

CHAPTER 1

A Plantation System

Desegregation

When the first class of Black undergraduates enrolled as freshmen at Duke University in 1963, less than forty years had elapsed since the gift from James B. Duke that transformed Trinity College into a prominent southern university. During that time, the university had made great progress in realizing James Duke's vision of creating a school that would attain "a place of real leadership in the educational world." A magnificent gothic-style "West Campus" had been constructed just over a mile from the location of former Trinity College in Durham, North Carolina. Trinity's campus had been reconstructed and a Woman's College established on the site. Graduate and professional programs in more than twenty disciplines had been added, the undergraduate college had expanded, and the quality of both the faculty and the student body was on the rise. One observer noted that Duke's graduate school "was considerably beyond that of any other institution in the south" and was ready to become a leader nationally in a number of areas.¹

Despite these achievements, Duke's transformation into a prominent national academic institution was a work in progress. The school remained largely defined by its city, state, and region. In 1963 a significant portion of undergraduates were raised within two hundred to three hundred miles of the

school. More than 400 out of a total of 1,199 freshmen came from North Carolina. Alumni were also concentrated in the South, and fully 75 percent of university trustees came from the region, mostly from North and South Carolina. President Douglas Knight recalled board meetings during the 1960s characterized by a “high degree of gentility” that was both “southern” and “courtly.” Duke was the largest employer in Durham by a factor of two and a half. If Duke’s place in the region’s academic and business communities was changing, the school remained, in Knight’s view, both “dominant and isolated.”²

Duke’s location in North Carolina gave it a strong geographic foundation but also meant that the university embraced the powerful racial codes that defined the segregated Jim Crow South. The arrival on campus of Duke’s first Black undergraduates in 1963 marked the official end of segregation at the school. Although only five in number, the presence of these freshmen, who joined a small number of Black graduate and law students admitted a year earlier, meant that Duke’s history of racially exclusive admissions was over. Still, this step marked barely a beginning if the university were to confront the Jim Crow attitudes and practices that infused campus life.

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The transformation of Trinity College into Duke University occurred in 1924 with the creation of the Duke Endowment by James B. Duke. The businessman rose to prominence in the “New South” as the region struggled to replicate the economic success of the northern industrial revolution and become more a part of the Union and world. President of American Tobacco Company when still in his early thirties, Duke and his family also had extensive holdings in the textile sector. By 1899 the Dukes began to develop water power as a means of generating electricity for their textile operations. As Duke developed his interests in electric power, he began to look for ways to combine his business and philanthropic activities. The Duke Indenture—which established the Duke Endowment and gave it control of Duke Power Company—was the realization of this ambition.³

The sums involved in creating the Duke Endowment were enormous. Securities worth \$40 million, primarily in Duke Power Company, were turned over to the Endowment with a stipulation that 20 percent of its net income would be added to the Endowment until an additional \$40 million had been amassed. The beneficiaries of the Endowment fell into four categories—hospitals, Methodist Church–related organizations, nonprofits established for

the care of orphans, and educational institutions. By far the most substantial of the bequests—up to \$6 million—went to the establishment of Duke University. James Duke provided in the Indenture that Trinity would receive this bequest, along with an allocation of fully 32 percent of the Endowment’s annual net income, as long as the school changed its name to Duke University and amended its charter to provide for “perpetual existence.” Duke hoped that his largesse would allow Trinity to be transformed rapidly into the first research university in the emerging New South.⁴

In less than three weeks, Trinity’s trustees said yes. “We have found,” the board declared after its historic meeting, “that the University is to be developed according to plans that are perfectly in line with our hopes for the expansion” of Trinity College. On December 30, 1924, the legal formalities required for the transformation of Trinity into Duke University were completed.⁵

Duke did not intend that the university he endowed become a haven for free thought or the exchange of radical ideas. During this time, historian John Egerton wrote, “a rigid orthodoxy of thought and opinion governed virtually every discipline and field of study” at southern universities. Like other New South business leaders, Duke believed deeply in hard work and success in industry as the pathway to a productive life. “There ain’t a thrill in the world,” Duke once said, “to compare with building a business and watching it grow before your eyes.” His aspirations for Duke University were pragmatic. He valued education, he said in the Indenture, “conducted along sane and practical, as opposed to dogmatic and theoretical, lines,” and considered it, “next to religion, the greatest civilizing influence.” As for students, he sought only those “whose previous record shows a character, determination and application evincing a wholesome and real ambition for life.” One writer at the time went so far as to comment that what Duke wanted “was a Babbitt factory, a mill for grinding out go-get-’em boys in the wholesale and undeviating fashion in which his Chesterfield plant across the way ground out cigarettes.”⁶

A novel “dual-governance” structure established for Duke complicated matters. Under the Indenture, the Endowment trustees could withhold funds from Duke University if, in their judgment, the school was not “operated in a manner calculated to achieve the results intended.” This created the risk that the independence of the university could be compromised if the Endowment trustees withheld funds from the school. Adding to this concern, Endowment trustees were required to provide oversight for Duke Power Company, the entity whose stock made up the bulk of the Endowment’s assets. To ensure that they could discharge this responsibility, the majority of initial Endowment

trustees selected by James Duke were directors or senior officers of Duke Power Company. Given this context, Knight observed that, for the Endowment trustees, “money rather than education was their primary concern.” This structure meant that an Endowment board composed of Duke Power executives and other businessmen held significant leverage over what went on at the university.⁷

