

REACTIONS OF TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY TO THE INTEGRATION OF  
BLACKS AND WOMEN, AND STUDENT ACTIVISM

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THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Council of  
Southwest Texas State University  
In Partial Fulfillment of  
the Requirements

For the Degree

Master of ARTS

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San Marcos, Texas  
May, 2001

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2001

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I take this opportunity to thank all those who participated in this journey of mine, which at times seemed daunting and forever lasting. Thank you first to Dr. Brennan, for whom the completion of this work would not have been possible. Your tireless editing and words of advice have not gone unnoticed or unappreciated. After so many months of writing, it is difficult to find the words to express my debt of gratitude for your kindness and help in completing this project. I also owe thanks to my other committee members, Dr. Andrews and Dr. Watson. Thank you for your contributions and your time. The department heads also deserve consideration. Dr. Margerison and Dr. Bourgeois were very kind and helpful at some proverbial bumps in the road. Thank you for your experience and encouragement in helping me through this process.

I also owe sincere thanks to Angus Martin, who is a reference archivist at the Cushing Library at Texas A&M. His help and contributions to my research were invaluable. Thank you for giving me a starting place and sharing your work and ideas with me. Finally, I absolutely could not have completed this thesis without the unconditional love and help from my husband and family. Thank you, Mom and Daddy, for babysitting at a moment's notice, and being there for whatever I needed. Thank you, Callie and Jared, and your cast of friends who tag-team babysat, or took my daughter to band practice or football games in order to give me extra time. You will never know how much that meant to me, and I do not see how I can ever repay your efforts. I thank my husband, Adrian Edmundson, most for being my biggest cheerleader, and a great secretary. Thank you for helping me figure out the computer, keeping our children,

Alexandria and Logan, at bay, and supporting all that I have accomplished. The completion of this thesis encompasses not only my own efforts, but the efforts of all those mentioned. Thank you. This thesis was submitted to the committee on April 20, 2001.

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## INTRODUCTION

Much of the social and political upheaval beginning in the 1950s and continuing through 1972 played out on college campuses around the nation. Texas A&M University was no exception. At a crossroads of change that included the integration of women and blacks, and the ensuing turmoil, the school struggled to establish itself as a viable university in the state of Texas. Interestingly, as the nation witnessed universities struggling with the riots accompanying desegregation, demonstrations demanding civil rights and protests against the government and its policies in Vietnam, the situation in College Station appeared at first glance out of step with everyone else. No public display of radicalism wracked the campus; no uprising shut down the school; and only a few students challenged the administration. A closer examination exposed the cracks in this stoic façade, however, and revealed the hypocrisy behind the university's boasts of social and racial tolerance. There were few demonstrations because neither the student body nor the administration allowed them to take place. Texas A&M's strong military tradition and conservative background determined their reaction to the shifting circumstances of the 1960s. The administration's desire to uphold that reputation also played a significant role.

The changes that A&M did make, resulted from internal problems that could not be ignored. It was a small college with a stagnating enrollment, facing a decline in status, and possible extinction as a school. Compounding the difficulty, outside agencies threatened to cut off funding if A&M did not move toward desegregation. Forced to confront these problems, A&M administrators, led by President Earl Rudder, initiated

radical changes in the 1960s: they admitted African Americans and women in 1963. Allowing women to register promised to halt the decreasing enrollments despite the hostile reaction of male students. The presence of a few African American students would solve the immediate funding problems and protect A&M from charges of racism and intolerance.

As evidenced by the student newspaper, the reaction of the student body to all of these changes was surprisingly mixed. Although the editors of the student paper or local press printed letters from students arguing against desegregation, white students did not rise up in protest as they did on other campuses. Similarly, although the letters to the editor concerning the admittance of women vehemently opposed the move, there were no organized demonstrations. Even though the attempts of black students to gain equal footing on campus exposed white Aggies' racism, no riots broke out. Following the lead of their administrators, Aggies limited their disagreements to letters to the editor and the president. If individuals or groups reacted violently, all reports, in the sources used, of such behavior have disappeared.

One explanation for their apparent restraint can be found in the conservative tradition of the university. Conservatism at Texas A&M is based in its southern, military and agricultural history. The school was founded in 1876 as an agricultural and mechanical college and requested as its first president, the former president of the Confederacy, Jefferson Davis. He would decline the offer, but the request of such a leader at a time when the wounds of Reconstruction were still open, was a clear reflection of the school's strong ties to the south.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> George Sessions Perry, *The Story of Texas A and M* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1951), 57-60.

Historically, the military and farmers, especially those in the south, have clung to tradition and often fight any change that might threaten their way of life. Most Americans professed to believe in God, country and family; most Aggies took this to the extreme. Devoutly Christian, they clung to a vision of the ordered society of the antebellum south. In this rigidly structured world, men were the absolute leaders of their homes, made all decisions; women and blacks stayed in their proper place, and men were expected to fight to defend their honor. This paternalism was one of the strongest characteristics of southern culture and one much admired by the Aggie establishment.

An essential part of this patriarchal vision was its military component. Texas A&M incorporated that aspect of southern society as well. One of the first schools established in Texas under the Morrill Land-Grant College Act, it was established as an agricultural and mechanical college. In order to instill discipline and respect for authority, the school required military training. Young men who chose to attend A&M made that choice knowing all that came with their decision. The military requirements reinforced this patriotism for the nation and the school. There was a strong desire and pride in the ability to maintain the long chain of history and tradition that had been established by the men who had attended before them. As stated in the Corps of Cadets *Standard*, thousands of Aggies have gone before and developed “honor, courage, and commitment during their four years in the Corps...these Aggies are counting on [current cadets] to uphold the high standards of excellence which they have passed on.”<sup>2</sup> Once at A&M, students and faculty inculcated these cherished traditions and legends to new arrivals. Over and over, freshmen heard of their responsibility to maintain a sameness

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<sup>2</sup> *The Standard*, Corps of Cadets Texas A&M University, Revised July 2000, i.



and not betray the past. Ignoring or defacing tradition, they were told, would be betraying their school and all that they held dear.

The changes wrought by World War II challenged the vision of the world that Aggies and Americans in general had created. Shifts in population caused by the war introduced new ideas and people into the closed world of the south. In addition, many Americans enjoyed greater prosperity during the decades that followed the war than they had ever known. With this new wealth came new opportunities. More men and women than ever, attended college partly due to this increased prosperity as well as reaping the benefits of the G. I. Bill. This legislation enabled former soldiers to attend school, many for the first time in their family's history. College enrollment increased for most universities. The onslaught of these new students destroyed the old image of the university as the bastion of the privileged elite.<sup>3</sup>

In the mean time, the social norms that had dictated women's exclusion from A&M were disintegrating under the onslaught of the changing reality of women's lives. While some studies in the 1950s emphasized the contentment of women in their domestic roles, in 1974, Betty Friedan, author of *The Feminine Mystique*, began to uncover some dissatisfaction in the role of wife and mother. She found that some women felt that this role did not give them full outlets for their creativity or other endeavors that fell outside the realm of the home.<sup>4</sup> Although the traditional role of the woman as homemaker was revered in the 1950s, a movement for some sort of fulfillment outside this setting began to gain momentum with young girls seeking to further their education. The numbers of

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<sup>3</sup> Sara M. Evans, *Born for Liberty: A History of Women in America* (New York: The Free Press, 1989); Barbara Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women: A History of Women and Higher Education in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).

<sup>4</sup> Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women*, 200.

women attending college therefore gradually increased throughout the twentieth century. For example, in 1950 women made up 30.2% of all students attending college, and this percentage increased to 37.9% in 1960. By 1970, 41.9% of the total number of students in American colleges was women, and finally in 1980, women made up 51.8% of the student population.<sup>5</sup>

At the same time that women were changing, the African American civil rights movement gained momentum. Building on opportunities created by the war, black Americans pushed for full citizenship. They held sit-ins, boycotts, and marches. Most effectively, they used the court system to challenge school segregation. In 1954, in *Brown vs. the Board of Education*, the Supreme Court ruled in favor of equality. African Americans used that decision as a lever to pry open the closed doors of schools across the United States, but particularly in the south. Facing the wrath of angry whites and usually without the protection of state and local authorities, black students claimed their rightful place in the classrooms of America. They then continued their struggle to break the back of Jim Crow in all other areas. Even after passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1964, African Americans intensified their efforts, attempting to turn law into practice.<sup>6</sup>

White young people also involved themselves in protest activities. Many joined civil rights organizations and “went south” for the movement. Others joined together to form Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), a more politically oriented group. SDS increasingly focused its attention on the growing American presence in Vietnam. Confused as to the purpose of the military action and frustrated by the escalating death

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<sup>5</sup> Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women*, 63.

<sup>6</sup> Further background on the civil rights movement and desegregation can be found in: John Hope Franklin and Alfred A. Moss, Jr., *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of African Americans* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994).

count, students protested on campuses across America. President Lyndon Johnson and later President Richard Nixon tried to ignore and quiet the protestors, even as they continued to expand American involvement. Ultimately, the government would resort to shooting protestors at Kent State in Ohio and Jackson State in Mississippi in order to quell the movement.<sup>7</sup>

General literature on this period of time and the major themes involved is plentiful. The Civil Rights movement has been much studied. Good overviews include *From Race Riot to Sit-In: 1919 and the 1960s*, by Arthur I. Waskow<sup>8</sup>, *A Rage for Order: Black-White Relations in the American South Since Emancipation*, by Joel Williamson,<sup>9</sup> *Running for Freedom: Civil Rights and Black Politics in America Since 1941*, by Steven F. Lawson,<sup>10</sup> *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Community Organizing for Change*, by Aldon Morris,<sup>11</sup> and *The Development of Segregationist Thought*, by I. A. Newby.<sup>12</sup> Other works more specific to desegregation include a doctoral dissertation, *The Opening of the Southern Mind: The Desegregation of Higher Education in Texas 1865-1965*, by Amilcar Shabazz, 1996,<sup>13</sup> and *Race Discrimination in Public Higher Education: Interpreting Federal Civil Rights Enforcement, 1964-1996*, by John B.

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<sup>7</sup> Further background information on student activism can be found in: Thomas Powers, *The War at Home: Vietnam and the American People, 1964-1968* (New York: Grossman Publishers, 1973); Todd Gitlin, *Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (New York: Bantam Books, 1987).

<sup>8</sup> Arthur I. Waskow, *From Race Riot to Sit-In: 1919 and the 1960s* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1962).

<sup>9</sup> Joel Williamson, *A Rage for Order: Black-White Relations in the American South Since Emancipation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

<sup>10</sup> Steven F. Lawson, *Running for Freedom: Civil Rights and Black Politics in America Since 1941* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1991).

<sup>11</sup> Aldon Morris, *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Community Organizing for Change* (New York: Collier Macmillan Publishers, 1984).

<sup>12</sup> I.A. Newby, *The Development of Segregationist Thought* (Homewood: The Dorsey Press, 1968).

<sup>13</sup> Amilcar Shabazz, "The Opening of the Southern Mind: The Desegregation of Higher Education in Texas 1865-1965" (Ph. D. diss., University of Houston, 1996).

Williams, 1997.<sup>14</sup> These two works proved useful in understanding and applying the history of desegregation in universities and colleges in the state of Texas. *The Opening of the Southern Mind*, in particular, provides useful statistical information of the order in which schools in the south desegregated, the numbers of blacks attending, and what made them finally change their policies. It also briefly refers to desegregation at A&M, but unfortunately, this subject is absent from the other works mentioned.

Similarly, information concerning the 1960s and student activism is also plentiful, but ignores more conservative student bodies. Titles on this subject include *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s*, by Clayborne Carson,<sup>15</sup> *And the Crooked Places Made Straight: The Struggle for Social Change in the Nineteen-Sixties*, by David Chalmers,<sup>16</sup> and *The Unraveling of America: A History of Liberalism in the 1960s*, by Alan Matusow.<sup>17</sup> Some titles are more specific to certain events such as *Kent State/May4: Echoes Through a Decade*, by Scott Bills,<sup>18</sup> *No Heroes, No Villains: New Perspectives on Kent State and Jackson State*, by Robert M. O'Neil and John P. Morris.<sup>19</sup> These authors explore the events leading up to and surrounding the tragedy that occurred at Kent State University in 1970. Examples of a sources specifically discussing student activism is *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage*, by Todd Gitlin,<sup>20</sup> and *From*

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<sup>14</sup> John B. Williams, *Race Discrimination in Public Higher Education: Interpreting Federal Civil Rights Enforcement, 1964-1996* (Westport, Conn.: Preager, 1997).

<sup>15</sup> Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981).

<sup>16</sup> David Chalmers, *And the Crooked Places Made Straight: The Struggle for Social Change in the Nineteen-Sixties* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991).

<sup>17</sup> Alan Matusow, *The Unraveling of America: A History of Liberalism in the 1960s* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1984).

<sup>18</sup> Scott Bills, *Kent State/May4: Echoes Through a Decade* (Kent, Ohio: The Kent State University Press, 1982).

<sup>19</sup> Robert M. O'Neil and John P. Morris, *No Heroes, No Villains: New Perspectives on Kent State and Jackson State* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Inc., Publishers, 1972).

<sup>20</sup> Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (New York: Bantam Books, 1987).

*Camelot to Kent State*, by Joan Morrison and Robert K. Morrison.<sup>21</sup> This work gives a good background of the origins of student activism and how it evolved into its well-known form of the 1960s.

The Vietnam War, which served as a great target for these student activists, is also well documented. Titles on this subject include *Nixon's Vietnam War*, by Jeffrey Kimball,<sup>22</sup> *The War at Home: Vietnam and the American People, 1964-1968*, by Thomas Powers,<sup>23</sup> and *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam 1950-1975*, by George C. Herring.<sup>24</sup> These works provide a useful and thorough history of the United States' involvement in the conflict and how it affected the American people and their relationship the their government.

Although background information on civil rights and student activism is plentiful, information on women entering higher education is not as easy to locate. Only a few scholars have addressed this question. For example, *Women in Academe: Progress and Prospects*, edited by Mariam K. Chamberlain,<sup>25</sup> *In the Company of Educated Women: A History of Women and Higher Education in America*, by Barbara Solomon,<sup>26</sup> and *The New Woman and the Old Academe: Sexism and Higher Education*, by Jonah R. Churgin.<sup>27</sup> One source that was particularly helpful was master's thesis, "Salvation of a

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<sup>21</sup> Joan Morrison and Robert K. Morrison, *From Camelot to Kent State*, (New York: Random House, 1987).

