood at 107, over 10 times the number just a generation previously.

The year 1924 was a momentous one for Bishop. It graduated 22 students. Fourteen of them became public school teachers; four taught college; and two enrolled in medical school.

That was the year in which Bishop not only earned its accreditation from the Texas State Board of Education for the certification of teachers but also discontinued its grammar school. Although Bishop retained its high school for five more years, the discontinuance of the grammar school was indicative of the fact that Afro Texans had gained broad access to at least a rudimentary education.

In 1925, Bishop instituted a requirement that all applicants would have to show that they had finished high school. With its college enrollment at nearly 60 percent of the study

body, Bishop began a two-year training program for ministers. The numbers were looking good: the library was back up to 5,000 volumes, and 21 students earned college diplomas.

The faculty had nearly doubled in just six years. There were 51 faculty members, 27 of whom held degrees. Two had earned master of arts degrees; most held B.A. and B.S. degrees. Among the faculty who were teaching college-level courses, only one lacked a bachelor's degree. The total enrollment at Bishop was 479.

The enrollment increased by only about 40 students from 1901 to 1927. But the increase in the number of faculty members indicates that more college work was being demanded of students and more electives were being offered. The college-level enrollment stood at 75 percent.

By 1927, the dean was O. A. Fuller. He oversaw a campus spread across 23 acres. Buildings on the campus included the president's home, Bishop Hall, Rockefeller Hall, Wolverton Shop, Marston Hall, a dorm for 110 young men, a steam plant and a laundry, Caldwell House, and the Printing House. There was also a chapel that seated 600, and in an interesting juxtaposition of religion and science, the chapel building, a large frame structure, also housed a biology lab and a physics lab. Nathan Bishop's widow donated the money to keep the labs up to date. A full-time librarian presided over 5,000 volumes.

The greater part of the student body was demanding college work, according to a master's thesis written in 1927 by Southern Methodist University student Cyrus LaGrone. In fact in 1927 the college department enrollment stood at 340.

Noted LaGrone, "The first-year college preparatory class has been discontinued. The students must complete the first year of high school before entering Bishop College."

By this time, the quality of Texas public school education had improved, even for blacks, and school semesters had been lengthened from their traditional truncated time frame that was designed to allow children to help on the farm during the growing season.

So Bishop began to phase out its high school classes. But LaGrone noted that there was "a question in the minds of some as to the wisdom of this since many negroes do not yet have access to high schools."

> For many years [after the school opened in 1881] the pupils of the grammar grades outnumbered all other departments combined. … College students now number three-fourths of the entire enrollment.

Bishop was in fact largely responsible for the improvement of education for Afro Texans. The preponderance of its graduates became teachers. It was believed that in 1927 about 90 percent of the graduates of the preparatory and college departments had become public school teachers. Most of the rest followed careers as ministers, physicians, surgeons or dentists.

President Maxson, a white man, at the time said that the purpose of the college was "to prepare teachers and ministers for the negroes." He did not mind measuring the value of blacks' education in terms of economic gain for whites, remarking,

> When you educate the negro, or any other class or race of people, you are removing them from the liability side of the book and putting them on the asset side.

and also:

> I believe that the work we are doing here in Marshall is doing more for the good of Marshall's white population than it is for the negro.

Bishop College strove to be a good neighbor in all respects. LaGrone noted that the college had created a nice part of town with well-kept homes -- and paved streets, a rarity for the time and place.

Annual costs to attend the college-level classes were about $250 in the mid-1920s. Miscellaneous fees were also charged, such as for millinery (hats), $1.50/month.

In 1927 the board of trustees had 15 members. "This board adheres to using a white man as president and part of the faculty are well educated and experienced white men and women from the North," LaGrone remarked.

He also noted that in 1927 Bishop was accredited by the Texas State Board of Examiners as a college of the First Class. This meant that along with their diplomas, Bishop students who wanted to become teachers could get teaching certificates without having to take any further examinations administered by the state.

Students at Bishop received close attention from their teachers. In 1928, most classes had fewer than 30 students. This personal attention was an enduring tradition. Even in the

1960s and 1970s, alumni recounted, it was not unusual for faculty members to treat their students like their own sons and daughters.

Another improvement in the late 1920s was that teachers of college-level courses were freed from also teaching high school-level classes. But the average faculty salary remained low, about $1,260/year ($15,900 in 2010 dollars).

In 1928, a new development created consternation on the Bishop campus. A federal government survey of black colleges recommended moving Bishop College to a site with more room to expand. Uncertainty over the college's future was exacerbated because the college's top leadership spot was occupied by an interim president after the retirement of C. H. Maxson. Financial support diminished somewhat because of uncertainty over the college's future.

Bishop got its first black president, Joseph J. Rhoads, in 1929. He held bachelor of science and master of arts degrees. He was a native of Marshall and a Bishop graduate.

Rhoads quickly set about arranging for the white faculty members to retire from their posts. (Later in the 20th century, Bishop again had white faculty, many of whom were pursuing second careers after retiring from Ivy League schools.)

Another of Rhoads' campaigns was an effort to gain accreditation for Bishop from the Southern Association of Secondary Schools and Colleges. One requirement was that in order to be granted the rank of full professor, faculty members had to have at least three years of graduate work above the baccalaureate degree.

With the complete phase-out of high school classes in 1929, Bishop earned the distinction of being the first black college in the Southwest to discontinue high school courses.

As part of his campaign to upgrade the Bishop offerings and lift the college above trade-school status, Rhoads discontinued the shop work that had been inaugurated by President Wolverton. The building that housed the shop, called the Wolverton shop, was converted to a science building.

Nevertheless, regional and national accrediting agencies declined to rate Bishop a "standard senior college." But the U.S. Department of the Interior's study of black colleges suggested that Bishop deserved such recognition. Indeed, Bishop's entrance requirements had been increased so that applications had to have completed 15 units of regular high school credit.

Also in 1929, Bishop established a School of Music and became the only black college west of the Mississippi River to offer courses leading to a bachelor of music, a five-year degree.

Rhoads instituted a nepotism policy to prevent members of the same family from being employed at Bishop. Previously it was common for a husband and wife, or a father and one or more children, to all be employed at Bishop. This had been driven by the scarcity of teachers, which was eased somewhat as better public education enabled more young people to pursue college work. Another factor fueling nepotism was Bishop's low salaries and the consequent commitment and sacrifice required of those who taught or

were officers of the school. If more than one person in a household was earning money, the low pay per teacher or per administrator was a bit more tolerable.

In this era, Bishop students began making on impact on the wider world. Another former Bishop student, Lillian B. Jones Horace, an African American novelist in Fort Worth active in that city's black theater circle, wrote about her dreams for a more just and fair life for African Americans "returning" to Africa. A teacher born in Jefferson, Texas, about 168 miles northeast of Dallas near the Louisiana border, Horace moved with her family to Fort Worth early in her childhood. She attended Prairie View Normal School near Houston and Bishop College in Marshall before beginning her teaching career in Tarrant County in 1905. An English teacher and dean of girls at I.M. Terrell High School in Fort Worth, she established the campus' drama department and the school's first drama club.

Horace, then 20, starred as the Old Testament title character in an African American production of the musical *Queen Esther* produced by the namesake of the Terrell School at Fort Worth City Hall, Professor Terrell. The local African American press praised the production, describing it as an "excellent entertainment" that "would have done credit to amateur singers anywhere." Horace also guided the I.M. Terrell Dramatic Club's original operetta *The Stolen Princess,* staged during the troupe's inaugural season in 1922. Horace's ideas seem to have been deeply influenced by Marcus Garvey, the Jamaica-born founder of the United Negro Improvement Association, which claimed 30 branches across the country by 1919. Garvey, who heavily influenced the Nation of Islam sect, taught that "black is beautiful." Opposing the Euro-American view that

Africa represented a civilization wasteland where inhabitants lived in the Stone Age until the arrival of Europeans, Garvey told his followers that Africans had built a noble civilization and that white culture was diseased. Racism was so deeply entrenched in white society, he preached, that it was useless to appeal to their sense of justice.

Garvey felt that blacks would be free only if segregated from whites while in the United States, and once even met with Klan leaders to discuss common strategy to achieve racial separation. Ultimately, the only hope for African Americans, he said, was for blacks in the United States to return to Africa and build a new nation of their own, a program he called "Negro Zionism." Garvey called this theoretical nation the “Empire of Africa” and crowned himself provisional president of that state in 1921.