<sup>22</sup> Jeffrey Kimball, *Nixon's Vietnam War* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998).

<sup>23</sup> Thomas Powers, *The War at Home: Vietnam and the American People, 1964-1968* (New York: Grossman Publishers, 1973).

<sup>24</sup> George C. Herring, *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam 1950-1975* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1986).

<sup>25</sup> Mariam K. Chamberlain, *Women in Academe: Progress and Prospects* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1988).

<sup>26</sup> Barbara Miller Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women: A History of Women and Higher Education in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).

<sup>27</sup> Jonah R. Churgin, *The New Woman and the Old Academe: Sexism and Higher Education* (New York: Libra Publishers, 1978).

University: The Admission of Women to Texas A&M,” by Heidi Ann Knippa.<sup>28</sup> Her work provided useful background information on the admission of women at Texas A&M and how their attendance altered the course of the university.

While literature on the history of women and A&M is limited, works on the history of African Americans at A&M is equally as sparse. In February, 2001, A&M produced an online exhibit dedicated to the history of blacks at A&M. The site was researched and put together by Cushing Library<sup>29</sup> curators and reference archivists, Angus Martin, and Steven Escar Smith. It is titled, “African Americans at Texas A&M University: In Fulfillment of a Dream,”<sup>30</sup> and includes a chronology of desegregation of blacks and significant events at A&M since their admission. Also included are pictures and brief stories of individuals who worked at A&M and attended throughout the years. The site provides a good beginning to understanding the story of blacks at A&M, but it avoids any analysis or attention to any conflict that might have existed during the civil rights movement.<sup>31</sup>

Other background information specific to A&M is written mostly by historian and A&M professor, Henry C. Dethloff. His works include *A Centennial History of Texas A&M University 1876-1976*, (volumes I and II),<sup>32</sup> and *A Pictorial History of Texas A&M*

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<sup>28</sup> Heidi Ann Knippa, “Salvation of a University: The Admission of Women to Texas A&M,” (Masters thesis, University of Texas, 1995).

<sup>29</sup> The Cushing Memorial Library is located on the A&M campus and houses rare books, special collections, and serves as the university archives repository.

<sup>30</sup> Cushing Memorial Library Texas A&M University, “African Americans at Texas A&M University: In Fulfillment of a Dream,” (College Station, Texas: Texas A&M UniversityLibrary) This information is from <http://library.tamu.edu/cushing/online/africanamerican/>; Internet.

<sup>31</sup> Angus Martin was instrumental in assisting me in my research and was working on this project while assisting me. He often commented that the information he was finding was fascinating, but there was little interest in compiling all of it into a written history. There is a recognized hole in their history at A&M, and ample material exists for their history to be told.

<sup>32</sup> Henry C. Dethloff, *A Centennial History of Texas A&M University 1876-1976* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1975).

*University, 1876-1976*, (first and second editions).<sup>33</sup> These works provide good overviews of the history of the university, but are clearly biased in favor of the school and its traditions. The history is recorded without any detail of the controversy that occurred during these years. An older and even more biased history of the school is George Sessions Perry's *The Story of Texas A and M*.<sup>34</sup> This work, published in 1951, does not even reach the momentous and turbulent times that lay ahead for the university. These works provide good information on the general history of the school, but fail to analyze reactions of students and administrators to the dynamic changes the decades following the war would bring.

From the late 1950s thru the early 1970s, America experienced great change and upheaval from their fairly comfortable white, middle-class lifestyle, established after the Second World War. The Civil Rights Movement and Black activism set off a chain reaction that encouraged other groups to speak out, and gained momentum through the fifties and into the sixties. While reactions on campuses around the nation have been well studied and commented on, the reactions of a conservative campus such as Texas A&M are not as well documented.<sup>35</sup> It is interesting that at a time when students around the nation challenged the "establishment," a few campuses such as A&M resisted liberal activities and rejected active protest. Response to the postwar changes on the Texas A&M campus was passionate, but not quite on the same issues that included such dissent

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<sup>33</sup> Henry C. Dethloff, *A Pictorial History of Texas A&M University, 1876-1976* (College Station: Texas A&M University Association of Former Students, 1996).

<sup>34</sup> Perry, *The Story of Texas A and M*.

<sup>35</sup> Gregory L. Schneider, *Cadres for Conservatism: Young Americans for Freedom and the Rise of the Contemporary Right* (New York: New York University Press, 1999). Schneider's work analyzes the history of conservatism in America while liberalism on campuses dominated the headlines following WWII. His work's value lies in its attention to conservatism, for the problem he encountered most was the lack of works that existed on the subject. His description of the young people that participated in this movement, and their efforts to resist and take action against the "excesses of American liberalism" apply easily to A&M students.

toward the government. The students in College Station did not rush to participate in civil rights or antiwar demonstrations. Rather, many supported the university's policies of zero tolerance toward dissent, and later the United States presidents' policies toward the Vietnam War.

Or at least that is the way it appears. Through an analysis of back issues of the student newspaper, *The Battalion*, and letters to the president, this thesis will describe the public image the A&M administration presented to the world. Through other sources, the cracks in that facade will be exposed.

The following chapters will explore and discuss how Texas A&M experienced these decades of upheaval and how they dealt with them amidst their own necessity for change. In the face of economic troubles brought on by a significant drop in enrollment when other universities' enrollment was flourishing, A&M was forced to amend admission requirements regarding women and end segregation. Chapter II will examine reactions of white students to the racial and gender integration that would alter the direction of the university. Blacks and women were granted admission in 1963, yet women seemed to face more of the students' wrath than did blacks. Chapter III then will examine how the African American students responded to their experience on this mostly white campus, and briefly discuss their efforts to gain equal access to campus life. Finally, Chapter IV analyzes how university officials reacted to the internal and external turmoil of the 1960s and 1970s. As the nation watched college campuses all around the nation protest the government and school administrators, A&M administrators prided themselves on showing the world how A&M served as the example of a model school. The reality, however, did not necessarily match the image. While the students at A&M



did not make the evening news with protests against authority and the government, they did not necessarily ignore the changes brought on by these active and tumultuous decades.

While A&M was not completely void of student liberalism, students there were much more conservative in nature and concentrated their efforts concerning these issues to reflect their more conservative values. They had an established way of conducting their days at school that included a rich history of traditions, and excluded blacks and women. When times forced them the change, the student body was not eager to accept such alterations to their university. These conservative values and resistance to change, were also reflected by the population of former students and further supported by the school administration. The administration was led by a very strong and charismatic president who took great pride in his students' apparent restraint regarding civil rights and student dissent. Yet this same pride also drove the desire of the university to maintain a conservative and harmonious image of this school they were trying so desperately to save.

## CHAPTER I

### A&M MUST DESEGREGATE: BLACKS AND WOMEN GAIN ADMISSION

In 1959, James Earl Rudder was named president of a school that was on the cusp of either growing into a strong and respected university or one that would fall victim to its own reputation as a school unwilling to change. Texas A&M was a school entrenched in tradition and very prideful of its unchanged state virtually since the school began educating young men in the state of Texas in 1876. The years following World War II, however, would reveal to school administrators that change was necessary for the continued life of the university. Enrollment was declining, and in order to maintain and advance as a competitive school in the state, school administrators were forced to consider the path of change. Administrators felt the pressures for change from many sources. The stagnant enrollment was a factor that could not be ignored, and officials were forced to reconsider admission policies. There were also outside pressures from women who were filing lawsuits in order to gain admission, and finally national funding was at issue in admitting black students and ensuring that segregation be officially ended at the university.

Texas A&M, a university with a long tradition of social and political conservatism, found itself forced to change in the years following World War II. Economic pressure in the form of declining enrollments and loss of grant funding as well as legal actions necessitated that A&M join other universities across the nation in opening their doors to African Americans and women. Despite the pride the

administration and the student body took in their reputation as a model campus, they reluctantly discovered that changes would have to occur.

Some background information on the university perhaps provides some clues to the conservative nature of the school and its students. From its earliest days, A&M had established a reputation as a conservative school that emphasized obedience and respect for authority. Established as the Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas by an act of the Texas legislature on April 17, 1871, the college formally opened to students on October 4, 1876.<sup>1</sup> Its beginning in the Reconstruction era affected the school's guiding principles. Governor Richard Coke wrote the former president of the Confederacy, Jefferson Davis, to offer him the presidency of the new college. While many Texans at the time would have been "deeply honored" to have Davis run their first college, others such as the "Radicals and former Unionists...would have been mortified, as would have been many Northerners."<sup>2</sup> Davis declined the position, but it is important to note this southern confederate tradition, direction and the support the school received in its opening days in the Brazos valley. Students could pursue fields of study in agriculture, mechanics and engineering, language and literature, or military tactics. Participation in the Corps of Cadets was compulsory and remained so until 1965. During the 1870s, College Station was very isolated. Once students were on campus, the college was all that they had in terms of time involved in study and recreation. There were no other options for the student to spend spare time elsewhere.

Like most male educators in the nineteenth century, the founders of A&M had assumed that its student body would be all male. This expectation was made apparent,

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<sup>1</sup> Dethloff, *A Centennial History of Texas A&M University, 1876-1976, Volume I*, 30.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 562.

but not explicit, in the founding charter written in 1871. The A&M charter dictated that the school include training in “military tactics” along with an industrial and technological education.<sup>3</sup> Thus military uniforms and training became mandatory for all incoming students. Since most men, in the nineteenth century, believed women to be too delicate for physical labor, much less for combat, females would be excluded from A&M. Besides, social norms dictated that women’s proper place in society was at home with her children. An ideal woman was defined by piety, purity, and domesticity, high standards which she would model and teach her children.<sup>4</sup> If she did her job well, her sons could attend colleges such as A&M, and take part in its great traditions. Strict social expectations, however, precluded her daughters from enrolling at a school that enforced participation in such masculine endeavors.<sup>5</sup>

Also, through southern tradition and the entrenched system of segregation, the school would not admit any African American students. While women had attended sporadically throughout the years under strict limitations, African American students were not granted the same privileges. The school remained for the most part homogeneously white and male until the official admission of women and blacks in 1963.

Despite this tradition of excluding female students, women had “attended” A&M in some fashion since early in the twentieth century. Beginning in 1903 and continuing thru the 1930s, the university accepted a few women as students. During the school year of 1903-1904, Mary and Sophie Hutson, Emmy Fountain Marsteller, and a few other daughters of faculty members attended A&M. The Hutson twins completed an engineering program but did not formally receive degrees because they were attending as

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<sup>3</sup> *Catalog of the State Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas, 1876-1877*, TAMU Archives, 26.

<sup>4</sup> Gerder Lerner, *The Majority Finds Its Past* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 26.

<sup>5</sup> Knippa, “Salvation of a University,” 9.

“courtesy students.”<sup>6</sup> Further registrar records show women attending A&M from 1910-1913, 1917-1920, 1922-1926, and 1933-1935.<sup>7</sup> During these semesters there were only one to three women on the rolls; all were the daughters or spouses of A&M faculty.

For unknown reasons, the Board of Directors issued a directive in 1934 that changed everything. At that time, a member of the board submitted a resolution to allow the daughters of the members of the college staff and faculty to continue their courses of study. What had been acceptable as unwritten tradition seemed incomprehensible as specific doctrine. A&M officials had tolerated limited numbers of women attending classes as long as it was not “real.” To accept this directive would have made coeducation a reality. The directors jumped at the chance to eliminate even the small number of female students. The resolution failed to carry, and the Board quickly determined that “no girls should ever be admitted to the College.”<sup>8</sup> On January 5, 1934, the 85th Judicial District Court legitimized the board’s decision. Judge W. C. Davis, of Bryan, handed down the opinion that, “administration of the college being vested by law in the Board of Directors, such board was within its rights in limiting enrollment at the college to men.”<sup>9</sup>

Women did not take their exclusion quietly. Instead they used legal means to fight back. In the 1933 case of Mrs. W.E. Neely, et al v. The Board of Directors of the Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas, et al, the Brazos County Court upheld the right and authority of the Board of Directors to exclude female applicants from

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<sup>6</sup> “Women Who Have Attended Texas A&M During Regular Long Sessions,” University Archives TAMU, President’s Office Papers, Coeducation, Box 82, August 1965-August 1966.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> “Official Minutes of Board of Directors,” University Archives TAMU, President’s Office Papers, Coeducation, Box 82, August 1965-August 1966.

<sup>9</sup> Perry, *The Story of Texas A and M*, 225.

attendance. No women attended A&M from the 1930s until they resumed the battle in the late 1950s.

For much of the twentieth century then, A&M remained as it had been from the beginning: dominated by a white, southern, military and decidedly masculine tradition. Even into the 1970s, the numbers of southern students enrolled at A&M remained strong with eighty-six percent of the student body coming from the south.<sup>10</sup> Many of those students served in World War I and II as well as in Korea and Vietnam. The university proudly dedicated its student center as a memorial to the Aggies who served and died in these wars.

This tradition of a respectful student body became a source of pride for the university throughout the twentieth century. A report commissioned in the early 1960s provides evidence of this in its depiction of the typical Aggie. He was a “native Texan...of middle to upper-class socioeconomic backgrounds, of generally superior physical development, and of relatively traditional and conservative political and religious attitudes.” The report further characterized the student as “well-disciplined, courteous, friendly, ambitious, courageous and hardworking...with loyalty to state and nation, belief in the American way of life and our democratic heritage, belief in a Supreme Being...and a capacity for initiative and leadership.”<sup>11</sup> Beneath the exaggerated language, however, was more than a kernel of truth. The A&M student body, perhaps more than many state universities tended to be more conservative and remained remarkably homogeneous. Whether A&M attracted only these kinds of students, or whether the school’s requirements forced others out, the university administration could

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<sup>10</sup> Max Birnbaum and James Cass, *Comparative Guide to American Colleges* (December 1970), University Archives TAMU.

<sup>11</sup> *Report of the Century Council to the Board of Directors, 1962*, University Archives TAMU.

and did pride themselves on an obedient, socially and politically conservative student body

Events of the post World War II era challenged this reputation for obedience and respect for authority. Veterans returning to Texas or anywhere across the nation discovered a world very different from the one they had left behind. In particular, Texas veterans returned to a state whose population was increasing rapidly as people from across the country moved in to get jobs. This influx of population brought new ideas and new customs into the area. In addition, compounding this strain, women who had enjoyed new opportunities during the war quietly began challenging their exclusion from those same opportunities after the war.