Garveyites were active across Texas, and the thoughts and deeds of Garvey received heavy coverage in the state’s black press. In this atmosphere, a time when Texas ranked third among the states in the nation in numbers of lynchings per year, Horace wrote the utopian novel *Five Generations Hence.* The title reflects Horace’s hope that African Americans would be resettled in the home continent in five generations. In the novel, the heroine, Miss Noble, shared a recent vision with a friend:

> It seemed a week of horrors to our people throughout the land, of which I read in the daily papers: there had been a lynching not far away and it seemed that the end of my endurance was reached when members of my race, men and women and even children, were attacked upon the streets of

> one of our leading cities, brutally assaulted, and forced to flee like hunted beasts . . . I saw the Negro for more than fourteen generations of oppression attended by theft from their native shores and crack of the whip about their heads.
>
> [Then] I saw a people, a black people, tilling the soil with a song of real joy upon their lips. I saw a civilization like to the white man's about us today, but in his place stood another of a different hue. I beheld beautifully paved streets, handsome homes beautified and adorned, and before the doors sported dusky boys and girls . . . I was as if thunder struck when a still small voice, yet seeming to penetrate my inmost soul, cried in thunderous accents, "Five Generations Hence." I was stunned as the truth began to dawn: the land was Africa, the people were my own returned to possess the heritage of their ancestors.

Another Bishop student, Lacey Kirk Williams, already worked as a teacher and a principal at African American schools in Central Texas in the 1890s before he enrolled in Bishop College in 1902. He left Bishop before graduating and began preaching at Baptist churches before getting a bachelor's degree from Arkansas Baptist College in 1913. He moved from Texas in 1916 to become pastor of Chicago's Olivet Baptist Church, with a congregation of with 12,000 members. Olivet Baptist was one of the largest black churches in the country. A tragedy during the so-called "Red Summer" of 1919, a period of violent race riots across America, thrust him into national spotlight.

A riot devastated large sections of Chicago between July 27 and August 3 that year. A swimming black teenager accidentally crossed the informal but rigidly enforced boundary at 29th Street that separated the "white" from the "black" beach. The teenager had been swimming against the current when he surfaced on the Lake Michigan shore. Whites threw rocks at him. The teen dived back into the water when, overcome by exhaustion, he drowned. This inspired seven days of arsons, assaults and gunfire as whites and blacks warred against each other. Most of the damage was in the city's South Side. When the riot burned itself out, partly due to the intervention of the state militia and a timely rain storm, 15 whites and 23 blacks had died and another 537 -- 342 African Americans and 195 whites – suffered injuries.

After the riot, Illinois governor Frank Lowden appointed Williams to the Chicago Inter-Racial Commission, which was given the task of determining the cause of the violence. The committee's report suggested that white ignorance about African Americans, their culture and their motives, were a major cause of the riot. "The practice of 'keeping the Negro' in his place, or any modification of it in northern communities, has isolated Negroes from all other members of the community," the report read. " . . . Negroes know more of the habits of action and thought of the white group that white people know of similar habits in the Negro group." One can read the cumulative effect of generations of self-assertion, reinforced through slave folklore, music and then the educational efforts of black teachers at school like Bishop College in this report. Williams and the other black members make it clear that African Americans in Chicago will not passively accept

second-class status. "No Negro is willing to admit that he belongs to a different and lower species, or that his race is constitutionally weak in character. All Negroes hope for an adjustment by virtue of which they will be freely granted the privileges of ordinary citizens."

Williams remained an active Republican and in 1922 won election as president of the National Baptist Convention. Moving back to Texas, he received a law degree from Bishop in 1927 and became vice president of the Baptist World Alliance the following year.

No Bishop student of this era achieved greater prominence than singer and composer Jules Bledsoe. Born in Waco on December 29, 1897, Bledsoe earned valedictorian honors at the Central Texas Academy in 1914 before enrolling at Bishop in 1914. He earned a B.A. four years later and studied medicine at Columbia University in New York in the early 1920s. He began studying voice while at Columbia. He started singing professionally, touring the United States and Europe. Bledsoe became known for the range of his voice and his talent in interpreting songs written in other languages. He performed regularly in New York City from 1924 to 1926, portraying the Biblical patriarch Abraham in the musical *In Abraham's Bosom.* He got an important favorable review by Theodore Stern in the *New York Morning Telegraph, "*The singing star of the cast . . . is Jules Bledsoe," Stern wrote. "He is a singer who can pick the heart right out of your body if you don't look out."

He became a celebrity when producer Florenz Ziegfield cast him as Joe in the 1927 production of *Showboat,* the same role later played by Paul Robeson on stage and in the film version of the play. Bledsoe's performance of the song "Old Man River" was the first to be recorded and was considered the definitive version before Robeson's performance in the 1936 movie. The opera world was largely closed to African Americans in the 1920s and 1930s, but with his talent, Bledsoe broke the color line, performing in productions of Giuseppe Verdi's *Aida* with the Cleveland Stadium Opera and in an opera version of the Eugene O'Neil play *The Emperor Jones* in Amsterdam in 1934. He performed in films in the early 1940s, including *Drums of the Congo,* and composed a song based on a poem by Harlem Renaissance author Countee Cullen called "Pagan Prayer" and an opera based on the Harriet Beecher Stowe novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* called *Bondage.* Although he is largely forgotten today, Bledsoe became famous enough in his time to be mentioned in lyrics. As the great jazz vocalist Billie Holliday once sang:

You don't have to sing like Bledsoe
You can tell the world I said so
Can't you see you've got to be
My mother's son-in-law

He died at the age of 45 of a cerebral hemorrhage after performing in several shows promoting the sale of war bonds.

Even though Bishop College would gain a reputation as a conservative institution, several prominent students in the early twentieth century gravitated towards more radical political beliefs. Garvey's influence at the Bishop campus, for instance, was not limited to Horace. Sutton E. Griggs, who became a Baptist minister, also authored a Garvey influenced 1899 novel, *Imperium In Imperio: A Study of the Negro Race Problem.* Griggs imagined a future in which African Americans finally experience freedom by creating a separate black republic within the United States.

Griggs authored another novel, *The Hindered Hand,* in response to the racist novels of white author Thomas Dixon such as *The Leopard's Spots* and *The Clansman* (the latter of which was the basis for the silent film epic *The Birth of a Nation.*) Griggs filled *Hindered* with painful and detailed descriptions of white violence against African Americans in the form of lynching and sexual assault against black women. Griggs would author 33 books in all before dying in 1933 at the age of 61.

The 1950s and 1960s later gained the reputation of the era of black activism, protest and radicalism. Students at colleges like Bishop in the first three decades of the twentieth century, however, already protested against injustice by producing art that rejected white supremacy and asserted the political rights of blacks, and through political activism. As the Roaring Twenties drew to an end, Bishop College, after years of struggle and steady improvement, at last had arrived as a full-fledged institution of higher learning and its students were already pushing back against segregation and disenfranchisement in Texas and beyond.

Questions to Think About

1. The founders of Bishop College were Christians who were motivated by their faith to support education. What do members of other major faiths – Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists and others – think about education and what do they do to spread learning in their communities?
2. Why do you think it was important to the African American students at Bishop to have African American professors and administrators?
3. Those who taught and ran Bishop College were role models for many of the school's students. Who do you consider your role models and why?
4. In the 1920s, many African Americans – including students at Bishop College - followed a man named Marcus Garvey who urged American blacks to emigrate to Africa. Why do you think this idea was backed by so many, and what do you think would have happened to America, and to Africans, had backs migrated in mass numbers away from the United States?

Chapter Five

On the Move

The years of the Great Depression saw Bishop College offering more practical education. In 1930 Bishop established the Cooperative Community Service and Leadership Training Program. Similar to modern extension services, it provided, mostly in Harrison County, adult education designed to improve the home, farm, church, personal and public health, vocational training and placement.

In 1931 the coveted recognition arrived from the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools. Although Bishop was given a "Class B" rating, it was one of only two black colleges west of the Mississippi to be rated at all by the Southern Association.

As hard times gripped the nation, the school year of 1931-32 saw Bishop appeal to the Home Mission Society's General Education Board to provide emergency funds, an appeal which was granted.

This period also brought the initiation and growth of an annual training institute for in-service ministers and lay church workers. (In 1943 this institute was renamed the Lacey Kirk Williams Institute, in honor of a Bishop graduate, the son of freed slaves, who became a leading minister and teacher. Williams was frequently consulted by political leaders on racial strife in the early 20th century, and was elected president of the National Baptist Convention. He died in a 1940 plane crash.)

Attendees at the institute eventually included Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and Jesse Jackson. But in the early and middle part of the 20th century, Bishop was not known for activism. Lloyd Thompson observed in his 1976 dissertation that

> Because of religion's historic role at Bishop, it is not surprising that conservative administrators have always controlled the school…. Faculty members have generally been either white missionaries whose views coincided with those of various administrations, or Negroes who were willing to cooperate with the institution's conservative leadership in order to gain or maintain middle-class respectability. Bishop's students have also acquiesced in conservative administrative policies because of their aspirations to attain the goals of the black bourgeoisie.

Bishop found it necessary to call on the General Education Board for emergency funds two more times during the Depression, in the school years 1932-33 and 1933-34. Both times, emergency money was granted.

In 1934 Bishop's enrollment stood at 577, with 1,000 more in adult education and the annual Ministers Institute.

In 1935, as part of Bishop's efforts to help country teachers improve their skills, it began its Institute for Rural Teachers. Also that year, the Board of Education of the Northern Baptist Convention took over supervisory control of the college from the mission society.

Although Bishop still had 12 buildings, the Depression took a toll on student enrollment, which tumbled to 397 in 1936.

In 1940 the college initiated the Ebenezer Community Program, a sort of mini War on Poverty. Its aim was to stamp out illiteracy, purify water, and provide sanitary toilets and other services for the 75 black families in the Ebenezer Community near Marshall.

The college acquired the Sabine Farms Community Center, twelve miles south of Marshall, and cooperated with various other community-service agencies.

Extension courses in religion had been established at schools including Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary (Fort Worth), Hardin Simmons (Abilene) and in Beaumont. These classes generally were held in the evenings, as blacks were not allowed to attend regular classes alongside white students.

On the Marshall campus, the original Wyalucing mansion, nearly 100 years old, was still in use as Bishop's music hall.

After the Depression lifted, Bishop's fortunes improved. In 1942 a debt clearance campaign to raise $12,000 was highly successful, raising $20,000. The fiscal year ended with a surplus.

World War II saw black soldiers fighting for America and finding far more equal treatment on distant shores. Concerned that these soldiers returning home would expect equal rights, leading Texans formed the Bi-racial Commission on Negro Education in Texas. In 1942, Bishop's President Rhoads was appointed to its steering committee.

President Rhoads was a busy man, attempting not only to help Texas resolve racial problems but also working against a movement to relocate Bishop to Dallas. He also had to find seed money to grow his school to accommodate soldiers returning after war service. In 1944 he sent lengthy documentation to the General Education Board in support of his request for a $61,000 grant. He also documented reasons Bishop should stay in Marshall, including the net loss of financial value of the school if it were moved -- more than a half million dollars -- and the importance of Bishop to the Marshall community.

The following year the General Education Board provided a $61,000 conditional grant, if Bishop could raise $85,000. The combined total was to be used for the New Development Program, a wide-ranging plan for improvements and for more involvement and teaching in the community.

In the school year 1945-46, enrollment took a jump, with 1,173 students, all at the college level. As the number of veterans skyrocketed, Bishop filled a need by establishing trade schools for them in 1946 in Texarkana and Kilgore, Texas.

In September 1946, in a foreshadowing of its eventual move to Dallas 15 years later, Bishop opened a satellite school in Dallas. It was called Bishop Center and was approved by the Veterans Administration for enrollment of veterans under the G.I. Bill, which paid their way through college. Teachers at Bishop Center were mainly from the Dallas public schools. Classes were held in the evenings because the teachers taught their public school students during the day. The following year, Bishop also opened a junior college branch in Dallas.

Meanwhile, the curriculum back in Marshall was not being neglected. There, a graduate program leading to the master of education degree was added.

By 1947, the Lacey Kirk Williams Institute had trained more than 6,000 ministers and religious leaders from 10 or more states.

And in 1948 Bishop obtained the Holy Grail it had long sought: Class A accreditation from the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools. One of the benefits of accreditation was that course credits earned at Bishop would transfer to other colleges.

By the end of the decade of the 1940s, pressure was growing to integrate the University of Texas at Austin. In 1949, President Rhoads, who also was president of the Texas Council of Negro Organizations, assigned leaders of 31 statewide organizations to draft "a program of action for an attack on discrimination and segregation in the state from every conceivable angle." He also stated that students from Wiley and Bishop were willing to participate in a demonstration.

1950 brought another milestone, when the Texas Education Agency approved Bishop's graduate program in the field of education.

In 1952 Bishop changed leadership, with M. K. Curry, Jr. becoming president. During his administration the graduate program in teacher education ended, an endowment of $300,000 was created, the faculty was strengthened, and the Marshall campus was renovated.

J.D. Hurd, who had graduated in 1949 with high honors, became registrar and remained in that post until Bishop closed three and a half decades later.

Enrollment figures in 1956 indicated a shift. The post-war spike had passed and enrollment was down to 440 students, with 114 of them at the Dallas junior college branch.

The rumors of an impending move to Dallas persisted. In December 1956, The Associated Press reported that the Rev. Ernest Estell, a trustee, had announced that Bishop was planning to move to Dallas. Bishop's President Curry denied it.

But only months later, plans to move the college got under way in earnest when the Hoblitzelle Foundation (Karl Hoblitzelle founded the Interstate Theater chain) donated 98 acres in south Dallas for a new campus. In later years it was widely reported that support of Bishop by Dallas' business leaders, including the Zale jewelers, was not entirely altruistic. Many claimed that moving Bishop to Dallas effectively allowed the white community to sidestep integrating Southern Methodist University by pointing to Bishop as an adequate place for black Dallasites to matriculate. In any event, four Baptist conventions augmented Hoblitzelle's gift with the purchase of a two-acre plot.

Initial construction in the multimillion-dollar expansion program on the Dallas campus provided an administration-classroom building, a gymnasium-auditorium, housing facilities, and a fine-arts building, converted from the junior college branch.

May 22, 1959, was a momentous day. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. delivered the commencement address to an overflow audience at the Marshall campus. His "I Have a

Dream" speech was still four years in the offing, but he was already recognized for his eloquence. He urged the Bishop students to strive for excellence:

> The fight for first-class citizenship must not be carried on with second-class methods. God is not interested in replacing white supremacy with black supremacy. Rather he is concerned to have all men live as brothers.

Nearly a year later, in April 1960, the civil rights movement had come to Marshall. Bishop students were among those arrested in sit-ins at the Marshall Woolworth's lunch counter, which refused to serve blacks. Some students spent the night in jail and were released on $600 bond each with the assistance of black citizens of Marshall and a lawyer from Dallas.

President Curry advised the students not to participate further in the demonstrations. Reports circulated that some donors to a $1 million fundraising campaign for the move to Dallas had withdrawn their pledges because of the demonstrations. On April 1, 1960, student leaders joined the call for a full-scale boycott of Marshall businesses as a civil rights action.

Ironically, one of the signal achievements of the Civil Rights Movement, the integration of previously whites-only universities, would become one of the major causes of Bishop College's demise in the 1980s. Once black students broke down the legal barriers to their attendance at schools like the University of Texas and Texas A&M, these traditionally white but much better-funded and esteemed institutions became an attractive alternative to black schools like Bishop. Bitter white reaction against the pioneer African

American students at UT and other campuses, however, would convince many African Americans to stick with traditionally black schools.

Heman Marion Sweatt forced open the doors of the UT law school to African Americans in 1950. An NAACP activist in Houston since the early 1940s and a columnist for the local black-owned newspaper the *Informer*, Sweatt plunged into fundraising drives for the NAACP's lawsuit against the so-called "white primary." Democratic Party rules in Texas barred blacks from voting in primaries which, given the party's almost complete monopoly on elective office in the first half of the twentieth century, left African Americans with no voice in partisan political races. The NAACP successfully persuaded the United States Supreme Court to declare the white primary unconstitutional in the 1944 *Smith v. Allwright* case.