Particularly shocking for the native white Texans was the refusal of blacks to accept the segregation system that had dominated the region. This civil rights movement would escalate throughout the decades and threaten to destroy the old structure of life in the south. Building on its successes in the immediate postwar years as well as its expanded membership, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) continued to press for an end to the old Jim Crow system. The Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. The Board of Education* in 1954 marked their success in undermining segregation in education. Despite the refusal of southern school systems to act on the decision, the inevitability of desegregation remained a constant pressure.

Adding to that pressure were new economic realities in the postwar world. Beginning in the 1950s and continuing through the 1960s, Texas A&M's enrollment began to stagnate. For example, in 1963, the University of Texas's enrollment was 22,196, which was up 6,000 students from 1953. Texas A&M's enrollment in 1963 was

8,126, which was an increase of less than 2,000 since 1953. The consequences of this stagnation were manifold. Low enrollment endangered A&M's generous state funding, and "hindered the development of a reputable faculty, campus expansion, and lucrative research opportunities." This weakening enrollment possibly threatened the very existence of the university. If it continued to decline, Texas A&M seemed destined to be relegated to secondary status within the realm of higher education.<sup>12</sup>

To face all of these challenges, in 1959 the Board of Regents appointed a new president, James Earl Rudder, whose background made him the perfect candidate for the position. After receiving a bachelor of science degree from A&M in Industrial Education in 1932, Rudder made a name for himself in the military. During World War II, he organized and trained the Second Ranger Battalion, which became known as Rudder's Rangers. His group of rangers participated in the D-Day invasion by successfully capturing a cliff between Omaha and Utah Beaches. Rudder and numerous others were wounded in this mission. His courage in the face of such a horrific and historical battle helped seal his legend at A&M. After returning from the war, he went to work as a rancher, businessman, and mayor of Brady, Texas. He also served as a member of the Texas Board of Public Welfare and the State Democratic Executive Committee. On January 5, 1955, Governor Allan Shivers appointed Rudder as Texas Land Commissioner following a veterans' land scandal. His experience in these offices would help prepare him for his position as president of Texas A&M.

Rudder assumed his new office with the full support of faculty, alumni, and the student body. Recognizing that he would uphold A&M's traditions and protect its conservative reputation, they trusted him to lead them through the confusion of the

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<sup>12</sup> Knippa, "Salvation of a University," 2.



swirling political and social circumstances of the 1950s and 1960s. This willingness on the part of alumni and students to accept Rudder's guidance proved crucial in the years that lay ahead. The fact that he retained both his position and the respect of the Aggie community until his death in 1970, despite his role in bringing the significant changes that included the integration of women and blacks at A&M, indicated the esteem with which the community held him.

Rudder accepted the position understanding that changes had to be made. In order to figure out exactly what areas needed the most work, the new president initiated four separate studies. These reports: *Faculty-Staff-Student Study on Aspirations*, *Report of the Century Council*, *Report to Commission of Colleges*; *Southern Association of Colleges and Schools*, and *Blueprint for Progress*,<sup>13</sup> exposed some of the problems and proposed solutions.

On April 29, 1961, he appointed a twenty-four-man committee, composed of faculty and staff members, which was known as the Committee of Aspirations.<sup>14</sup> Out of their findings, combined with recommendations from the other studies, came some significant changes that would alter the course of the college in the tumultuous decade of the 1960s.

To begin with, some of the reports recommended eliminating the required participation in the Corps of Cadets. The Commissioners recognized that the mandatory nature of Corps participation prevented some students from applying for admission.<sup>15</sup> Required membership had gone back and forth since 1954, but in 1965 membership in

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<sup>13</sup> Dethloff, *A Centennial History of Texas A&M University, 1876-1976, Second ed.*, 561.

<sup>14</sup> Dethloff, *A Centennial History*, 568.

<sup>15</sup> *Texas A&M University: Directory of Former Students, 1876-1994* (College Station: Texas A&M University Association of Former Students, 1994), xi-xii.

the Corps of Cadets was finally made optional for all incoming freshmen. Considering all of the changes the university was experiencing, this policy elicited little response. Faculty and administration saw it as a necessary change for the growth and advancement of the university.

Most of the reports concluded that A&M's all-male admissions policy was a significant cause of declining admissions. The report also stated that the faculty was "overwhelmingly in favor of coeducation," and feared that the college's current negative policy toward coeducation created a major obstacle to "academic excellence and institutional stature."<sup>16</sup> Moreover, the faculty considered the refusal to admit women to the college to be "contrary to the spirit of the land-grant idea and a handicap to the institution."<sup>17</sup>

The reports further acknowledged that there was increasing external pressure to move toward coeducation. In particular, women continued to attempt to gain admission by filing lawsuits. Although the courts sided with the university, the suits indicated both a large number of potential students and the possibility that the legal problems would escalate. Moreover, the court's support seemed more tenuous as the years went on. In 1958, in the case of Heaton v. Bristol, the court upheld the Board's authority to refuse admittance to women. The decision held that the Board of Directors had discretion in determining admission requirements. According to the ruling, the Court could not compel any change in policy; that could only come from the state legislature. Two years later, however, in Allred v. Heaton, the Court of Civil Appeals held that the Board of

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<sup>16</sup> Tommy De Frank, "History of Coeducation," part 6, *The Battalion*, February 23, 1966.

<sup>17</sup> Fritz Lanham, "Changing: 20 Years Ago, Texas A&M Opened its Doors to Women," *The Eagle*, April 23, 1983.

Directors would have had the authority to make exceptions.<sup>18</sup> University administrators feared that it was just a matter of time before the courts mandated the admission of women.

There had also been pressure coming from the legislative front. In 1953, Senator William T. Moore '40<sup>19</sup> of Bryan led the fight to get women into A&M. He questioned how Texas A&M could continue to be proud of its traditions if it prevented "the natural development of the minds and spiritual bodies of the individual." He stated further that the record of A&M graduates spoke for itself. Where they have excelled, "they will go even further with less readjustment to society, were the college to become coeducational."<sup>20</sup> He moved the discussion and battle for the admission of women from the A&M Board of Directors to the State Legislature when he submitted a resolution to the state Senate in March, 1953, to make A&M coeducational. A few days later, however, the resolution was rescinded by a vote of the senate.<sup>21</sup> Yet he initiated the very important step of taking this issue out of the hands of the Board, and getting it into the State Legislature, where women would finally gain the right to enroll at Texas A&M.

Despite this senate effort and as a result of all of these pressures and the changing circumstances, the Board of Directors finally amended their policy. In 1963, the board issued an official proclamation: "Effective June 1, 1963, the Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas will admit qualified women on a day-student basis to all graduate programs and to Veterinary Medicine." Refusing to surrender completely, they narrowly defined "qualified women." Only the wives and daughters of faculty and staff,

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<sup>18</sup> "Court Proceedings," University Archives TAMU, President's Office Papers, Coeducation, Box 66.

<sup>19</sup> William T. Moore was a graduate of A&M in 1940. It is common for former students to use their class year with their name in this manner.

<sup>20</sup> *The Battalion*. April 7, 1953.

<sup>21</sup> "Legislative Action/History," University Archives TAMU, President's Office Papers.

the wives of students in residence, and women staff members were to be admitted to the undergraduate program.<sup>22</sup> Thus the Board tried to have it both ways: to admit women but drastically limit their number. Despite this obvious attempt to keep them out, women seized the opportunity to enroll. Within two days of the board's announcement, twelve women applied for admission to Texas A&M, and by September, 150 women were enrolled.<sup>23</sup>

Ironically, although the reaction to the admission of women would be for more hostile initially than the reaction to integration of African Americans, the decision to move to coeducation was much more easily adopted than the decision to register black students. This was clear even from the reports. The studies were supposed to find a solution to declining enrollments, but the commissioners paid little attention to African Americans. However, the same consideration and concern was not paid to African Americans. It seems apparent that these reports and commissioners did not recognize the admission of black students as vital to the future growth of the institution, and this lack of concern is reflected in their virtual omission from their reports.

The pressures leading A&M officials to admit African Americans all came from outside the university system. Around the nation, schools and universities faced court-mandated desegregation. The schools in the south became increasingly vocal and violent in their attempts to resist the change. To offer but one example: when on February 6, 1956, Autherine Lucy, a twenty-six year old African American secretary tried to register as the University of Alabama's first black student, a violent white mob attacked her. As a result, school administrators barred Lucy from attending classes. She had to obtain a

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<sup>22</sup> Official Minutes of the Board of Directors, April 27, 1963, University Archives TAMU, President's Office Papers.

<sup>23</sup> Dethloff, *A Centennial History of Texas A&M University, 1876-1976, Second ed.*, 163.

court order to be able to resume her class schedule. Although a few schools such as the University of Georgia and the University of South Carolina admitted blacks without much incident, violence erupted on many other campuses. Despite the hostile reactions, African Americans maintained a steady walk through the schoolroom door and into integration.

Although Aggie officials must have recognized the shift toward integration taking place by the early sixties, they did not move in that direction until reality forced their hands. Concerned about the school's academic and professional reputation, administrators could not risk anything that might further injure their reputation or limit their faculty's ability to compete with other professionals. As a result, when the National Science Foundation (NSF), a government agency, indirectly threatened to discontinue funding to A&M if the school did not desegregate, administrators took it seriously. On June 29, 1962, the school received a letter from the NSF "reminding" Texas A&M that candidates for their program "shall be considered, without regard to race, creed or color, solely on the basis of their ability."<sup>24</sup> Surely it was not a coincidence that two of the first eight African Americans admitted studied in the Department of Geology and Geophysics as part of the National Science Foundation Institute in Earth Sciences.<sup>25</sup>

A clearer example of the racism and desire to avoid actually enacting equal opportunity policies surrounded the issue of equal hiring practices. According to the transcription of a telephone conversation that occurred sometime between April, 1961, and August, 1962, between President Rudder and Chancellor Tom Harrington, Rudder and Harrington revealed their true attitudes toward the changes taking place across the

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<sup>24</sup> George W. Burns, Head, Institutes Section NSF, Letter to Dr. James G. Potter, Head, Department of Physics, Texas A&M, June 29, 1962, University Archives TAMU, President's Office Papers.

<sup>25</sup> "Eight Negroes Attend A&M During Both Summer Terms," *The Battalion*, 12 September 1963.

country. Rudder had called to ask Harrington what to do about passage of the Equal Employment Practices Act:

Would you please advise the proper employing offices of the System that the provisions of the Executive Order No. 10925 pertaining to Equal Employment Opportunity, have been accepted by the System for and on behalf of each of the parts of the Texas A. and M. College System.

Rudder then asked Harrington what it was that he wanted the administration to do.

Harrington replied:

Earl, I don't think there's a thing in the world to do with this. I think it will just be on our file that we have adopted this. It's not—it's for the employment on these Federal grants. And I think I just—Oh, sometime at your Executive Committee just tell your deans that we have this; that if anybody comes around checking, why, we have adopted this employment policy.

Harrington went on to explain that he did not want any publicity about the policy.

Rudder replied that was the way he understood it but wanted to make sure that it was not to be made public. Harrington added that the Research Foundation had received some calls from people concerned that A&M would have some "Negro faculty members" as a result. The callers were assured by the secretary that this new policy would absolutely not result in the hiring of black faculty. Clyde Wells, Chairman of the Board, told the secretary that this administrative order was "just our employment policy—all it is."<sup>26</sup>

With that reassurance, they ended the conversation. Traditional racism was clearly present in the agreement between these two powerful men in the A&M system, and apparently supported by concerned former students and faculty members. It was acceptable to have these equal opportunity policies on file, but clearly they were not to be enforced. This example of racism exemplified the intolerance of any initiation of African American rights beyond what was required by law. A&M was not going to take any

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<sup>26</sup> Phone conversation between President Earl Rudder and Chancellor Tom Harrington, University Archives TAMU, President's Office Papers, box 57-25, April 1961-August 1962.

extra steps to create an environment that was inviting to the African American population.

However, under these various financial and social pressures, the Board of Directors in June, 1962, established a policy to “admit qualified students regardless of sex, race, or color.”<sup>27</sup> In June 1963, two African American graduate students and an undergraduate were “registered quietly” for the first summer session.<sup>28</sup> At the beginning of the second session, six African Americans, including two women, were enrolled. The students included Leroy Sterling, an undergraduate student, as well as George Douglas Sutton and Vernell Jackson, who both held masters degrees from Prairie View A&M College. They studied in the Department of Geology and Geophysics as part of the National Science Foundation Institute in Earth Sciences. Other students who enrolled that summer included B.C. Evans and A.L. Dunn, of Bryan, Texas. They were undergraduate transfers from Texas Southern University during the second summer session. Finally, Edward Elliott, Jr. was a teacher in Bryan who was completing his graduate work.<sup>29</sup> These students, however, were only enrolled for the summer, and returned to their jobs or other schools in the fall.

The summer and fall of 1963 had transformed the historically all-white, all-male university. The changes resulted in part from administrators’ recognition of the need to increase their enrollment for economic reasons. In addition, outside pressures in the form of federal court-ordered desegregation, escalating legal threats from women, and threats from federal agencies forced university officials to make changes on campus. Aggies’ obsession with tradition made a difficult adjustment that much worse. Although they

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<sup>27</sup> Shabazz, “The Opening of the Southern Mind.”

<sup>28</sup> “Eight Negroes Attend A&M.”

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

were reassured by their loyalty to their president, they reacted strongly to what they perceived as a threat to their way of life.



## CHAPTER II

### WHITE AGGIES REACT TO THE ADMISSION OF WOMEN AND BLACKS

The reactions of the white students at A&M to desegregation of blacks and women varied from moderate acceptance to outright hostility. Interestingly, there was no reported violence of the nature evident on other southern campuses. As white students rioted in Mississippi and Alabama, Aggies wrote letters to the editor and harassed individual blacks and women. Even their letters include a surprising number of students who welcomed such changes. In fact, white students appeared to respond with more opposition to the introduction of women than to desegregation or the ending of required Corps membership. Since, however, much of this evidence appeared in a newspaper owned and controlled by the university, the assumption must be that the material was at the very least partially censored. Still, what was printed painted an intriguing picture of how white Aggies dealt with the new rules.