A postal carrier, Sweatt fought against discriminatory policies that blocked African Americans in Texas from higher-paying positions as clerks. His work on that issue got him interested in law. Sweatt considered attending law school in Michigan, but changed his mind when his father suffered a heart attack. At the urging of Dallas NAACP attorney W.J. Durham, Sweatt applied to the UT Law School, aware that the school was legally vulnerable to litigation since the state of Texas had failed to provide a law school for African American students. Sweatt applied, was turned down and on May 16, 1946 filed the *Sweatt v. Painter* case that became a building-block for the later, more famous *Brown* decision in which the United States Supreme Court ruled against "separate but equal" schools.

The state of Texas scrambled to provide sham law schools for blacks, in an attempt to

avoid a federal desegregation order. The Texas A&M regents created a "law school" for blacks by hiring two Houston lawyers to hold classes in their offices. No one enrolled at this "law school." The Texas Legislature, meanwhile, moved to convert Houston College for Negroes into Texas State University for Negroes, which would provide law classes for African Americans. (TSUN would open in 1947 and eventually be rechristened Texas Southern University.) At the University of Texas, regents set aside a basement in a building south of the campus on Thirteenth Street where black students could receive law instruction from the most junior members of the faculty, although African Americans would not have direct access to the law library or other resources. Only one black student, Henry Doyle, attended the Jim Crow classes. The NAACP refused to accept this sham.

The UT Medical Branch in Galveston admitted an African American student for the first time in 1949. After years of financial hardship while waiting for the case to wind through the courts, Sweatt and the NAACP prevailed in its lawsuit against UT in 1950. This initiated a wave of at least token integration in higher education, with Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Southern Methodist University in Dallas, Texas Southmost College in Brownsville, Howard County Junior College in Big Spring, Wayland Baptist College in Plainview and Amarillo Junior College in West Texas all officially desegregated the next year, in 1951.

After the decision, the University of Texas admitted 22 African Americans out of a total enrollment of 12,000, with six of the black students enrolled in law classes. Sweatt and the NAACP won their legal battle to attend previously all-white universities, but

softening the hearts of their Anglo fellow students would prove another matter. Literally schooled to hate and fear black Americans, Texas' best and brightest usually treated their new back peers with attitudes ranging from indifference at best to condescension to outright hatred. If black students successfully attended Texas universities and entered the professional classes in large numbers, the entire theoretical basis for Texas' racial hierarchy would topple. White college students, however, often served as shock troops defending the *ancien regime*. Blacks attending desegregated campuses found a relentlessly hostile learning environment, a fact that made historically black schools like Bishop College attractive for most African American collegiates for at least for another decade.

Marion Sweatt had to attend his first day of law school at the University of Texas as newspaper camera bulbs flashed around him. Some professors, such as Charles McCormick and Jerre Williams, provided support and a sympathetic ear, but other members of the UT law faculty insulted Sweatt and treated him with contempt. Dean Page Keeton, who had privately assisted NAACP counsel Thurgood Marshall with the *Sweatt* case, apparently worried about alumni who might be angered over Sweatt's admission. Keeton cracked under the pressure of publicity, berating Sweatt for the press attention given his registration and warning him against further "NAACP showmanship."

According to Texas NAACP historian Michael Gillette, the reactions of whites to Sweatt and the five other American Americans in the program were mixed. Most were agreeable, Sweatt said, and he and the other integration pioneers encountered few problems as they sought access to water fountains, restrooms, school dining facilities,

lounges and football games. The Friday of his first week at UT, however, Sweatt discovered, after studying late at the law library, that a large white crowd had gathered across the street and was burning a cross. Accompanied by a white friend, Sweatt made it safely to his car, only to discover that the tires had been slashed. Although a few campus liberals offered condolence, UT officials largely ignored the incident and Austin police never made an arrest in the case. The intense scrutiny of the press, the racism of faculty and students, and financial pressure destroyed Sweatt's marriage during his two years at UT and undermined his academic performance. Poor health added to Sweatt's difficulties as he battled a painful ulcer and missed seven weeks of classes after suffering appendicitis. He failed courses in his first year, audited the classes he failed in the fall of 1951, and re-enrolled in the spring semester of 1952, but he subsequently dropped out.

Sadly, Sweatt's experience was not unique. George Washington, Jr., of Dallas, one of six integration pioneers at the law school, described the atmosphere as "icy and uncomfortable." One time during a class, Washington later recalled, a student nonchalantly used the word "nigger." Washington said he attributed this to the student's ignorance and was ready to ignore the provocation, but he sensed white liberals in the class wanted to respond, "so I turned around and looked at the fellow with as stern a look as I could muster." Washington said he never heard the word uttered again.

The integration of the University of Texas took place in the larger context of Austin desegregation, which may have added to the bitterness of the struggle. Segregation in downtown Austin and the area around the UT campus presented a formidable challenge to African Americans seeking a water fountain or a place to go to the bathroom. When

one African American, Dr. Connie Yearwood, began working for the Texas Public Health Service in 1937, she had to walk about 10 blocks from her workplace to her East Austin home when she needed to go to the bathroom. African American women shopping at a white-owned downtown store like Scarbrough's had to put paper on their heads if they wanted to try on a hat and could not try on a dress at all. Restaurants on Congress Avenue closed their doors entirely to black customers. The restaurants and on the 'Drag" (Guadalupe Street alongside the campus) still enforced segregation in the early and mid-1960s and students conducted "stand-ins" in movie ticket lines in a long, hard struggle to desegregate area movie theaters.

Zeb Ferdinand Poindexter broke the color barrier at the University of Texas Dental Branch in Houston in 1952 and almost immediately encountered white anxieties over relationships between young African Americans and Anglos. Highly charismatic, Poindexter formed friendships with a number of white female students. "The girls used to come and bring me coffee and donuts when I was down there [in the laboratory] taking care of the animals -- white girls; wasn't no black girls working there, the white girls," Poindexter said. "Dr. [Frederick C.] Elliott called me into his office. He say, 'Zeb . . . you in a new environment now.' I say, 'Yes, sir.' I'm expecting him to ask me do I need a tutor or do I think I can't keep up with the subjects and everything. He say, 'I want you to stay out of these white women's faces.' I said, 'Yes, sir.'"

Such sexual and racial phobias delayed integration of undergraduate programs and public schools. By 1956, the University of Texas regents finally admitted black undergraduates, who were subjected to now-familiar slights and humiliations. Bettye McAdams later

remembered feeling total social isolation at the University of Texas. They were forced to live in below-par, segregated dorms located off-campus, and barred from participation in school athletics and prohibited from patronizing many local businesses along "The Drag" near the heart of campus. The UT administration and local business owners kept blacks at the margins of campus life. "The great bulk of the students chose to ignore us," said McAdams, who lived in a dorm at the present-day Huston-Tillotson campus several blocks from the university. Not until 1964, 14 years after *Sweatt v. Painter*, did UT regents allow African Americans to live in integrated housing on campus.

Linda Lewis lived on campus, but faced her own unique set of challenges. Only about two African American students lived on each floor of the 'integrated" dormitories provided in the mid-1960s. White students, most of whom graduated from the racism factories that were the Texas public schools, had experienced black individuals only as abstractions and found black college students an absolute novelty. Lewis recalled that she and other black students were "constantly barraged with questions about any and every detail of [our] lives and [our] thoughts," by Anglos who wanted to know what black people ate, how they dressed their hair, and how they viewed politics and current events. This represented innocent curiosity, but still became exhausting to young women who found themselves appointed spokespersons for their race. Lewis remembered how she often needed to take time out "with only Black people" to maintain her sense of self-worth. Well into the 1960s, African American men and women continued a lonely battle to be treated as normal students. Harriett Murphy, later to become a municipal judge in Austin, remembered that when she attended UT's law school, she was for two years the only black student out of 1,500 students. "This was 20 years after *Sweatt v. Painter*," she

said, ". . . and the school had demonstrated no real progress."

Desegregation of Lamar State College of Technology in Beaumont in 1955 met angry resistance from residents of the surrounding South Park neighborhood, a white area closely tied to the oil industry "with a reputation for hostility toward black residents," according to scholar Amilcar Shabazz. Forty-seven men from South Park signed a letter that year to Lamar regents urging them to "rule against any integration of the white and colored races . . . We believe in equal but separate educational facilities and we think that the NAACP is trying to usurp the power of the state of Texas."

During a regents meeting concerning the application of seven black students to the school, local youths lit ablaze a fifteen-by-eight foot cross on the grounds south of the college's main entrance. Regents promptly denied the African Americans' applications. The NAACP challenged this decision, and the courts ordered that blacks be admitted in the 1956 Jackson v. McDonald decision. "The regents' deep-seated and publicly stated belief in segregation, their legal efforts, and their delaying tactics may have encouraged white extremist violence," Shabazz wrote. On August 1, 1956, six hooded figures, most likely Lamar students, lit another gasoline-soaked cross, with another two crosses set on fire near the campus on August 11. NAACP attorneys received death threats and assailants vandalized their offices. Anti-integration protestors pulled a black Lamar student from a cab and beat him in the presence of police. When picketers were finally arrested, crosses burned again at Lamar and at city hall on October 5, and the mayor of Beaumont received a death threat. Shabazz quotes what he believes to be a typical view of many whites in the area. "We like niggers here," said Francis Lightfoot. "We like a

nice sweet collie dog, but we don't like 'em in bed with us. We'll help 'em out whenever we can, as white folks have always done in the South. But just don't let 'em get uppity on us."

No school experienced a more tense transition to desegregation than Kilgore Junior College, where a series of random shootings at African American schools and homes, and the brutal 1955 murder of 16-year-old James Earl Reese by whites tired of "uppity blacks," intimidated the African American community which had won the right to attend KJC in the *Allen v. Masters* case. Local Baptist deacon Basil Earl Masters organized the state's first White Citizens Council, which formed to resist court desegregation orders. White Citizens Councils formed across the South in the wake of the 1954 *Brown* decision, and these groups came to be known as the "uptown Klan," because of the middle-class and upper-class membership of these groups and their penchants for wearing neckties instead of white sheets. Within its first month of existence in 1955, the Kilgore Council claimed 1,500 members, which, if accurate, meant that half the white male population of the East Texas town belonged. Soon White Citizens Councils formed all over the state, and the Associated Citizens Councils of Texas passed a resolution urging state Attorney General Jon Ben Shepperd to investigate the NAACP as a subversive organization. By 1961, ongoing white terrorism meant that blacks had still not enrolled in the Gregg County college six years after its supposed integration.

By law, Texas schools had to admit African Americans, but blacks were still viewed by much of Texas academe as barely reformed savages. Convinced that blacks lacked intellect and high culture, resistance to African Americans receiving college education

remained high. As a result, one of the last all-white holdouts in higher education, Texas A&M, could desegregate only with the greatest discretion. The 1960s marked a time of rapid change at the college, which adopted a series of reforms to improve the academic image of the school, including opening full-time undergraduate enrollment to women, dropping the requirement that students enroll in the Corps of Cadets (which provided military training) and changing the school name from Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas to Texas A&M University. Regents wanted the school designated as a university rather than a college for reasons of prestige. Some faculty members urged the regents to change the name of the institution to Texas State University, worried that the A&M designation (which originally stood for "Agricultural and Mechanical") would link the school in the public's minds with black institutions such as Florida A&M University and Prairie View A&M near Houston. ". . . such a name would put us in company with the only other school to my knowledge which has such a name – Florida A&M University, which is a school for colored students only," wrote A.F. Isbell of A&M's chemistry department, who chaired the faulty name change committee. In spite of the A&M label's association with African Americans, however, the school adopted the new name of Texas A&M University in 1963.

The 1950s and 1960s were a time of dramatic change at Texas A&M University. So much emotional energy had been spent on the school name and making the school co-educational, that A&M desegregated almost without notice. A June 18, 1954, an editorial in the student newspaper *The Battalion* endorsed the Supreme Court's *Brown* decision and on March 14, 1956, the Student Senate voted 23-7 for a resolution opposing

segregation. By no means did every student embrace desegregation. One student senator, Doug De Cluitt, said it "would be more degrading to me to have a Negro boy chew me out than to wear lip stick all year round and walk in steam tunnels." A student petition objected to the senate vote. The senate responded by holding a campus-wide referendum in order to accurately gauge student views on segregation. Students favored segregation by 1,066 to 620 votes.

Student sentiment aside, the Texas A&M Board of Regents ruled in 1962 that qualified male students would be admitted to the school regardless of race. A&M quietly admitted three African American students in June 1963, during the summer session when fewer students were in attendance. Two graduate students and one undergraduate who were not seeking degrees were admitted under special circumstances. "One college official said the Negroes came into Sbisa Hall to register and practically no one gave them a second glance," the *Dallas Morning News* reported June 5 1963. One of the students, Leroy Sterling, told a reporter that he experienced no "incidents of any kind when I went to class." A&M officials initially considered segregated housing for black students, but decided instead to achieve the complete integration of black students into the Corps of Cadets. Years later Sammy Williams, an African American who enrolled in 1964, told the *Battalion* newspaper that his experience at A&M was not always pleasant and that he got "extra treatment" because of his color. Two years later, Williams and his friend J.T. Reynolds became walk-ons with the Aggie football team, officially the first black athletes to cross the university's color line in that sport, even though William did not get to play a down during Aggies' 1967 run to the Southwest Conference Championship.

It must have been lonely for Williams, who could not have missed the racial slurs and late hits white Aggies dished out to the Southwest Conference's first great African American star, Jerry Levias, Southern Methodist University's electric pass receiver. Levias shattered the Southwest Conference's segregation barriers in the mid-1960s, but A&M did not recruit a black football player until Jerry Honore suited up for the Aggies in the 1970s. A&M was not alone, as the Southwest Conference, which included schools such as A&M, the University of Texas, Baylor, SMU, Texas Christian University, Texas Tech, Rice University, and the University of Arkansas remained almost exclusively white until the 1970s. The famous showdown between number one-ranked Texas and number two-ranked Arkansas the last game of the 1969 NCAA regular season featured two teams without a single African American player. It wasn't until Coach Emory Ballard's recruitment drives in the mid-1970s that African Americans represented a significant part of the Aggie football team.

Dramatic change also gripped Bishop College at the time. Students were on the move in the march for civil rights, and for whatever reasons their college was in the midst of a move to Dallas, which at the time held Texas' the second-largest black population. In March 1961, the City of Marshall arranged to buy the old campus for $140,000. The move to the new campus at the Bishop Center was completed later that year. The number of classrooms, library space and other facilities, inadequate for some time, finally caught up with demand. The Zale jewelry family contributed to the library project, and by the 1980s the Zale Library would come to house more than 130,000 volumes, in addition to

collections of federal publications, clippings, and pamphlets, and over 375 periodicals and newspapers.

When it moved to Dallas, Bishop became rechartered by the state, and reduced its number of trustees but strengthened their power. The Harrison County Historical Society tried to save the original Bishop building, the Wyalucing mansion, but was unsuccessful. The old plantation house, built by slaves, bought by their descendants and converted to provide the education denied to generations of Afro Texans, was demolished in the early 1960s. It eventually became the site of a low-rent housing development.

Meanwhile in Austin, the Texas legislature was hunting scapegoats for the civil rights unrest in Marshall. The Report of the Texas House of Representatives General Investigating Committee alleged in 1961 that the previous year's sit-ins in Marshall were attributable to Bishop College education professor Dr. Doxey Alphonso Wilkerson. The report used the inflamed communist-baiting rhetoric of McCarthyism to imply that civil rights activists' connections with communism indicated their intent to subvert the United States to foreign domination.

Public hearings that were intended to contribute to the committee's report were canceled, and the report instead was based on witness interviews and "investigations of events and background activities."

Bishop College President Curry was among those investigated. The report states that Curry asked Wilkerson to resign, and fired him when he declined.

The year 1962 found Bishop thriving. There were more applicants than ever -- 2,600. Students hailed from 24 states, the District of Columbia, Africa, Jamaica, Honduras, and the Virgin Islands. A student center was built to accommodate them. The following year, 1963, saw the addition of a men's dormitory and married-student apartments, classrooms, an infirmary, service buildings, and a stadium.