In contrast to the situation on other campuses across the country, the registration of the first African-American students in College Station went almost unnoticed. One editorial praised the students and administration for accepting this obligation to desegregate for which they had no power to ignore. Even though the registration of the trio was unannounced, and conducted quietly, “there was plenty of opportunity afterward for people to make fools of themselves—but no one did.” The writer also gave credit to the new registrants. These students, he explained, entered A&M with intentions identical to those of the majority of summer school students. “They did not come as civil rights demonstrators or rabble-rousers.” The editor concluded by praising the A&M student

body for their dignified acceptance of these new students: “Regardless of how each individual felt about the issue, he was able to see that ugly disorder like those now occurring in much of the South would not ultimately change things and would serve only to give A&M a black eye.”<sup>1</sup>

Considering Aggies’ earlier responses to desegregation throughout the state, the acceptance evidenced in the aforementioned editorial seemed remarkable. For example, on October 17, 1955, the youth council of the NAACP had picketed the gates to the state fair in Dallas on Negro Achievement Day. Tommy Neal, head of the NAACP’s youth council, told reporters that they were picketing because Negroes had been segregated and discriminated against on five separate days at the fair. Their signs encouraged African Americans to stay away from the fair and not to sell out. Another sign read, “This is Appeasement Day at the Fair—Stay Out.”<sup>2</sup>

The *Battalion* editorial defended segregation as being part of the fair for years, and “in conservative Texas, until a hole-proof decision, backed by enough prestige to put it into effect is made about desegregation of the fair, the Negroe [sic] [would] continue to be discriminated against.”<sup>3</sup> Basically the editor excused segregation because it had always been that way. The author further argued that purposeful and intelligent action was needed and not such acts of defiance “in order to retain the prestige which such a great social revolution as desegregation [would] entail.” Finally, however, he praised the peaceful character of the demonstration. It represented a great difference from the

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<sup>1</sup> “A Big Step Forward,” *Battalion* Editorials, *The Battalion*, 6 June 1963, 2.

<sup>2</sup> “Negroes Picket State Fair on Negro Achievement Day,” *The Battalion*, 19 October 1955, 1.

<sup>3</sup> “Understandable, But...,” *The Battalion*, 18 October 1955, 2.

“bloody trails followed by another large group that fought to overcome oppression and discrimination—the worker.”<sup>4</sup>

It is revealing of the times and social separation of the races that this editor could compare the plights of the African-American to that of the struggles of the American factory worker. Being from a southern state that was strongly anti-union, this comparison revealed the strong opposition and distaste most Texans had for unions. It also revealed how many white southerners retained some of the long-held beliefs of the justification of slavery. In 1955, some southern whites were still justifying and comparing the struggles of the African-American to the Northern worker, as many did when comparing slave labor in the South to “slave wages” in the North in the nineteenth century.

On February 15, 1956, a student wrote a letter to the editor that reinforced the image of the typical white Texan but that would also spark a few weeks of debate on campus. James P. Syler '57 wrote to the editor attacking editorials that Bill Fullerton had written that were sympathetic to the struggles of African-Americans. Syler wrote that Fullerton's editorial was a “typical pseudo-intellectual article of the type that has been appearing in Northern newspapers for 100 years.” He stated “the Yankees that think like you (Fullerton) have finally gotten their wish.” The result of desegregation and the Civil Rights movement had brought on “nothing but a chain of bloody riots and a few mixed marriages, the offspring of which are the beginning of a mongrel race.” He further went on to suggest that the Communist Party supported the NAACP, and that the incident in

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<sup>4</sup> Understandable, But...,” 2.

Alabama<sup>5</sup> was exactly what the Communists wanted. “Communist activities such as this threaten continuance of the freedom and Christianity of all men—colored as well as white.”<sup>6</sup> This letter clearly demonstrated how some whites felt that communism and desegregation both threatened the established and cherished traditional American ways of life.

Syler’s letter sparked numerous responses and several days of featured articles letting the students express their views on segregation. Some students supported Syler’s remarks and segregation, including Charles Beyer, ’58 and James Blackmon, ’58. They wrote that Syler should be congratulated “for his clearness of thought,” and criticized the editor for printing what they felt, were hastily written articles.<sup>7</sup> Another proponent of segregation wrote that the school program of the south should have “as its ultimate aim, the determined provision of the same educational facilities for both races—brick for brick, dollar for dollar, degree for degree.”<sup>8</sup> He continued to argue that with adequate dual school systems, both races could progress efficiently. He paternalistically insisted that the south had brought the African-American along to the point of great progress, unequal to any other race throughout history.

Surprisingly, the paper printed many more letters in opposition to segregation and in anger at Syler and his cohorts. One student praised the successful desegregation in San Antonio, which was accomplished without any bloody riots or organized opposition. He pointed out that while African Americans were segregated, other races were not singled

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<sup>5</sup> This incident refers to the admission of Autherine Lucy to the University of Alabama as mentioned in Chapter I.

<sup>6</sup> James P.M. Syler, ’57, “Letters to the Editor,” *The Battalion*, 15 February 1956, 2.

<sup>7</sup> Charles Beyer, ’58 and James Blackmon, ’58, “Readers Express a Few Views on Segregation,” *The Battalion*, 17 February 1956, 1.

<sup>8</sup> Ray R. Stevens, ’58, “Readers Have More to Say,” *The Battalion*, 21 February 1956, 2.

out in the same way. He idealistically boasted that the nation realized “there [was] no superior race, and that each race [contributed] to the general welfare.” In his support of desegregation, he wrote, “We of the South have failed to give equality through a “separate but equal doctrine, and if integration is the only path to complete equality, then we must integrate.”<sup>9</sup> Another student strongly insisted that Syler’s letter was “nothing but a biased, one-sided, bunch of ‘baloney’ stuffed into sentences.” He asked if suppression of other people based simply on the color of their skin was truly the democratic way of life. While Syler accused the NAACP of being controlled by the Communist Party, this student pointed out that American prejudice and discrimination was one of the major propaganda weapons of the Communists.<sup>10</sup> Guy Fernandez, ’56 further criticized Syler, stating that he would no doubt be opposed to blacks attending A&M and accused Syler of being the type of person that was participating in the riots taking place on other campuses. Taking a strong stand in favor of integration, Fernandez supported Autherine Lucy’s fight to attend Alabama, and asked Syler, “Why deny her the right to knowledge when she is a human being just like you?” He concluded his letter by encouraging readers to let African Americans share in the progress of the nation “to make a better, stronger and more prosperous America.”<sup>11</sup>

These letters in opposition to segregation continued to run in the paper and were featured again in the February 21, 1956 edition. Again, perhaps as part of maintaining this image of tolerance, the paper included more letters in favor of integration than in opposition. One student praised *The Battalion* for its positive thinking and enlightening

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<sup>9</sup> A.O. Hilgers, ’56, “Readers Express a Few Views on Segregation,” *The Battalion*, 17 February 1956, 1.

<sup>10</sup> Dale Harvill, ’57, “Readers Express a Few Views on Segregation,” *The Battalion*, 17 February 1956, 1.

<sup>11</sup> Guy Fernandez, ’56, “Readers Express a Few Views on Segregation,” *The Battalion*, 17 February 1956, 2.

editorials on the race situations. He encouraged desegregation, and wrote that the South “must assert herself as being firmly opposed to brutality, bigotry, intolerance, prejudice and lawlessness.”<sup>12</sup> He believed that the South needed to work on changing its image and attitude toward African-Americans. Revealing the limitation of his tolerance, he explained that whites needed to help blacks ultimately enter and adjust to life in mainstream America.

Students at A&M began discussing the possibility of their own integration a month later. In March, 1956, the Student Senate held a vote to determine the student body’s view on integration, and informed the school administration that the student body would not oppose integration. Some students, however, voiced their disapproval of the senate’s report. One student complained that the Student Senate was not voting the true feelings of the student body, but rather the feelings of the senate. Personally against integration, the student stated that in a vote in his dorm, the majority favored segregation.<sup>13</sup> Another student argued that men were by nature unequal, and it was foolish to attempt to treat them otherwise. He qualified his remarks by stating that he was not speaking of blacks only. “The Negro just happens to be the center of attraction today in a push for equality that is not there for the whole race.” He went on to point out that “Negroes of superior stock...[had] never failed to gain [white men’s] recognition.” Finally, he stated that the Constitution guaranteed equal rights to man, but not a sweeping equality of man.<sup>14</sup> Even with these few letters of dissent concerning desegregation, the school remained calm and absent of any major public protests or reports of violence. The

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<sup>12</sup> “Readers Have More to Say,” *The Battalion*, 21 February 1956, 2.

<sup>13</sup> James C. Blackmon, ’58, “Letters to the Editor,” *The Battalion*, 20 March 1956, 2.

<sup>14</sup> Richard A. Tindall, ’56, “Letters to the Editor,” *The Battalion*, 23 March 1956.

administration's efforts to maintain a calm campus in the face of such drastic changes was proving successful.

A&M students during these years clearly recognized that times were changing, and while some held on tightly to established customs and beliefs, others welcomed and supported the revolutionary changes occurring in American schools. One editorial commented that the fear of the end of segregation, and the end of the myth of "white superiority" drove the continuance of hatred and fear. He wrote that they were living in a world where the races were ultimately going to have to work together. The armed services had been integrated, and many of the current members of the Corps would be faced with working side by side with African Americans. He further commented that all students "have to face a world that is moving, not standing still in the bogs of hatred," and that while no one was "shoving integration down A&M's throat," in 1956, the Board of Directors would base any future action on what they considered "necessary in light of the Supreme Court's decision."<sup>15</sup>

Many of these views, surprisingly sound quite liberal for a university of A&M's background, location, and student body. Perhaps it was easy to criticize actions of southern schools and the violent opposition to desegregation when it had not been introduced directly into their schools and culture in 1955 and 1956. In addition, A&M's long tradition of patriotism also showed through in the letters. Many of the supporters of integration used the Constitution or Declaration of Independence to justify the actions of

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<sup>15</sup> "Thoughts on the Future," *The Battalion*, 21 March 1956, 2.

blacks. Emphasizing the peaceful nature of the proponents of integration, these Aggies voiced their dismay at the lawlessness and disorder of the segregationists.<sup>16</sup>

Even the most racist of the letters supporting segregation seemed mild compared to the hostility that greeted the admission of women. The students seemed much more threatened by the presence of women, and the possibility that women might damage the history and tradition of the school. Or perhaps, printing letters in opposition to admitting women did less to damage the reputation of the school than opposing desegregation.

From the first hint about the move toward coeducation, Aggies, present and past, rose up in opposition. Even these few numbers of women who sought admission met with bitter and passionate disapproval by both powerful former students and the current student body. Following the announcement that women would be allowed to attend A&M, on April 29, 1963, Rudder called a meeting of the entire Corps of Cadets to be held in the G. Rollie White Coliseum. More than 4,000 angry cadets greeted President Rudder with “boos and hisses” and chanted, ““We don’t want to integrate.””<sup>17</sup> The students were using the term “integrate” in reference to women rather than blacks. This demonstration by the student body, and specifically the corps members, aimed at Rudder indicated the depth of hostility. To most Aggies “Rudder personified all that A&M stood for: military heroism, courage, success, and loyalty.” The community, students, and

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<sup>16</sup> Although evidence of any events of racial violence on campus are not presented in *The Battalion* or presidential papers, it cannot be assumed that African Americans on the A&M campus experienced no racial discrimination. Some students reported later of being spat upon, or having books hit out of their arms. Perhaps there were not any full scale incidents as witnessed at the University of Alabama, but blacks still experienced unfair and hateful treatment by some white students on campus.

<sup>17</sup> Tommy DeFrank, “History of Coeducation—6: Board Admits Coeds,” *The Battalion*, February 14, 1966; and Dethloff, *A Centennial History of Texas A&M University, 1876-1976, Volume I*, 568.



former students once had treated him with almost religious reverence and respect.<sup>18</sup> The spectacle at the auditorium would have seemed incomprehensible even a year earlier.

As a desperate last attempt to prevent the admission of women, State Senators Andrew J. Rogers '46 and Galloway Calhoun, Jr. introduced Senate Resolution 620. The language of the proposed resolution was very critical of the Board of Directors and their decision to admit women:

The recent action of the Board of Directors of the Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas in voting to break a ninety-two year old tradition of the College by changing the status of one of the greatest men's schools in the world has caused distress, apprehension and resentment among many thousands of students and former students of A&M College.

The resolution continued with descriptions of A&M's rich military heritage, emphasizing service in wars since 1871. By responding "with bravery, devotion and distinction" when the nation called, these men, according to the senators, enhanced A&M's reputation. This great history of A&M was "written without the feminine hand of coed students and without classes in home economics, dressmaking, pincushion embroidery or hairdressing." Finally the resolution argued that thousands of Aggies throughout the state and around the world strongly opposed the "sacrificing of the great traditions of a great school for the doubtful reward of a possible increase in enrollment which may be wholly undesirable." Therefore they resolved that the board's decision was not in the best interest of the state of Texas.

Furthermore, they proposed that the state senate should declare that at least one major state university be maintained for men only, and that another major state university be maintained for women only. This final part of the resolution reflected a definite separate but equal philosophy among these senators and presumably by their supporters.

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<sup>18</sup> Knippa, "Salvation of a University," 103.

The resolution prevailed in Committee by a vote of 17 to 11.<sup>19</sup> The outcome in this initial vote reflected the clear opposition and disdain for the possibility of women's presence at A&M by many powerful former students and supporters of the school. While their efforts would ultimately fail, this resolution serves as a vivid example of the vehement disapproval of coeducation at Texas A&M.

In addition, throughout the 1960s, letters poured into the president's office and the school newspaper from students, former students, and also from concerned citizens from all over the state. One parent wrote President Rudder in opposition to the admission of women, comparing their inclusion to that of mares in a horse race. He asked the president if there was ever a good horse race with a mare entered; "it will tear a good race up every time."<sup>20</sup> His comments degraded both the female students and the male students whom the parent believed would be unable to maintain the proper course in their academic endeavors.

Other former students felt that by bringing coeducation to Texas A&M, the president and Executive Board stripped a certain freedom from men. Young men of Texas should have the "freedom of choice whether to go to a co-educational college or an all-male college. It seems logical that we have at least one great state supported university for men."<sup>21</sup> Even a group of young female nursing students from Beaumont, Texas, wrote President Rudder to express their opposition to A&M's admission of women. They believed that A&M's tradition was not worth sacrificing, and that the

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<sup>19</sup> Senators Andrew J. Rogers and Galloway Calhoun, Jr., *Senate Journal: Fifty-eighth Legislature—Regular Session*, Austin, Texas, Friday, May 24, 1963 pp.1559-1560, 1665, University Archives TAMU, President's Office Papers.