An anonymous gift enlarged the campus in 1964 by 287 acres, and a library, chapel, and science building were added. Although church-related, Bishop College was nonsectarian and interracial in student admissions and appointment of its faculty. Liberal arts education was emphasized. There were summer sessions and an evening division of adult education. Students could earn bachelor of arts or bachelor of science degrees in 20 major fields. By 1969 the library contained 75,000 volumes. And by 1970, Bishop has received research grants from agencies including NASA, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare.

Questions to Think About

1. The Great Depression from 1929 to 1939 brought hardship to the Bishop College community. Does anyone in your family have any memories of the Great Depression? What have they told you about this time? Has anyone in your family gone to college when they didn't have much money? How do they make ends meet?
2. A highlight for many Bishop students was when Martin Luther King, Jr. spoke at the college's graduation ceremony in 1959. Why do you think so many African Americans found King inspiring? Are there famous figures in the world today, men or women, black, white, brown or Asian, that you think inspire people in a similar way today? Who are they and why do you respect them?
3. Many black, brown and white people courageously participated in the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s and the 1960s. Is there anyone in your family or in your friends' families who participated in the Movement and what have they told you about that time?
4. In the 1950s and 1960s, many accused communists of being behind the Civil Rights Movement and of using protests to destroy the country. Why were these accusations made? Have similar attacks been made about other groups in America in your lifetime?

Chapter Six

The Storm Gathers

It was the age of integration, but across Texas African Americans students discovered that at previously all-white universities they were expected to be quiet and stay in the background. The turmoil in the larger world would reach Bishop as well. Both at Bishop and formerly white schools, students challenged the priorities and the policies of school administrators in local battles that often served as proxies for the larger cultural war over civil rights and the Vietnam War.

At A&M the president, Earl Rudder, a hero of D-Day who was begged to take the post in spite of his lack of academic credentials, signaled that he would accept no dissent from civil rights and anti-Vietnam War protestors at his College Station Campus. In spite of the tepid, almost invisible traces of the New Left on the A&M campus, Rudder still felt compelled in April 1969 to warn would-be student demonstrators to stay away from the school. "They will have a hell of a fight," Rudder said in a speech before the A&M chapter of the Future Farmers of America, "and this pot-bellied president will be in the front ranks leading it . . . We must meet their power with power if they threaten our society . . . I would use whatever force I could command to keep the educational processes at A&M continuing in an orderly fashion."

To many older, white middle class Americans threatened by the violence and chaos of uprisings in Watts in 1965, Detroit in 1967, and across the country after Martin Luther

King, Jr.'s murder in 1968, and shocked by the spectacle of protest by privileged children at top universities, Earl Rudder, became a comforting symbol of a mythic, civil, orderly past.

On May 1, 1969, a group of 34 black SMU students belonging to the Black League of Afro-Americans and African College Students occupied President Willis Tate's office for five hours. They presented a list of demands, including the hiring of two black staff members to assist prospective African American students, expansion of black study courses, and provision of a building for use as a black social center. Dr. Tate agreed to all the student demands except one calling for recruitment of 500 additional African American students for the next fall semester. SMU at that time had only 50 African American students, mostly in graduate school, out of a total of 9,500, but Tate insisted that school had the prerogative to set admissions standards. SMU Vice President Thomas E. Broce praised the students, telling the press, "It was a very constructive and healthy discussion. We feel and the students feel we have a better university for it."

The SMU meeting stood in stark contrast with the almost simultaneous confrontation that took place at Texas A&M. The very same day that black students occupied Dr. Tate's office at SMU, 15 students at A&M, identifying themselves as the Afro-American Society, presented a list of eight demands to Dick Bernard, special assistant to President Rudder. 'We have been morally maimed and mentally tormented by the pretentious atmosphere of racially tranquility set forth by racist proponents on this campus," the student statement, in part, read.

Expressing anger at the tokenism still prevailing at A&M six years after its supposed integration, the students sought recognition of the Afro-American Society as a campus organization; the immediate hiring of a black counselor to work as liaison between black students and the administration and the right of black students to approve the counselor's selection; investigation of recruitment policies at the still almost all-white A&M athletic department and the expansion of athletic scholarships to black athletes. "We want immediate recruitment of black athletes in all major sports or the firing of athletic director Gene Stallings," the students said in their mimeographed statement. [Gene Stallings, the A&M head football coach, still fielded an all-white team.] "If the demands are not met by the third week of September, 1969, the Afro-American Society will take appropriate action. We will meet force with force, understanding with understanding, and restraint with restraint." A&M officials, including Rudder, offered no comment immediately after the confrontation.

Rudder later rejected the notion of students presenting demands to the university and the A&M board of directors rejected the complete list, including recognition of the Afro-American Society. ". . .[C]hange which would disrupt due academic process, change thrust upon this institution under the ugly veil of threat or demand will not be considered or tolerated," the board said on May 5. In a May 27 letter, Rudder provisionally rejected the idea of black studies course. "As to the idea of 'special courses on African history' and the like, I am against them," Rudder wrote. "Any course with academic merit which is submitted to the Coordinating Board with evidence of sufficient demand and adequate

financing has no problem of meeting with approval . . . I just don't believe that 'special' courses in anything which lack either academic value, sufficient demand or a college able to offer them should be included in the curriculum."

Clearly, the tactics used by the Afro-American Society were clumsy and making "demands" of a former Army general running a conservative, hierarchy-driven institution was unlikely to produce a positive response. Furthermore, the promise of these 15 students to meet "force with force" was a bit of macho bravado, meant to match, and perhaps parody, Rudder's earlier pledge that student protestors would meet a "hell of a fight." The reasonable requests and questions raised by the students was unfortunately lost, however, in their overheated, immature rhetoric. It was reasonable, for instance, to ask why so little progress had been made in recruiting black students or why the A&M athletic department was supposedly still unable to find qualified African American athletes for its sports program. Today, it is also easy to see merit in establishment of a Afro-Studies program. Rudder's presumption that "African" studies would not carry sufficient academic merit may indicate his lack of academic sophistication (he held similar suspicions about art courses) but also suggest a belief that the African American past and culture had little of value to offer the larger world. Such racist assumptions were commonplace in Western academia for the first half of the twentieth century and a serious re-appraisal of African history and culture and the black past in America was only just under way. As a product of early twentieth century Texas schools without an academic background, Rudder can be forgiven his suspicions about such courses.

The ugly racism undergirding much of the public support for Rudder after this incident underlies not why Afro-American studies were sorely needed in Texas schools in the late 1960s, but why historically black colleges like Bishop were still needed. Don B. Slocomb, a 1921 Aggie graduate, and in 1969 the superintendent of the Giddings Independent School District near Austin, expressed similar sentiments. "I am in favor of giving the Negro, within reason, those things that he requests in an orderly manner," Slocomb wrote on May 5. "But, violence and threats of violence have no place on our college campuses, and I hope, Earl, that you won't tolerate sit-ins and building takeovers! . . . I will wager that 99 percent of the present student body will back you in opposing militant blacks, militant whites . . . and any other groups that issues demands and threatens a takeover if their demands are not met." Jack P. Goode of Seabrook, Texas, said that Rudder "should listen to their [the protestors'] problems and take corrective actions where required . . . However, do not allow any radical group to take over and destroy A&M in the eyes of the world."

Many other correspondents, however, were more motivated to write letters of support to Rudder because of their disgust at the sight of African Americans speaking out to white authorities. Several letter writers used the incident to express their anger that any blacks were attending A&M. "So the black students want more black history taught," began a letter dated May 3 from Rusk, Texas.

> What history? Historians have been kind to the Negroes in not discussing their lack of accomplishment as a race when not led by

> the white race (Negro Africa). They want you to recruit more black students, students who will not pay their own expenses and can't learn if accepted (The average Negro can't do satisfactory high school work.) They will do nothing but disrupt the orderly process of educating the real students.

Raymond Orr of Kerrville encouraged the use of violence to put black students back in their place:

> I deeply deplore the 1954 decision of the U.S. Supreme Court that ended segregation. If I had my way, there would not be a negro in a white school or college in the United States. These negroes are not in college to learn anything. They are there to create trouble and to destroy college functioning, nationwide . . . It is an old Southern saying that to give a negro an inch, he will take a mile. This is so true. Permissiveness and ignorance of the basic nature of the negro, on the part of so many softies who head up Northern and Eastern colleges, have brought about a state of anarchy everywhere. What must happen, if civilization is to survive, is to expel hundreds of these negroes, and send them to the penitentiary for 25 or more years. It would be a good thing to shoot dead all negroes caught toting guns on a campus.

Year later, one of the students participating in the Afro-American Society, Ken Lewallen, recalls the Afro-American Society receiving piles of hate mail from fellow students and the surrounding community. In spite of the inability of the group to be recognized by the campus, the society continued as an underground group for years until it evolved into a formally recognized student association. Life had been tough for African American students before the society presented its demands, and it remained tough afterwards. "A&M resisted integration as long as it could, and it did so very quietly," he said. Lewellen, who graduated from A&M in 1969 and then received a doctorate in American History from Kansas State university, learned quickly that the best way to survive as an African American on campus was to keep a low profile. "You could be a black student at A&M and pursue your educational aims unimpacted, if you were careful. All of us were very careful. We rocked the boat, but we knew when to do it, and when not to."

At Bishop College, African American students didn't feel the alienation of being part of a small minority. Black students had each other for emotional support. Their faculty was integrated, but seemed to take black history and black culture seriously. Integration was draining away potential students, and financial mismanagement would soon destroy the school but Bishop students were making their presence known in the Dallas-Fort Worth area. On January 1, 1970, the "Concerned Students of Bishop College" helped organize a planned protest against housing conditions for the poor in Dallas held to disrupt the Cotton Bowl Festival that was cancelled when Mayor Erik Jonsson agreed to meet with the demonstrators and discuss their demands.

Demonstrations swept the Bishop campus in February, the firing of a white professor serving as the precipitating issue. In 1967, Bishop College terminated the contract of English professor Dr. Gretchen Milne allegedly because of her "poor teaching, that she was ill-prepared and did ineffective work in the classroom." The American Association of University Professors, however, said that she had been fired because of what Dr. Milton Curry called, "her troublemaking activities." An AAUP committee issued a report in February criticizing Bishop for a lack of academic freedom. Milne had participated in the civil rights march on Selma, Alabama, in 1965 and a demonstration against an appearance by the American Nazi Party at Southern Methodist University. "Constructive criticism appears to be regarded by the administration as an indication of lack of loyalty to the aims and purposes of Bishop College," the report said The report also condemned Texas A&M University, Sam Houston State, Frank Phillips College in Borger and Amarillo College.

On February 6, 24 students took over the Carr P. Collins Chapel on campus during a service and sat in for several days. Students criticized the firing of Dr. Milne three years earlier. They presented a list of demands that included, according to the *Dallas Morning News,* "the right to form student organizations" without administration approval and the "right of free assembly on campus." Students had asked to form an "Afro-American" but the administration said no, fearing it would be a hotbed of radicalism. In addition, students wanted an improvement in the quality of the curriculum and "protested what they termed unsanitary conditions in the school cafeteria, where rats and roaches were widespread and the lack of milk dispensed by food service." Finally, students wanted a doctor and nurse on 24-hour call. The only campus health facility closed at 4:30 p.m.

daily. As the college suspended the picketers, the protestors maintained the occupation for days, with other students and residents of the neighborhood near the college bringing pillows, blankets, groceries, radios, television sets and record players. A group of white protestors, led by Stoney Burns, publisher of counterculture newspapers like *Notes from the Underground,* visited the chapel, "to give support for your cause."

At times, the crowd at the chapel swelled to more than 200 (about 900 were enrolled in Bishop at the time.) The college suspended the students, prompting the demonstrators to demand a full amnesty. "We'll stay here all night or however long it takes the man [President Milton Curry] to give us amnesty," said A.Z. Prestwood, one of the student protestors. "That is a non-negotiable demand. Students left the chapel temporarily, but on February 9 about 30 overturned their food trays in the cafeteria and reoccupied the building. They still demanded amnesty for the protestors, and greater academic freedom. Dr. Curry insisted that he could not reinstate the students until their cases were head by a formal discipline committee. By then, students were boycotting classes. The Bishop College Student Senate soon endorsed the protests. On the night of the sixth day of protests, February 11, guards posted at the sanctuary would not allow demonstrators to leave the chapel to go to the bathroom, making some ill. Dr. Curry cracked down and requested and won a court injunction, and then received arrest warrants for the students from Dallas District Attorney Henry Wade. Dallas police, backed up with state patrolmen armed with shotguns and rifles, arrived with up to 12 paddy wagons and arrested 356 protestors. Students yelled at the armed state troopers, "What is this, Mississippi?" referring to the Deep South state's history of police brutality and murder of black protestors. Prosecutors charged 24 ringleaders with "disrupting the activities of an

education institution" and the rest for disorderly conduct. An attorney for the college claimed that the protestors had been in contact with the revolutionary Black Panther Party, but presented no evidence.

The protests, and Dr. Curry's crackdown, became controversial within the African American community. A Dallas group, the Black Citizens for Justice, Law, and Order, issued a statement supporting amnesty for the protest leaders. Nevertheless, the executive committee of the Bishop College Board, praised Dr. Curry for his actions. "We see the situation as one caused by the action of a small group, disrupting the educational process, rules and regulations of the school," the committee said in a released statement. Curry also received the endorsement of the very conservative editorial board of the *Dallas Morning News.* Condemning the "crisis of minority troublemakers on the campus," the February 20 editorial declared that, "Dr. Curry displayed commendable patience with the demonstrators throughout the seizure of the school's chapel. But when violence was threatened, he did not hesitate to call in police to protect the rights of the majority and of school property." There was, in fact, no real evidence that violence was in the air. The *Morning News* also failed to mention that more than a third of the student body participated in the sit-in, an extraordinarily high number, and that the number of students supporting the strike who didn't participate might mean that the majority on campus backed the sit-in.

On February 16, Curry confirmed the indefinite suspension of the 24 leaders of the sit-in and said that they could not apply for readmission until the start of the following school year. To gain re-admission, the students would have to "go before the student faculty

conduct committee and pledge to abide by college regulations." He claimed that he had to suspend the students or that the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare would suspend critically needed funding. The remaining students were being interviewed by 20 different student-faculty committees and most had already been readmitted.

More trouble arrived in the early 1970s in the form of the pullout of a large business supporter in the white community. The Zale jewelers family foundation ceased its annual $25,000 contribution. In later years, Donald Zale said this was because of the lack of a regular audit of the school's financial condition. In the mid-1970s, the Bishop board of trustees began to be dominated by ministers as Bishop relied more heavily on Baptist organizations for financial support. After the school foundered, some attributed its fall to the preference for religious as opposed to business and financial acumen.

In the school year 1974–75, enrollment was a healthy 1,243; the faculty numbered 100. Curry was still president after more than two decades. A Bishop pamphlet described the college as "the second-largest, four-year, degree-granting institution of higher education in the Greater Dallas Metropolitan area." But in 1974 fifteen administrators are charged with turning in student loan applications with falsified names and taking the money for themselves. Most of the administrators were subsequently convicted. This was the start of a spiral of financial scandals that would destroy the school in little more than a decade.

Nevertheless, two years later, **p**rominent white Dallasites who continued to support Bishop College included U.S. District Judge Sarah T. Hughes, Claude B. Keeland Jr, (chairman of board of South Oak Cliff Bank); Lloyd S. Bowles, Sr. (chairman of the board of Dallas Federal Savings and Loan Association); and Mary Crowley of Home

Interiors and Gifts Inc. White supporters kept the school financially afloat, but those same benefactors kept Bishop a conservative institution. The Dallas campus was valued at over $18 million (nearly $72 million in 2011 dollars). In 1976, Bishop could boast that about 70 percent of its faculty held terminal degrees. The Community Service Programs included various locations where Dallas residents took tuition-free courses such as apartment management, data processing, child care and teacher's aide training, law enforcement and corrections, and programs for teachers in cross-cultural community areas. Students could attend foreign institutions with Bishop sponsorship. Two years later, Bishop's budget reached $9.3 million.