<sup>20</sup> Letters to President Rudder concerning coeducation, University Archives TAMU, President's Office Papers, Coeducation, Box 82, August 1965-August 1966.

<sup>21</sup> Charles B. Martin, Jr. '43, Letters to President Rudder concerning coeducation, University Archives TAMU, President's Office Papers, Coeducation, Box 82, August 1965-August 1966.

school was not being discriminatory against women or stopping them from obtaining a college education. "Texas has many good coeducational and women's colleges. Texas A&M is important in helping to develop boys into men."<sup>22</sup>

Taking more drastic action, some students formed a committee for the ultimate purpose of reversing the senate's decision to abolish the state's only all-male college. Calling themselves the "Committee for an All-Male Military Texas A&M," they promised to remain in existence until the reversal had been accomplished by the following legislative session, through legal proceedings, or through voluntary action by the A&M Board of Directors. Pledging to carry this issue to the people of Texas, they declared that the citizens of the state had the right to know why their sons and future generations of young Texas men were "being denied a choice as to the type of institution they can attend." They feared that the addition of women would destroy the cherished military tradition at A&M, and that it was the first step in the Board's intention to destroy the cadet corps at Texas A&M. Finally, they confidently and defiantly proclaimed that Texas A&M would be preserved as an all-male military institution.<sup>23</sup>

A leader in this movement to restore A&M to its all-male status was a former student, Bob Rowland '57, director of the radio station KFMK in Houston. Appalled by the board's actions, Rowland returned his Aggie ring to the Board President, saying, "A&M would mean nothing to him after the decision to enroll coeds." Considered by some to be the "East Texas General in the anti-coed fight," he was a dedicated fighter who believed that A&M was "worth saving."<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Letters to President Rudder concerning coeducation, University Archives TAMU, President's Office Papers, Coeducation, Box 82, August 1965-August 1966.

<sup>23</sup> "Sound Off," *The Battalion*, Thursday, August 8, 1963.

<sup>24</sup> "Former Students Keep Attack Alive," *The Battalion*, July 3, 1963.

Although he enjoyed some support from former and current students, his remarks and tactics offended others. Marion C. Pugh, class of 1941, responded that Mr. Rowland did not represent him or most Aggies. He wrote:

True A&M men [were] endowed with that certain something you cannot beg, borrow or steal, and gain only by being an A&M Man. All of us are privileged to have this unique quality, that A&M and only A&M can give.

He added that loyalty was much “deeper than co-education, integration, or any other changes the administration or board might feel necessary to further the advancement of [this] great university.”<sup>25</sup> One woman responded to Mr. Rowland’s efforts, defending women’s rights to attend a state-supported school to which she also contributed tax money. This female correspondent strongly felt that a woman should not be denied the right to follow a course of study at a school that fits her interests and needs as a student.<sup>26</sup> However, letters such as this were rare, and the author of this letter was actually an employee of the college and not a student.

Protest and turmoil concerning the issue of women on campus, and in the classrooms dominated the fall semester 1963. The general disapproval of the decision even spilled over into attendance at football games and the general “spirit” on campus. One student wrote that the “Spirit of Aggieland has ceased to exist.” Students refused to support football or the athletes because they blamed the administration for “completely destroy[ing] the spirit, honor, and traditions of Aggieland.”<sup>27</sup> Even a visitor to campus wrote the paper to express his chagrin at the fallen spirit of the student body. He

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<sup>25</sup> Marion C. Pugh '41, “Sound Off: Letters to the Editor,” *The Battalion*, 11 October 1963. Marion C. Pugh was a graduate of Texas A&M, star athlete on the 1939 national championship football team and also a member of the baseball team. He was a highly respected local citizen in the community. His opinion would have carried great weight with current and former students.

<sup>26</sup> “Sound Off,” *The Battalion*, August 15, 1963.

<sup>27</sup> Derrell N. Chandler, “Sound Off,” *The Battalion*, October 10, 1963.

questioned where the “burning spirit” had gone, and stated that something “very gloomy hung in the air.” Blaming the change on coeducation, he explained that the admission of women had “dampened the Spirit” of this student body.<sup>28</sup> He encouraged students to voice their opinions so that their great traditions would not be destroyed. The view that coeducation would destroy the “spirit” of A&M permeated the protests.

A student and wife of an Aggie, Meghan Tilghman sent a letter to the editor responding to these charges. Tilghman wrote the paper to defend women’s rights to the educational opportunities A&M had to offer. She stated that women did not intend to destroy the traditions and spirit of the school, but simply wanted access to a fair and equal education. She emphasized that if women’s presence threatened the “Spirit of Aggieland,” then perhaps it was not a spirit worth preserving. She posed the question: “How can anyone, if they feel their school is the best not want everyone possible to share in the best?” Women were willing to care for their families while working toward the same goal of an equal and quality education, and that should enhance the true Aggie spirit rather than hinder it. Finally she stated that women were not seeking an education in order to infringe upon a man’s world, but rather to better themselves so that they could be an asset to men as “educated women.”<sup>29</sup>

Several male students reacted very strongly to her letter, completely dismissing her promises to understand and respect the spirit and traditions at A&M. They felt that “Mrs. Tilghman and the rest of the female additions to our campus have no conception of the true meaning of this Spirit.” They posed several questions that only a true Aggie, according to them, could know or care to know. For example, they asked if she knew the

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<sup>28</sup> Pat Bryant, “Sound Off,” *The Battalion*, October 17, 1963.

<sup>29</sup> Megan Tilghman, “Sound Off,” *The Battalion*, October 15, 1963, 2.

symbolism of many of the traditions around the campus. They further asked if she was familiar with the Aggie Spirit exemplified by the men on Corregidor in World War II, or if she had heard of a list of revered Aggie military leaders. They felt that if she and the other women were familiar with these and other Aggie traditions she might be “qualified to comment on the effect of co-education on the Spirit of A&M.”<sup>30</sup> It seemed that one of the greatest concerns of these students was that the presence of women on campus would completely destroy any traditions and spirit that had been established by the school’s long history as an all-male military institution. Many of these writers ignored the fact that incoming male freshmen had to be indoctrinated in those valued traditions upon their arrival on campus. Unless the male students came from a family line of Aggies, they too came to A&M ignorant of its traditions, but chose to attend a school whose rich history was held in high reverence, and which expected its students to respect and carry on. These men had been taught the traditions of the school, and there was no realistic reason that women could not do the same.

Much of this concern about “spirit” centered in the corps of cadets. They were the group that seemed most threatened by the change. In May, 1962, the student body had conducted a poll concerning the admission of women. Among the traditional cadet population the vote was 1,290 to 699 in opposition to admitting women. Interestingly, however, the civilian population favored admitting women by a total of 1,049 votes to 309.<sup>31</sup> In another poll conducted in February, 1965, the results reflected similar sentiments. The corps voted by a total of 795 to 445 to oppose coeducation, while the

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<sup>30</sup> George Eeds ‘64, Tommy Ferguson ‘64, Don McGown ‘64, Jim Mayo ‘64, Frank Owen ‘64, *The Battalion*, October, 23, 1963.

<sup>31</sup> *Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas Office of the President*, “Student Vote on Coeducation, Name Change and Compulsory Corps,” May 18, 1962, University Archives TAMU, President’s Office Papers.

civilian students voted 423 to 108 in favor of admitting women. The corps members were defiantly more traditional and did not want to change to a coeducational university. As previously mentioned, many of these men were from small, rural communities, which had most likely remained unchanged throughout their lifetimes. They had been taught that being a cadet at A&M would set them apart. In the early 60s, that notion seemed threatened from all angles. Blacks and women on campus might have appeared to them to signal the end of the corps itself. Already by this time it was no longer mandatory to participate in the Corps, which for many was the heartbeat and purpose of the university.

The polls indicated, however, that not everyone felt threatened. Those few letters received by the university and school paper in support of coeducation contributed intelligent arguments without surrendering their love and respect for the school. One former student wrote President Rudder to congratulate him on his decision to admit women. He praised Rudder's insight in recognizing the need for such changes in order to continue "efforts for multiple programs of excellence furthering higher education."<sup>32</sup> Another former student commended the Board for admitting women, and encouraged the board to take the next step and open enrollment to all scholastically eligible women and drop the restrictions, of having to be the wife or daughter of a student or faculty member, that were currently in place. He disagreed with the prevailing feeling among many of those opposing coeducation that women would destroy the traditions that made A&M the great school that they enjoyed. He believed that nothing could destroy the history, prestige or tradition "because it is made."<sup>33</sup> The *Battalion* also ran a letter from a former

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<sup>32</sup> Richard H. Harrison III, Letters to President Rudder concerning coeducation, University Archives TAMU, President's Office Papers, Coeducation, Box 82, February 11, 1965.

<sup>33</sup> Waller T. Burns, Jr. '20, Letters to President Rudder concerning coeducation, University Archives TAMU, President's Office Papers, Coeducation, Box 66, June 5, 1963.

student who attempted to quell fears that all tradition would be destroyed. He expressed that “loyalty is much deeper than co-education, integration, or any other changes the administration or board might feel necessary to further the advancement of our great university.”<sup>34</sup>

While there were a few examples of former students showing support for the changes at A&M, the support from the student body was not so obvious. It is interesting that the subject of racial integration elicited some support from students, but any support for the admission of women was almost non-existent in letters to the president and editor.

The summer and fall of 1963 introduced great and unprecedented changes at A&M. For the first time, African Americans attended classes, and women returned to the campus under restricted enrollment qualifications. Possibly because of the larger number of women on campus, 152, verses only four blacks, their limited numbers seemed less threatening than in other schools across the South. Women’s presence on campus, regardless of the restrictions, completely captured the attention of the student body and former students from around the state. There was great fear that their inclusion would destroy A&M, because of the perceived lack of their ability to understand or carry on the beloved traditions. Some felt that the women threatened the military tradition and school spirit. Perhaps loyal Aggies found it easier to blame women than to admit that their beloved administrators were responsible for the changes.

Clearly, the reaction of the current and former students was strongly negative towards the admission of women, and efforts on the part of administration and students to accommodate them once their presence was real was obviously lacking. Women had to file lawsuits to gain admittance and then had to continue their fight for acceptance once

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<sup>34</sup> Marion C. Pugh '41, “Sound Off,” *The Battalion*, October 11, 1963.



on campus. Neither the students nor the administration were eager to aid in women's adjustment. However, as difficult as their fight was to find a niche and enjoy campus life, it would reap much greater results and rewards than the eventual struggle of African Americans. While women's initial admission seemed to ignite much more response from Aggies, their eventual adjustment attracted much less attention than the struggle for African American adjustment on campus would in the following years.

### CHAPTER III

#### BLACK STUDENTS STRUGGLE FOR ACCEPTANCE AND A PLACE ON CAMPUS

While African-Americans and women gained admission to Texas A&M in the summer of 1963, the road that lay ahead was not smooth, despite the lack of organized protest by the student body. The situation was worse for African Americans, whose numbers were low in 1963, and remained low throughout the following decade. Most white students did not protest their entrance, but neither did they welcome African Americans with open arms. The struggle to gain admission was easy compared to the true challenge of becoming a real part of the campus life. Over the years, black Aggies would struggle for acceptance by the student body and participation in the full college experience that included extracurricular activities, friends, and lifetime memories. The white student body was for the most part respectful of the policies of the administration, and did not react as students at other southern universities, to the desegregation of A&M. Clearly there was an absence of violence toward blacks, but there was also somewhat of an absence of tolerance for the introduction of anything new that would disrupt their heritage and tradition that had led them into the 1960s. It was this resistance and fear of altered traditions that would mark the relations between the students over the next ten years as African-Americans and women struggled to fit in and gain equal rights on campus.

Somehow, women were able to integrate in spite of the opposition on campus. The male students remained hostile, and the administration only marginally less so.

Although university officials “welcomed” the women to campus, they did little to accommodate them. Few buildings were equipped for the addition of women. Classroom buildings lacked restrooms for females, and the first female dormitories were not opened until the fall of 1972. Until September 1971, the university admitted women with restrictions laid out by the board in 1963. Finally, in 1971, the catalog read, “Texas A&M University is a coeducational university admitting all qualified men and women to all academic studies on the same basis without regard to race, creed, color or national origin.” By 1974, 25 percent of the student body consisted of women<sup>1</sup>, and by the spring of 2000, their numbers had grown to almost equal those of men.<sup>2</sup>

The great contrast in enrollment figures for African American students provided another possible explanation for the lack of open protests or acts of violence. The number started out low and experienced little change throughout the decade of the 60s. In the fall of 1963, out of a total of 7,813 students, 152 women were registered to attend classes, while only four African-Americans enrolled.<sup>3</sup> By 1969, only fifteen African-American students were enrolled at Texas A&M. With such low attendance and basically stagnant growth rate of black students attending, there was not much strength in numbers. It would have been very easy for A&M students to ignore the reality of integration.

A series of articles for *The Battalion* in the early 1970s illustrated that being ignored was an integral part of black students’ A&M experience. Betty Hanks, ’69 chose to attend A&M because she was from Bryan and it was close to home. She said that she

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<sup>1</sup> Dethloff, *A Centennial History of Texas A&M University, 1976-1976, Second ed.*, 163.

<sup>2</sup> Garcia, Rolando, “Figures show decline in enrollment,” *The Battalion*, 21 February 2000, 1.

<sup>3</sup> “First Enrollment Totals Smaller Than ’62 Count: 4 Negroes, 152 Women included,” *The Battalion*, 17 September 1963, 1.

did not see color. Even though she would be the only black person in her class, “it never really bothered [her]. Most people didn’t act like [color] was a factor either.”<sup>4</sup> Others, however, experienced worse treatment. James Courtney said that although there were no riots, protests, or blocked doors by the governor, he and the other African-American students were not welcomed by the white students. For the most part, he went unnoticed. There were times, however, when he was spat upon, or when his books were knocked out of his hands. Basically, the students looked through him, and not at him.<sup>5</sup>

Another student and athlete, Samuel Williams, was one of only three blacks in the Corp when it was still mandatory. For him, the worst experience with racism was being forced to hear and sing “nigger jody.”<sup>6</sup> He left the Corps to play on the football team, where his experience worsened. He and J.T. Reynolds were the first blacks on the football team. The other football players did not want them there and “were told to get rid” of Williams and Reynolds. Ultimately, Williams was not allowed to play, despite being told that he was the most talented wide receiver in the Southwest Conference.<sup>7</sup> These experiences indicated a reality that was not being reported by the administration or the papers. While the university was successful in creating a public image of tolerance, problems existed in the reality of adjustment and acceptance of the black student in campus life.

Other black students acknowledged the racism, which existed on the campus, but were still able to succeed and actually speak of A&M fondly. James Courtney, who was twenty-four years old when he came to A&M after completing military service in the

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<sup>4</sup> “Reception to Honor African Americans,” *The Battalion*, 10 January 1969.

<sup>5</sup> Jennifer Smith, “Trials, tribulations of first black students,” *The Battalion*, 8 February 1994.

<sup>6</sup> A jody is a military cadence sung when the soldiers are marching or running in formation.

<sup>7</sup> Smith, “Trials, tribulations.”

Marine Corps, commented that he “was young and didn’t really understand the importance of what [he] was doing.” The problems he experienced came from the white students. “The school system was committed to integration.” This comment would surely have pleased the administration, because this student was being respectful toward authority, not stepping out of his proper place, and the positive image of the university has been preserved. Courtney added that while the school administration and faculty welcomed him, he was warned by many people not to go to A&M. After watching other black students around the country struggle to attend segregated schools, Courtney said that he was expecting the worst when he came to A&M. He reported, however, that he experienced little harassment while at A&M, and that he prospered after graduation.

Courtney was the first African American to complete a bachelor’s degree at A&M, receiving a veterinary science degree in 1967 and earning a doctoral degree in veterinary science in 1970. He said that he would not trade his experience at A&M for anything. He stated, “It was something I was committed to doing. When I look back, it looks hard to do, but I knew I was going to be a veterinarian, and I knew I was going to Texas A&M.” He went on to praise the university: “If there’s a better university than Texas A&M, I don’t know where it is.”<sup>8</sup> Courtney was truly an advocate of the university and one that the university would want to report and share his experiences as a black student at A&M in the 1960s.

Other black students did not share Courtney’s positive outlook on A&M’s dedication to desegregation. Taking their cue from the growing militancy of the Black Power movement, a group of fifteen to twenty African American students formed an organization called the Afro-American Society. Members of this group felt that the

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<sup>8</sup> Smith, “Trials, tribulations.”

administration was only giving lip service to equality. These young men and women believed that the only way the situation would change was to force the administration's hand.

Consequently on May 2, 1969, the Afro-American Society issued a list of eight demands to the administration. Dissatisfied with the administration's efforts toward the true integration of blacks on the A&M campus, they wanted the administration to recognize the Afro-American society as an on-campus organization and to reserve a position for a black student on the Civilian Student Council. They also demanded the immediate hiring of a black counselor to work in counseling and testing. This new counselor, who would be approved by the black students, would serve as a liaison between black students and the administration. Desiring an improvement in recruitment policies, they demanded an investigation of current practices. The athletic program drew special attention. The society wanted more black athletes in all major sports, and more scholarship money. Seeing the Athletic Director, Gene Stallings, as the problem, they recommended firing him. Moving on to academics, they demanded a "truer representation of the role and scope of the Black man in the compulsory American History courses," as well as the addition of other black history courses.<sup>9</sup> Obviously in their view, more black literature would be needed for the library. Finally, they demanded a university-financed program to aid in the recruitment of black high school students by black A&M students.

The final paragraph's strong wording was perceived and interpreted as a threat by the student body and administration. It stated that if these demands were not met by the

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<sup>9</sup> "Manifesto," List of Demands presented to President Rudder, 2 May 1969, University Archives TAMU, President's Office Papers, box 110-20.

third week in September, 1969, the Afro-American Society would “find it necessary to take appropriate action.” They explained that they did not seek confrontation, but wanted to “make it crystal clear, that we are prepared to meet force—with force, understanding—with understanding and restraint—with restraint.”<sup>10</sup> These words did not directly warn of any specific actions, but they were enough for the university to defend the strong stand they would soon take against the demands.

Considering the situation on other campuses, this list appeared almost innocent. After all, the Afro-American Society was only asking for what A&M had already said they would deliver—equal education for both black and white students. The deadline seemed reasonable to the black students since it gave the administration four months to comply. The administration never really considered the demands, interpreting them as a threat. Rudder dismissed them as the work of a dangerous group of radicals.

Only a few days later on May 5, 1969, the president of the Board of Directors, Clyde H. Wells, called a special meeting of the board to discuss the situation. The meeting was brief and the response authoritative. Referring to A&M’s regulations governing student conduct, the board announced that the Afro-American Society had violated the rules. This violation negated any action on the Manifesto’s demands. “These regulations are the basic ethical standards under which we live and operate. Provisions are made for changes when needed, but these regulations must not and will not be brushed aside to serve the whim of any individual or group.”<sup>11</sup> Broadening the discussion, the board expanded on the laws that govern a democratic society, and emphasized the university’s responsibility to the people of Texas to uphold its own

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<sup>10</sup> “Manifesto”

<sup>11</sup> “Minutes of a Special Called Meeting of the Board of Directors of the Texas A&M University System,” 5 May 1969, University Archives TAMU, President’s Office Papers, box 110-20.

policies. Therefore, the Board concluded that the “doors of Texas A&M University have been, and will continue to be, open for orderly, constructive change as recommended by anyone with noble purpose. But change which would disrupt due academic processes – change thrust upon this institution under the ugly veil of threat or demand – will not be considered or tolerated.”<sup>12</sup>

Students, former students, newspapers, and citizens from all over the state and nation loudly applauded this strong stand taken by President Rudder and the Board of Directors. *The Austin American Statesman* wrote that President Rudder may “be setting the pace in a trend toward administrative backbone.” They applauded his courage.<sup>13</sup> *The Bryan Daily Eagle* reported that the A&M Student Council commended the Board of Directors and President Rudder for refusing to hear or discuss any threats or demands from any organization.<sup>14</sup> The story even made the paper in London, where the *Daily Mirror* reported the incident in the article, “A&M Board Balks at Threat of Force” in their June fourth edition.<sup>15</sup>

Led by the Student Senate, the students also supported the administration’s actions. The Student Senate emphasized, as the administration had, that it would not consider any demands or threats from any group, student, faculty, or administration. Bill Carter, Student Senate President, stated that given the current trends in society and the administration’s firm response to student dissent, students at A&M would not get anywhere telling the administration what to do.<sup>16</sup> Not surprisingly, for the most part, the

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<sup>12</sup> “Minutes.”

<sup>13</sup> “Comment: Schools Lay Down Rules,” *Austin American Statesman*, 7 May 1969, 4.

<sup>14</sup> “Student Senate Commends Rudder, A&M Directors,” *The Bryan Daily Eagle*, 9 May 1969.

<sup>15</sup> “A&M Board Balks at Threat of Force,” *Daily Mirror* (London), 4 June 1969, University Archives TAMU, President’s Office Papers.

<sup>16</sup> “Student Senate Commends Rudder, A&M Directors.”



majority of white students appeared to agree with administration policies. The furor over women's admission had died down, and the student body and administration were again living together more harmoniously.

After the rejection of their demands, African American students continued to try to communicate with the administration to have their concerns heard. Chairman of the Committee on Black Student Affairs, Kenneth A. Lewallen, issued a statement supporting the black students' actions. He stated that the "majority of the members of the committee overwhelmingly believe that the orderly procedure taken by the Afro-American Society is a healthy sign of social protest and dissent."<sup>17</sup> After a meeting with President Rudder on May 14, 1969, Allen Giles, spokesman for the students, stated that the major "hang-up" was that President Rudder refused to recognize the problems of the African American student on his campus. According to Giles, "Rudder later acknowledged the problems claimed by the black students, but said that the students caused the problems themselves."<sup>18</sup> Rudder stated that he would remove any real obstacles in the way of the black students' education, but argued that these demands were "not in keeping with good education." Giles responded that the demands had not been designed to evoke the strong policy statement from the A&M Board of Directors. The "appropriate action" promised in the Manifesto would have been more in the nature of a boycott, and would have been "strictly non-violent."<sup>19</sup>

Even with these clarifications of "appropriate action," and meetings with the president, the letters and responses poured in to the president's office supporting the Board's actions. These letters of support came from former students, current faculty, and

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<sup>17</sup> "Student Senate Commends Rudder, A&M Directors."

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

citizens from around the state. One citizen praised the Board's reply to the demands for its quickness, decisiveness, and accurateness. He stated his support for "whatever extent may be necessary to maintain discipline, obedience and undisputed control of Texas A&M."<sup>20</sup> A faculty member wrote President Rudder stating that he was "totally opposed to blacks or SDS members breaking the law or interfering with our affairs either on or off campus." He went on to say that if confrontation should take place, he was available to assist in neutralizing it.<sup>21</sup> In addition to these letters, parents of a future student wrote the president to commend his strong actions. They felt that "if more college and university administrators and boards would stand firm...our American educational system would be much better off." They concluded by reaffirming their confidence in the university that their son had chosen to attend.<sup>22</sup>

Letters from former students were somewhat harsher in their criticisms of the African American students while praising the administration's handling of the situation. One former student addressed his letter,

Dear General, Regardless of the problems being experienced by other colleges and universities across the country because of their jelly-spined administrators, certainly there is no reason why Texas A&M University should lay down and play dead in face of ridiculous demands by a very small group regardless of race, religion, creed, color or what-have-you. We of A&M are different and we certainly want to stay that way.<sup>23</sup>

Another former student was not surprised by the actions of the black students because of the trends of the times which included militancy of student activists and their "unreasonable demands of the schools over the country." He praised the student body

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<sup>20</sup> Tommie E. Stuard, "Letter to President Rudder and Mr. Clyde Wells, Chairman of the Board TAMU," 9 May 1969, University Archives TAMU, President's Office Papers, box 110-20.

<sup>21</sup> Willard A. Taber, Professor Institute of Life Science Department of Biology, "Letter to President Rudder," 11 May 1969, University Archives TAMU, President's Office Papers, box 110-20.

<sup>22</sup> Mr. and Mrs. Kermet Seabourn, "Letter to President Rudder," 13 May 1969, University Archives TAMU, President's Office Papers, box 110-20.

<sup>23</sup> L.S. Pawkett '34, "Letter to President Rudder," 16 May 1969, University Archives TAMU, President's Office Papers, box 110-20.

and Board of Directors for their strong reaction against the demands and lack of tolerance for such activity.<sup>24</sup>

Racism clearly emerged in many of the letters. One former student was much more blunt: "Get rid of those damn Negroes. Don't take one thing off of them."<sup>25</sup> Other letters, even more explicitly racist, urged the administration to expel African Americans from campus. These letters filled with racial slurs and degradation of African Americans, certainly indicated a deep, abiding racism on campus. White students' criticism of blacks was subdued as long as the numbers of blacks attending remained small, and the black student population remained quiet. When blacks tried to organize and obtain equal rights and access to an education, the students and former students were much more quick to respond and express their distaste for such activity. Basically, they seemed to want the blacks "kept in their proper place."

While the university administration was willing to legally admit African Americans, their social admittance and acceptance was not so easily achieved. The numbers of blacks who were admitted and who attended were small and remained so through the 1960s into the 1970s. However, there were several who made the choice to attend A&M even in the face of probable racism and exclusion from campus life. It was some of those same individuals who also chose to participate actively in school activities in an effort to make the school more their own. Some became members of the Corps of Cadets, while others attempted to form groups such as the Afro-American Society (AAS) to aid blacks on campus adjust to college life and life at A&M. The AAS also served as a

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<sup>24</sup> Gradie W. Turner, '20, "Letter to President Rudder," May 1969, University Archives TAMU, President's Office Papers, box 110-20.

<sup>25</sup> Robert Gault III '49, "Letter to President Rudder," 2 May 1969, University Archives TAMU, President's Office Papers, box 110-20.

single organization in which the blacks could unify and form a base of power in order to initiate change. However, their efforts revealed continued racism and also the limitations of true tolerance on the part of the administration and current and former students of the university. While the eighty-seven year segregation of blacks and women had finally ended in 1963, the struggle for blacks at A&M to truly bring about change was only just beginning.

## CHAPTER IV

### UNIVERSITY OFFICIALS RESPOND TO THE TURMOIL OF CHANGE: THE INTEGRATION OF WOMEN AND BLACKS, AND STUDENT ACTIVISM

The relative calm in College Station, Texas, amid so many changes for the university, was perhaps more a result of a very successful effort from the administration in constructing and maintaining a desired image, than a reality of toleration and self-control. Having survived the potentially radical additions of blacks and women, the university wanted to present itself as a model university that allowed reasonable change, but maintained order and civility. This goal was once again challenged as the 1960s ushered in the Vietnam era and the student activism that accompanied it.

The student body appeared to help the administration maintain that image. Unlike on most campuses, students at A&M appeared to be animated in their efforts to limit change and support established institutions. This vigorous support of both the administration and the nation surely pleased university officials in their continued desire to show everyone how calm A&M students remained amidst social change and turmoil. The majority of the protests and letters to the student newspaper voiced approval of both student and administration attempts to curtail the spread of dissent from within as well as from outside sources. In stark contrast to the other universities around the nation and state, A&M students established a national reputation as a “model” school.

The A&M student body’s effort to remain faithful to established institutions and authority was all the more incredible because of the circumstances in which it happened. As American military involvement in Vietnam increased in 1968-1970, so did student

protests on college campuses around the nation. Students, and a growing number of others around the country, disagreed with the American government's efforts to support the South Vietnamese government's war against dissidents and communists. Resenting the escalating cost in dollars and lives, antiwar protestors began to challenge the authority of the president and government in domestic as well as foreign policy decisions. As the demonstrations, many of which centered on college campuses grew larger and more militant, so did the response of both university and governmental authorities. Eventually, students experienced violence themselves as the states and the federal government called out their police forces to control the protests and demonstrations. This war truly polarized the nation.<sup>1</sup>

In fact, student activism concerning the Vietnam War on the A&M campus manifested itself in a conscious effort to show support for the war. An examination of articles in and letters to the editor of *The Battalion*, throughout the 1960s and more specifically in 1969 and 1970,<sup>2</sup> revealed an overwhelming support for the soldiers in particular and the American effort in Vietnam in general. Although some stories discussed the progression of the war, (mostly reprinted from the Associated Press), the *Battalion* editors refrained from printing any controversial articles concerning the war or the government's policies in Vietnam. Instead, they covered former students and young Aggies who were serving in Vietnam. They also frequently reported any deaths. For example, for most of the 1969 academic year, the *Battalion* carried such articles as “'67

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<sup>1</sup> Background information on the Vietnam War and student activism can be found in George C. Herring, *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam 1950-1975*, second ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1986).