But on May 29, 1979, very bad news arrived. Federal indictments were lodged against President Curry, his former chauffeur and heir apparent Reginald Leffall, and Assistant Vice President Walter Johnson. They were charged with embezzling $306,000 in retirement funds and faking documents to get a bank loan for $2.7 million. They were given leaves of absence and later indicted on further charges of misusing millions of dollars in federal assistance. One administrator was convicted on minor charges. President Curry and the other administrator were acquitted. But amid the firestorm, a new man took the helm. On June 9, 1979, Harry S. Wright became acting president. The next year the news was no better. An audit showed Bishop owed the U.S. government $3.5 million.

In 1981, Comer J. Cottrell, a highly successful Dallas businessman, became acting chairman of the board of trustees. In 1983, Dr. Wright J. Lassiter Jr., former president of Schenectady County (N.Y.) Community College, became Bishop's president. He had a

tough situation on his hands, because Bishop was put on private notice that it was in danger of losing its accreditation. A bright spot appeared in 1984 when *Ebony* magazine selected America's 15 leading black preachers. Three were Bishop graduates. Lassiter hired new administrators, and in an austerity measure, more than 30 employees were laid off. Bishop launched a $5.5 million fundraising drive.

Some hope appeared when the U.S. Department of Education agreed to erase Bishop's federal debt if the college would pledge to repay more than $2 million. But the celebration was short-lived: in December 1984 the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools put Bishop on probation. A year later, that probation was continued in spite of administrators' strenuous efforts to be restored to full accreditation. But the school announced settlement of a federal debt of $12.5 million.

In spite of its slippage toward the brink of disaster, in 1986 Bishop College was the largest black employer in Dallas. For all that, in July President Lassiter resigned and became president of El Centro Community College. Bishop was $7 million in debt. The next month, Levi Watkins, retired president of Alabama State University, became the interim president. A nasty blow fell in September 1986. The U.S. Internal Revenue Service notified current and former Bishop trustees that each trustee would be personally liable for $1.5 million in taxes that Bishop had withheld from employee paychecks but never forwarded to the IRS.

The next month, a group of business leaders offered to run Bishop College. But Comer J. Cottrell, the acting board chairman, resigned from the board of trustees. Others who resigned from the board in 1986 were developer George Shafer and Donald Zale. Shafer

later said that the Dallas business community's support of Bishop collapsed at this point. The blows began falling hard and fast. In December 1986 the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools revoked Bishop's accreditation and membership in the association. Consequently the college lost access to the United Negro College Fund as well as its right to participate in several government financial programs.

In February 1987, the U.S. Department of Education withheld $216,000 from Bishop to make up for student debts collected by school officials but not forwarded to the department. Michael Goldstein, Bishop attorney, called this a departure from previous federal policy. Some blamed a conservative political shift in Washington toward budget austerity. As spring began, there was little hope on the horizon. In March the Southern Association rejected Bishop's appeal of its loss of accreditation. The next month, Bishop College filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy, trying without success to restructure its debts and raise the money to stay open.

As the court system ground through its laborious bankruptcy process, on Jan. 13, 1988, an anonymous donor offered Bishop $300,000 if it could raise a matching amount within a week. On Jan. 19, Bishop announced it has surpassed the $300,000 goal. But the roller coaster took another plunge just a month later. On Feb. 23, Clifford Alan Sugerman, the erstwhile anonymous donor who had pledged the $300,000 and a scholarship program for up to 5,000 students, withdrew his offer after news reports that he previously had been convicted of passing hot checks. (Sugerman was sentenced to six years in prison in 1995 for swindling several people in real estate scams in Illinois.)

On March 11, 1988, Bishop officials rejected a call by the bankruptcy trustee to voluntarily close the school and sell its assets. On June 3, the **c**ollege's attorneys filed a financial reorganization plan promising to raise $1.85 million by August or close the college. The plan also included a one-year moratorium on debt payments and a 10-year payback on the college's estimated $18 million debt. That summer, the debt had grown to $20 million. The bankruptcy judge ordered sale of the property, which by then was down to just 130 acres from the previous 400 acres. The bankruptcy judge appointed longtime registrar J.D. Hurd to maintain Bishop students' transcripts and teachers' grade books in an archive. Over the years, more than 50,000 had attended Bishop; some 6,000 graduated.

On August 15, 1988, Bishop College closed. "It broke my heart," an alumnus recalled in 2011, echoing the sentiments of hundreds of former students and many thousands of supporters and the community at large. Enrollment had dropped to 300; most of the students were from foreign countries and states outside Texas. Less than 10 percent of the students were from Dallas by that time.

An odd twist in the Bishop saga occurred in 1989. Panditha Sujatha Nadarajah, a well-to-do American who evangelized Buddhism and lived in Lubbock, proffered $10 million for the Bishop property. For collateral she put up 10 sapphires worth $75,000. She went to Sri Lanka for the rest of the money. But gem dealers claimed she had cheated them out of more than $4 million, and she was detained. She alleged she was being held hostage in her hotel room. The bankruptcy judge overseeing the Bishop case threw out Nadarajah's offer and ordered an auction of the Bishop property.

On Feb. 24, 1990, former Bishop trustee Comer J. Cottrell bought the college at auction for $1.5 million. It consisted of 130 acres and 22 buildings. In 1990, Paul Quinn College, originally in Waco and affiliated with the African Methodist Episcopal Church, took over the grounds and facilities of Bishop College. In 1993, Hurd, who had become the Quinn registrar, was still maintaining the Bishop student records at the Quinn campus.

But the legacy of Bishop does not die. In 2006, Georgetown (Ky.) College proposed a partnership with Bishop alumni, as Georgetown, a historically white Baptist school, sought diversity in its bid to qualify for Phi Beta Kappa. The Kentucky campus became the repository for Bishop College's student records.

Questions to Think About

1. How diverse is your school? What do you think students gain from attending schools with students who are white, black, brown, and Asian and who come from other countries? Have tensions happened between students from different groups in your school? What caused the tensions and how could the relationship between students from different backgrounds be made better?

2. Do you think race relations between Anglo, African American and Hispanic students today are better today than in the 1950s and 1960s? Why or why not?

3. Have you ever participated in a protest? What was the cause?

4. What do you think the African American community loses when mostly black colleges like Bishop close?

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Suggested Class Projects

This curriculum guide could be used as a starting point for group research projects. Below are a few suggestions:

1. Students could research the history of a college or university in their community, investigating how the school came to be founded; the motives of the founders for establishing the school; prominent people who attended and taught there; and the history of race relations, protest, and activism at the campus. Students could research the college or university's archives and also interview important figures at these institutions.
2. Students could document the history of the Civil Rights Movement by conducting and recording interviews with local civil rights leaders who fought for African American, Hispanic, immigrant, gay or disabled rights or other causes. Students could photograph and film local civil rights leaders and collect documents and memorabilia from former activists and their families. Students could gather these materials and donate them to a local museum or library or to major collections such as at the Dolph Briscoe Center for American History in Austin, Texas, or the African American Museum in Dallas.
3. Students could research the history of racial violence and oppression and hate groups like the Ku Klux Klan in the communities by visiting local archives, interviewing law enforcement officials and contacting civil rights groups like the NAACP and the Southern Poverty Law Center.

4. Students could write plays based on novels, or perform existing plays, written by former students from Bishop College, Prairie View A&M and other major historically black colleges and universities. Students could also write dramatic productions based on the B'rer Rabbit or John folktales or on songs written and performed by African American folksingers like Leadbelly.
5. Students could visit local primarily African American, primarily Hispanic, primarily white, and primarily Asian churches, temples, mosques and/or synagogues and compare the preaching styles and the behavior of congregants at these churches during services, and research the origins of worship practices among these groups.
6. Students could identify storytellers from the African American, Hispanic, white and Asian communities and invite them to perform at the school.
7. Students could go on field trips to local sites of importance to African American history.
8. Students could interview leaders of the African American, Hispanic, white or Asian communities, students could identify historical sites of importance to those communities that are in danger of being lost or collections of historically important papers that are not available for researchers and organize a campaign to save these sites and documents.
9. Students could create an art project – a mural, sculptures, etc. – based on the history of civil rights or of African American or Mexican American education in their community.

10. Students could identify which local sites important to the history of African Americans, Mexican Americans, Asian Americans, immigrants, gays, or the disabled have not yet received an official state Historical marker and organize a drive to get one installed. Students could also organize a lobbying campaign to get streets, parks, and schools named after important figures from these communities.