<sup>2</sup> The years 1969 and 1970 were chosen because of the heightened intensity of the war and student protests during those years. For instance the highest number of troops were in Vietnam beginning in February 1969.

Grad Oats Dies in Vietnam,” “Pilot, ’66 Grad, Survives Viet Hit,” “Aggie Awarded AF Cross for VN Bomb Raid,” “Medals Awarded for VN Service,” “Aggie Captain Killed in VN,” and “1966 Yell Leader Killed in Vietnam.”<sup>19</sup> Even as the war escalated, the Aggies continued their support for their “buddies” fighting for their country.

Their affirmation of the war and the soldier paid off in positive publicity for the school. On Wednesday, February 12, 1969 the *Battalion* reported that NBC-TV was sending a news crew to film the corps for the “Huntley-Brinkley News.” According to the article, the Pentagon “suggested NBC cameras be turned on Texas A&M to show ‘the other side of the coin,’ or where the ROTC program works the way it was designed.”<sup>3</sup> Aggies took pride in the fact that the Pentagon recognized their military accomplishments and sound ROTC program.

People from around the nation also took notice of A&M and wrote President Rudder in praise of the university and its ability to resist the trends of the sixties. Frank Harvey, of Hackettstown, New Jersey, wrote: “Thank God we still have people who are ready to fight for our country instead of selling it down the river. You’ve got the respect and backing of millions of Americans.”<sup>4</sup> Will Ellis, of Wilmette, Illinois, wrote to the Dean of Men, expressing the tremendous admiration for A&M that the television spot generated. He added that maybe being clean physically “begats clean in other ways,” and praised A&M for the absence of any riots, sit-ins, or other “disruptive activity” on

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<sup>3</sup> “NBC-TV newsmen to Film Corps for Huntley-Brinkley,” *The Battalion*, 12 February 1969, 1.

<sup>4</sup> Frank Harvey, “Telegram to President Rudder,” 26 February 1969, University Archives TAMU, President’s Office Papers.

campus.<sup>5</sup> This attention from the Pentagon, news programs, and American citizens further validated their patriotism and support for their fellow students serving in Vietnam.

While conservatism dominated campus life, leftist student activists did attempt to bring “radical” groups to campus. In December, 1968, Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) sought official recognition as a student organization on the A&M campus. By this time, most Americans regarded SDS as the leading antiwar/radical student organization. On December 12, 1968, the Student Council passed a resolution refusing SDS permission to organize on campus.<sup>6</sup> The Student Senate remained consistent in this practice of denying official recognition to groups or actions deemed radical or that threatened any type of dissent on the campus. According to the school paper, and presidential papers, the evidence indicated that school administrators, most of the student body, and former students supported and applauded these decisions.

Student leaders appeared to take their cue from President Rudder. Rudder strongly discouraged any organized dissent on the campus, and praised the student body when they rejected such organizations as the SDS and the antiwar movement. Rudder closed the 1968-1969 school year with a speech encouraging students to reject outside forms of dissent, and opened the new academic year in the fall of 1969 on the same note. In May, he urged students to spend little time with those who in the "name of change, want to bring down the 'establishment' without offering something better in its place." He then offered his support to the students in their campaign against dissent. He told them

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<sup>5</sup> Will S. Ellis, “Letter to the Dean of Men,” 1 March 1969, University Archives TAMU, President’s Office Papers.

<sup>6</sup> “Council Opposes A&M Recognition,” *The Battalion*, 13 December 1968, 1.



that "without reservation, if you students bring to my attention anything that is standing in the way of your getting an education here, I'll do my best to remove it."<sup>7</sup>

At a time when many college campuses were experiencing the shock of turmoil and rioting, "Texas A&M felt some of the unrest, but only minimally."<sup>8</sup> President Rudder was a leader that promoted change for the betterment and survival of the university, yet at the same time took great pride in the university's long tradition of obedience and patriotism toward authority and the nation. While he desired the image of the school to reflect this traditional, calm, and conservative student, he had little tolerance for the radicalism of the 1960s. He clearly did not want any of the student dissent present on other campuses around the nation to find its way onto the A&M campus. Rudder promised a 'hell of a fight' to any would-be troublemakers at Aggieland." Rudder was quite outspoken against the trends of stereotypical hippie dress and hair. He claimed that "a prof who wears a beard in the classroom is just trying to substitute a beard for knowledge."<sup>9</sup> The basic character of the A&M student, combined with a school president who did not tolerate radical dress or behavior, helped to create an environment in which dissent and antiwar activism was not easily or readily tolerated.

As the new school year commenced in 1969, Rudder again spoke to cadet leaders and warned them that the Corps of Cadets would be the number one target of "Kooks, anti-militarists and just plain lousy Americans." Encouraging the cadets to stand up to any attack by such groups, he guaranteed them that they "won't walk alone." He went on to warn the students that the attacks would come from within and from outside the

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<sup>7</sup> "Rudder Advises 'Orderly Change,'" *The Battalion*, 16 May 1969, 1.

<sup>8</sup> Dethloff, *A Centennial History of Texas A&M University, 1876-1976*, Volume I, 574.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

university; there were people in the nation and on the campus "who would wipe ROTC off the face of the earth." Proudly, he claimed, "A&M's record as a source of officers during two world wars, the Korean and Vietnam conflicts is one of the reasons the university will be in the dissidents' sights." Concluding, he warned them that "if seed sown among us by dissidents falls on fertile ground, we're going to have a sorry year. If the dissention falls on thistles, thorns, and rocky ground, the year will be great."<sup>10</sup> Clearly President Rudder had no tolerance or desire for any organized student dissent groups on the campus, and he gave encouragement to the student body to reject and organize against any forms of protest.

Aggies' reaction to the Moratorium on Vietnam provides further evidence of the university's efforts to stifle dissent. Ostensibly a day of mourning for the soldiers lost in the Vietnam War, the national leaders of the Moratorium hoped to spark debate about the war itself. Students at A&M spent the week prior to the event, which was scheduled for Wednesday October 15, 1969, debating what type of recognition it would receive on campus. On October 10, the Student Senate recommended that the university not officially dismiss classes or grant excused absences for students wishing to participate in the Moratorium. Some senators argued that the "senate should have been more explicit concerning the question of a student's right to express dissent on campus."<sup>11</sup> Most senators, however, defended their ruling, citing a university regulation under the discipline code that stated that a "student may be dismissed or suspended for not less than a semester for 'membership in any group that might bring discredit to the University."<sup>12</sup> This statement made by the senators clearly showed that both students and the university

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<sup>10</sup> "Rudder Sees Cadet Corps as First Target of 'Kooks,'" *The Battalion*, 20 September 1969, 1.

<sup>11</sup> Dave Mayes, "Official 'No' Given on Moratorium," *The Battalion*, 10 October 1969, 1.

<sup>12</sup> "Officials to Ratify Senate Decision," *The Battalion*, 14 October 1969, 2.

viewed the antiwar movement and any dissent among students as forces that might discredit the university and create a negative image of Texas A&M and its student body.

Not everyone agreed with the senate's opinion. Jim Stephenson, a senior from Louisiana, criticized the Student Senate and A&M. He argued that "A&M isn't one of the more progressive schools in the field of student rights...some individuals on campus feel that a student's right to express himself is limited a little more than by those boundaries set by the Constitution."<sup>13</sup> The students who favored an official recognition of the Moratorium told the senate that students only wanted a debate and to read off names of deceased veterans. The senate responded that A&M had plenty of memorials to fallen veterans with more currently being planned.

On Monday, October 13, the University Executive Committee ratified the Student Senate decision and refused the use of campus facilities to students who desired to participate in the Moratorium. The Campus Committee of Concern (CCOC) simply organized activities off campus. They planned to debate the war in Vietnam and wear black armbands. Although they scheduled a march through town, it was cancelled without explanation. In an editorial, one student criticized the university for denying students' rights when they "conflict with administration."<sup>14</sup> Protests such as these, however, fell on deaf ears.

The Moratorium on Wednesday, October 15, 1969, generated various reactions on the campus. Groups gathered peacefully throughout the day in front of the Academic Building to discuss and debate America's involvement in the Vietnam War. While protesters wore black armbands, many students wore red, white, and blue armbands or

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<sup>13</sup> "Student Dissent: When at A&M?" *The Battalion*, 14 October 1969, 2.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

flag decals on their shirts. In addition to flying American flags, students displayed signs outside the Corps dorm windows that read, "Gig'em U.S.A.." <sup>15</sup> A picture in the *Battalion*, revealed those students who participated in the Moratorium. Apparently they were allowed to gather peacefully, but were met with clearly expressed patriotism from many of their fellow students. While those students who wore red, white, and blue showed support for America, none specifically stated that they supported the decisions made to continue or escalate the fighting. The article further described that there was clear support for the soldiers, and a sense of patriotism among these students, but not necessarily a blind loyalty to the war effort.

A similar situation resulted following the American invasion of Cambodia in May, 1970, and the subsequent student protests across the nation. The *Battalion* reported on the invasion and escalation of the war, but offered little reaction to the further entrenchment of American soldiers in Vietnam. Criticism seemed to be limited to the increased amount of dissent and demonstrations around the nation. When student anger and protests climaxed in crisis and tragedy at Kent State University <sup>16</sup>, the A&M

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<sup>15</sup> "Moratorium Day Spawns Varied Reactions at A&M," *The Battalion*, 16 October 1969, 1.

<sup>16</sup> When Nixon escalated the war in April of 1970 by sending American troops into Cambodia, activity in the antiwar movement increased correspondingly. Events reached a climax with the killing of four students at Kent State University in Kent, Ohio on May 4, 1970. Although beginning as a peaceful protest against the Cambodian invasion on the campus Commons on May 1, a confused series of actions and reactions in the downtown area during the night, involving students, townspeople, and outsiders, resulted in a riot, property damage and arrests. The mayor of Kent declared a state of emergency and requested the help of the National Guard, without consulting university officials. During the night of May 2, someone torched the campus ROTC building and Troop G of the Guard was called in to occupy the campus. They were trained to put down strikes and riots but not to prevent, manage, or resolve conflict. On May 3, Guardsmen charged a group of students who were engaged in a sit-in at a downtown intersection, stabbing several with their bayonets and arresting many others. The confrontation continued into May 4, and the exhausted, tense, and angry Guardsmen aimed their rifles and fired off several rounds for a period of thirteen seconds at a crowd of students. Many of these students had been protesting the Guard's presence and behavior on campus, but some of them were simply bystanders or on their way to other campus locations. When the shooting finally ended, four students were dead and nine were wounded. Students across the nation reacted in the days following the incident. Over 4,350,000 students nationwide participated in demonstrations against the Kent State killings and the invasion of Cambodia at over 1,300 universities and colleges during

newspaper barely seemed to notice.<sup>17</sup> The front page on May 5 included headlines about sporting events, the Mother of the Year at Parent's Weekend, and student elections. On page three, there was a small headline and article from the Associated Press, "4 Students Die at Kent State."<sup>18</sup> On the second day following the shootings, *The Battalion* carried several articles on the shootings and the fallout events affecting campuses around the nation as well as the A&M campus. The Student Senate met on May 5th to consider a resolution on the Kent State killings. Up for debate was a resolution condemning the National Guard. The CCOC also asked students to wear black armbands to protest the action of the troops.<sup>19</sup>

Instead of the proposed resolution, however, the A&M senate debated whether or not to lower the flags on campus in honor of the four college students who were killed by the National Guard. The student senators refused to lower the flag in front of the Academic Building because, as some said, "the action might be interpreted on campus and across the state as a show of support for student disruption." Head Yell Leader, Sam Torn, argued that "the flag should only be lowered to mourn the passing of some national figure, and that most people would take the senate action as a condemnation of the Ohio National Guard." Two other students added that if they lowered the flag for the students from Kent State, then "it should be lowered everyday for those killed in Vietnam."<sup>20</sup>

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the month of May. Authorities across the nation responded by closing down one-fifth of America's colleges for periods ranging from one day to the remainder of the spring semester.

<sup>17</sup> Additional background information on the invasion of Cambodia and Kent State can be found in the following sources: Scott L. Bills, ed., *Kent State/May 4: Echoes Through a Decade* (Kent, Ohio: The Kent State University Press, 1982); Robert O'Neil, John P. Morris, and Raymond Mack, *No Heroes, No Villains: New Perspectives on Kent State and Jackson State* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Inc., 1972).

<sup>18</sup> "4 Students Die at Kent State," *The Battalion*, 5 May 1970, 3.

<sup>19</sup> "Senate to Consider Resolution on Kent State Deaths Tonight" *The Battalion*, 6 May 1970, 1.

<sup>20</sup> Dave Mayes, "Violence Deplored, Sympathy Expressed: But Senators Don's Lower Flag," *The Battalion*, 7 May 1970, 1.

Some students at A&M showed their continued disapproval of the war, and their protest against the killings by wearing black armbands. A peaceful rally in front of the Academic building met with no efforts to suppress it. Interestingly, the paper chose not to report these demonstrations in detail. There were no major articles or pictures in the *Battalion* covering these small movements against the war. Moreover, the majority of the student body appeared to offer little support to these fledgling efforts. Letters to the editor and activities on campus continued to condemn the antiwar movement and the drastic increase in student demonstrations across the nation.

While not all of the arguments of the students who wrote the editor were historically or academically sound, they remain valuable evidence of the mood on the campus during the Vietnam War amid all of the student outrage and protest on other campuses. For example, one student wrote that

those claiming to have a 'social conscience' and a 'moral backbone' need to direct energies toward learning more about the intricacies of government and the way policy is developed than making uneducated demands and irrational plans that contribute to the problem rather than the solution.<sup>21</sup>

Another student defended the National Guard's actions, stating that although he regretted that four students lost their lives, "it must be remembered that those who were killed were in front of a mob that was throwing rocks, [and] bricks." He went on to condemn any administration for lowering the flag in honor of those students. Lowering the flag would do a "greater disservice to the flag than most radicals in any way."<sup>22</sup> These students seemed almost to feel that the Kent State students got what they deserved.

The *Battalion* did print at least one letter supporting the student protests against Cambodia and the extension of the war. This student praised the Kent State students for

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<sup>21</sup> Steve Nesbitt, "Letter to the Editor," *The Battalion*, 8 May 1970, 2.

<sup>22</sup> Stanley Collins '73, "Letter to the Editor," *The Battalion*, 8 May 1970, 2.

protesting an "extension of the war to Cambodia, an extension which the Senate's Foreign Relations Committee called illegal. America should be proud of its concerned citizens who risk being murdered to protest an unjust war."<sup>23</sup> These letters of support of student protest were few and far between. While the letters supporting student activism against the war were limited, perhaps the few that were printed were seen by the editor as necessary to promote healthy debate over such current and prominent national issues. However, this relative absence of dissent in student letters and editorials supported the public image that the university desired to project. A&M continued to be seen by current and former students as well as the rest of the nation as a bastion of conservatism and patriotism in the face of great pressure to question and aggressively attack authority and established traditions.

Former students also wrote to the *Battalion* in praise of A&M's calm response to Kent State. A graduate of the class of 1959 wrote *The Battalion* to congratulate the student body "for showing restraint and reason during the recent demonstrations throughout the U.S."<sup>24</sup> He further commended the way that students at Texas A&M handled themselves throughout the crisis. Another former student and current Vietnam soldier also wrote the paper to commend the student body for "its lack of physical action and mature attitude." Interestingly, he wrote in response to a news commentary by Paul Harvey that he had heard on the Armed Forces Radio and Television Service (AFRTS). He wrote that Paul Harvey, in a commentary on student unrest and violence in the nation, noted approvingly that "Texas A&M [was] not breaking the peace but keeping it." Harvey also said that "the student body president...told the Parents Day audience that

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<sup>23</sup> James M. Lucas, "Letter to the Editor," *The Battalion*, 12 May 1970, 2.

<sup>24</sup> W.O. Kelly, "Letter to the Editor," *The Battalion*, 15 May 1970, 2.

A&M students would not strike and promote violence." <sup>25</sup> Hearing Paul Harvey talk about Texas A&M in such a positive manner made this former student proud, as he felt that it probably did among most Aggies. Although he thought there was probably still dissent and disagreement with the war in Vietnam, he was proud that "at least Aggies don't resort to violence and destruction."<sup>26</sup>

A few factors perhaps explain why there was so little anti-war and anti-establishment protest at A&M. First, this was a military school. Many of its students obviously believed in and supported a strong military; otherwise, they would have chosen another university. Second, as previously stated, Texas A&M, founded as an agricultural and mechanical institution, required participation in the Corps of Cadets and was located in an isolated area far removed from any cities. Both the location and the coursework offered would attract conservative young men. Third, a conservative administration worked to encourage traditional ideals and practices and to limit strictly any kind of dissent.

Under the guidance of President Rudder, Texas A&M retained its conservative nature through the 1960s and 1970s, when campuses around the nation became immersed in conflict, protests, and increasing activism against the war. Aware of the dissention on college campuses, A&M students refused for the most part to participate. The administration clearly supported and promoted opposition to student activism and antiwar activity, in order to ensure the continuity of A&M's public image.

University officials and the student government would not tolerate student protests on campus, and they supported each other in their efforts to quell dissention on

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<sup>25</sup> Eugene Geninger '68, 9<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, "Letter to the Editor," *The Battalion*, 19 May 1970, 2.

<sup>26</sup> Geninger, "Letter to the Editor."



campus. While students on campuses around the nation intensified their antiwar efforts with the escalation of the Vietnam War, the students at Texas A&M supported the soldiers and usually the policies of the United States government. Often these soldiers were their "buddies" or classmates who were fighting and dying in Vietnam. There was a heightened sense of patriotism among students at A&M, as they showed support for the war in Vietnam and condemned those who demonstrated against the government. The conservative nature of the students who attended the university, coupled with the support given by university administration and the school's military history, seemed to provide the right environment for such resistance to student activism, during a time of unrest, dissent, and clear dissatisfaction with the American government.

President Rudder initiated some radical changes at the university, which included the ending of mandatory participation in the Corps of Cadets, and even more radical the admission of African Americans and women. The student body reacted more strongly to these decisions than to many of the developments of the Vietnam War. Somehow even into the decades that followed, Texas A&M maintained its conservative base, retained its traditions, and excelled in President Rudder's visions of the future for the university. At a time of social and political unrest, students at Texas A&M resisted or refused to acknowledge the changes in how the American government was perceived by other young people, and the role that students across the nation were invited to play in this antiwar movement and increased student activism.

Certainly the administration and strong supporters of Texas A&M were relieved with the lack of effort on the part of A&M students to protest the war and the nation's government. While the administration's task of maintaining its traditional and

conservative image in the face of desegregation proved challenging, it almost seemed that the students' lack of protest and dissent was something the university could hang its hat on and show the nation how great an example of calm and conservatism their institution could be. While other campuses were falling into disarray, A&M was almost championing itself as an example and institution for others to aspire to, and found support in their efforts from former students, and more effectively the national media. Through the calm on campus during the war, A&M truly could bask in their efforts at creating and maintaining the image of a calm, and civilized university environment.

## CONCLUSION

Administrators and students at Texas A&M used this conservative background and history to guide and stabilize them through the turbulent times of the late 1950s through the early 1970s. The students resisted major changes to the system that they prided themselves on preserving throughout the years of the school's existence. Former students and citizens around the nation praised the students for their relative calm during such unstable and unruly times on college campuses. Closer examination of the students' activities, however, revealed that the campus did not remain untouched or unscathed by the events that transpired during these decades. School administrators faced the daunting task of implementing changes that caused controversy among current and former students, while hoping to maintain its status as a model school of respect and tradition. This conservative, traditional, military and southern school received strong support from its former students and administration in its efforts to maintain the status quo.

The student body was by nature very conservative, and any introduction of any type of change was met with swift resistance. In particular, the integration of African Americans and women elicited strong reactions from students and former students. While these two groups fought to gain admittance and acceptance, the majority of the white male students fought equally as hard to keep women and blacks in their "proper place." Through their adamant desire to keep their school from changing, the students became quite active and vocal against their beloved university. Later, when student activism against the war swept the nation, A&M students were able to concentrate this energy of maintaining A&M's status quo outward toward a clearer enemy. Instead of

criticizing their own administration and doubting their leadership, students concentrated their efforts against a movement and group that seemed to threaten the university as well as their national government. Their actions to limit the activities of radical student groups received almost universal support from the school administration, former students, and “concerned” citizens from all over the country.

In light of this intense opposition, several factors explain how and why A&M changed at all. First, A&M had an extremely strong and respected leader in President Rudder. Even though his term as president of the university brought sweeping changes, he managed to guide the transition. Through it all, he was able to maintain order through the admission of blacks and women without losing the respect held for him and the university across the state. More importantly, students and former students continued to follow his lead even though they disagreed with his decisions. In fact, one recent graduate stated that A&M’s culture would never have allowed such alterations to tradition without the strong respect held for Rudder and his leadership.<sup>1</sup>

Second, ironically, the strong respect for traditions and desire to maintain them created a strong hesitancy in accepting any changes. Their respect for authority and tradition also mandated that students present themselves to the world as orderly and dignified. As a good soldier would, they were expected to obey authority. Just as a soldier follows an order he dislikes, so the Aggies followed Rudder because that was the way it was always done.

Of course, this obsession with tradition also explained the intense reactions of Aggies to some of the changes. In fact, the school still takes great pride in this

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<sup>1</sup> Suzanne Gamboa and Mike Ward, “Aggies’ traditions resistant to change,” *Austin American Statesman*, 7 May 2000, 17.

preservation of tradition. The current president of the university, in a recent interview, discussed how Texas A&M is “a place that respects [its] history and ...traditions and change is not something we celebrate.” A sociology professor further added that cultural changes are “particularly difficult in environments such as A&M where traditions are venerated”<sup>2</sup> This resistance to change in tradition and culture is firmly entrenched in the Aggie psyche, and created strength among the students which would aid in their fight against change.

This veneration of tradition does not completely explain the reaction of the university and student body to the admission of blacks and women. In particular, the hostility aroused by the admission of women indicates other factors at work. The larger number of female students obviously posed a greater threat to the status quo than the limited number of black students. In addition, as women moved into the classroom and the marketplace, many men worried that all of the old privileges were disappearing. Some even worried about their masculinity.

This lack of visible support of the women in the school paper or in response to the student demonstrations through the letters, related to the broader question of shifting gender roles. While the majority of civilian students favored the admission of women, they were still outnumbered by the cadet population. Perhaps there was an element of intimidation and fear of retaliation, combined with 1950's compulsion for conformity. Although these reforms occurred in the 60s, these students attending A&M were from conservative backgrounds, and showed great resistance to change. Historian K. A. Courdileone argued that in the decades following WWII the role of masculinity in America experienced challenges, and was sometimes seen as softening with the changing

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<sup>2</sup> Suzanne Gamboa and Mike Ward, “Aggies’ traditions resistant to change.”

roles of women. Women were sometimes blamed for the “unmanning of American men,” and any reputation for softness became “something like the political kiss of death.”<sup>3</sup> There was a fear of being perceived as weak when giving into “feelings,” or emotional issues. Perhaps those students who supported the right of these women to attend A&M feared the public criticism and ridicule if they supported women. Although not completely clear, this fear, whether real or perceived, might have kept the levels of support down.

Several factors also account for the reaction to the black students. Women and African Americans entered A&M in the summer of 1963, yet the uproar was aimed at the women rather than the blacks. However, the students’ seeming acceptance of blacks was probably the result of a less perceived threat at the time. The number of blacks who applied, attended, or showed interest was considerably less than that of women, and remains so even to present day. For example, as of February 2000, out of a total enrollment of 40,626, only 1,058 of those students were African American, whereas 18,942 students were women. Almost half of the student population is made up of women, but only a tiny fraction is made up of blacks. In fact the number of black students had even fallen from the previous spring, when 1,133 African Americans were enrolled.<sup>4</sup>

The numbers of African American students attending A&M have not been a threat since their original admittance. White Aggies’ true feelings surfaced when black Aggies attempted in 1969 to gain more equality on campus. Both the white students and the

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<sup>3</sup> K.A. Cuordileone, “‘Politics in an Age of Anxiety:’ Cold War Political Culture and the Crisis in American Masculinity, 1949-1960,” *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 87, No. 2, (September 2000), 524, 539.

<sup>4</sup> Rolando Garcia, “Figures Show decline in enrollment,” *The Battalion*, 21 February 2000, 1.

administration reacted strongly. The administration quickly and authoritatively refused the demands and showed complete lack of tolerance for any such dissident activity. Certainly the student body as a whole and the administration usually rejected radical behavior; the response to the black activists, however, revealed their racism as well. The language in letters supporting the administration's action revealed A&M's traditional southern background and values. Outraged at the black students' demands, one anonymous letter to Rudder urged Aggies to "give 'em hell!" He wrote that he had defended decent colored individuals since 1919, but these "inherently weak mentally Niggers...giving to demand recruitment of ill qualified Niggers to hear and defend the Aggie tradition and colors," should not be heard or given what they demanded. Further, he urged the school not to "bow down to a bunch of bombastic trash."<sup>5</sup> Another Aggie praised the administration's strong actions against the demands, and supported any policy necessary to "maintain discipline, obedience and undisputed control."<sup>6</sup> It is clear from these remarks that racism played a significant role in how and why black students struggled to find their place at Texas A&M. While the school was forced by financial and social pressures to admit black students, most white students, supported by the administration, clung tightly to the hope that they could keep the black students in their proper place, separate from mainstream campus life.

Racism was clearly a second factor in explaining not only the immediate reactions of white students but in the difficulties black students faced throughout their tenure at the school. While A&M was compliant to the letter of the law in desegregating the school,

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<sup>5</sup> Letter to President Rudder, 3 May 1969, University Archives TAMU, President's Office Papers, box 110-20.

<sup>6</sup> Tommie E. Stuart, Letter to President Rudder and Clyde Wells, Chairman of the Board, 9 May 1969, University Archives TAMU, President's Office Papers, box 110-20.

some policies were implemented officially, but not practiced in reality. For example the university implemented a policy of integrating the university without any restrictions “on participation of qualified students in any approved activities.”<sup>7</sup> Yet the administration did not officially approve or recognize any organization of African American students until the fall of 1970. After years of applying for official university recognition as a student organization, and continuously being denied, the Black Awareness Committee (BAC) finally obtained official recognition by the university. The BAC’s goals included promoting a “better understanding of black heritage and culture and to encourage close relationships among blacks at A&M.”<sup>8</sup> It seemed clear that the university was in no hurry to give black students any help in organizing or adjusting to the overwhelmingly white university.

Ironically, while the initial reaction to the admission of women was much more intense than the response to racial desegregation, in the end women flourished on campus while black students continue to struggle for recognition. Women currently make up about forty-six percent of the student population and participate in and carry on the cherished traditions of the school, while the position of black students has progressed very slowly to the point of stagnation. Much of the blame for this stagnation rests on a disinterested and unsupportive administration and student body. No radical actions or policies have been initiated by either to improve recruitment, which has remained basically unchanged since the original admission of blacks to the university back in 1963.

A&M is still known for its conservative and traditional base. Students continue to value tradition, and hold great respect for the military and authority. These traits draw

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<sup>7</sup> *Resolution: Statement of Policy-The Texas A&M University System*, 27 November 1963, University Archives TAMU, President’s Office Papers, box 110-20.

<sup>8</sup> “Black Awareness Committee explains organization, plans,” *The Battalion*, 2 August 1972.



conservative students to A&M, yet offend and turn away those students who do not desire such conformity. In their zeal to turn away radical, leftist change and movements, they too became activists. The white students were extremely active in their efforts to resist change and dissent among more liberal students. Their active and vocal disapproval of change and student dissent proved that A&M was not completely void of student activism. Rather it could be specified that they were very clearly organized and powerful in their efforts to resist change and maintain a desired status quo on their campus. In some ways they were dragged kicking and screaming into the age of equal rights and access to education and public institutions. They did not approve of students acting out against the government, and they prided themselves for maintaining a calm campus through desegregation and the social upheaval that accompanied the protests against the Vietnam War, yet in their efforts to quell such activity, they were in reality quite active themselves. However, the public image of the university remained one that was appealing to conservative, middle-class America, who longed for a return to calmer days. This calm on the A&M campus allowed the school administrators to continue to promote their good work in maintaining such an orderly campus in the wake of such turmoil that the decade of the 1960s would stir around the nation.

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