With the substantial Endowment funding, Duke grew rapidly. The school immediately undertook an ambitious building program. Between 1925 and 1927, eleven red-brick Georgian-style buildings were constructed on the original Trinity College campus. Soon this became the location for the Woman’s College. In 1926 graduate schools of arts and sciences and religion were added to the campus, followed by professional schools in medicine, law, nursing, and forestry. Between 1927 and 1930, work was initiated on the new, Gothic-style West Campus. The School of Nursing was established in 1931 and the College of Engineering in 1938. Over the years, Duke’s graduate programs expanded, with some gaining a national reputation. Construction of West Campus was finished in 1954 with the completion of the Allen Building, which became the center of the university’s administrative operations. Faculty salaries and morale went up.⁸

As Duke was growing, the quality of its undergraduate student body also continued to change. During the late 1950s and early 1960s, William J. Griffith, who served as director of the student union during this period, remembered that Duke had “good students” but the women students “across the board were of a higher caliber than the male students.” As a result, Griffith recalled, “men had an [academic] inferiority complex.” Zoology professor Peter H. Klopfer was more candid. He remembered Duke’s male students as predominantly southern, “not particularly bright,” and “conformists to a fascinating degree.”⁹

As the 1950s ended, however, the academic quality of undergraduates began to improve. In 1959 Duke president A. Hollis Edens reported “an intellectual groundswell . . . among the students.” Barney L. Jones, assistant dean of Trinity College at the time, called the class entering Duke in the fall of 1959 “potentially the best ever.” Still—despite these changes—Duke had not achieved the level of national prominence it aspired to. Even by the early 1960s, Duke had only three departments that were recognized as being in the top fifteen nationally. Its graduate programs had been placed, according to one report, in a “third group” behind twenty-two other schools.¹⁰

To help chart its path forward, the university formed a long-range-planning committee in 1958 to develop goals for the next ten years. At the university’s

June 1959 board meeting, the committee presented its initial progress report. It identified three objectives—higher faculty salaries, improvements to buildings and facilities, and investments targeted to bolster the university’s areas of strength. Taken together, the committee’s recommendations would cost \$76 million. “It would be difficult to exaggerate the importance” of the report, Edens commented. He called the ten-year plan “the most challenging dream presented for the University since the dream which created it.”¹¹

Edens was careful to point out to the trustees that the planning committee’s conclusions were consistent with the vision of Duke’s founders. “They did not set out to build a provincial University,” Edens noted, “though they were in sympathy with the need to render special service to the South.” Noting the “extraordinary educational developments” that had taken place in the postwar era, Edens cautioned that “universities are now more complex and the demands more pressing both as to the quality and the quantity of production.” He warned that Duke could not “rest at this point without falling behind in the procession.” “Duke University was born to lead,” Edens concluded, and “not to follow.”¹²

With all of Duke’s progress, one area of university life that remained nearly unchanged since the school’s founding in 1924 was race. Although the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill—Duke’s neighbor—had admitted Black students in 1955, Duke’s board resisted desegregation, even given the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision by the Supreme Court in 1954 declaring segregated public schools to be unconstitutional. The board voted down a resolution in 1957 authorizing the admission of Black students to the Duke University Divinity School.¹³ By the early 1960s, this failure to “lead” on racial matters threatened to derail the school’s ambitious plans for national prominence.

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Despite its progressive reputation, North Carolina was, as one author put it, “a full-blown Jim Crow state.” Described by historian Leslie Brown as a “troubling set of racial codes” ultimately enforced by violence, Jim Crow “attempted to appropriate black life and labor by any means necessary.” It portrayed Black people, Brown recounted, as “inhuman, irresponsible, and immoral” and “translated antiblack rhetoric into officially administered discrimination in the arenas of democracy—employment, education, and elections—and sustained it for over a hundred years.”¹⁴

At the core of Jim Crow were numerous laws and customs that denied Black people social equality by imposing a strict separation of the races. One white officeholder described the dangerous “slippery slope” Jim Crow was established to prevent.

If I sit side by side in the Senate, House or the judicial bench with a colored man, how can I refuse to sit with him at the table? What will follow? If we have social equality, we shall have intermarriage, if we have intermarriage . . . we shall become a race of mulattoes. . . . We shall be ruled out from the family of white nations. So, it is a matter of life and death with southern people to keep their blood pure.¹⁵

“The idea of social equality was so abhorrent,” historian Leon Litwack wrote, “so weighted with fears of racial impurity and degeneration, that the very suggestion of such equality had to be rigorously rejected and punished.” These attitudes were anchored in a racial creed based on religious teachings. “It is clear that organized religion in the white South was dominated by spokesmen,” theologian H. Shelton Smith wrote, “who held firmly to the dogma of Negro inferiority, and who thus maintained that the system of black-white separatism represented the normal development of a divinely implanted instinct.” William C. Turner Jr., a Black undergraduate who came to Duke in the mid-1960s, explained that those who embraced segregation had “imbibed the toxic nectars of white supremacy and even more of cosmic disaster [and] believed that you are engineering the disaster of the races when you mix them or exchange their proper place on the chain of being.”¹⁶

Given the perceived “life and death” stakes involved, it is not surprising that in states living under Jim Crow—including North Carolina—legally mandated segregation permeated all areas of life where white and Black people might come into social contact. In Durham, segregation encompassed marriage, housing, public transportation, water fountains, public restrooms, restaurants, hotels, theaters, libraries, churches, hospitals, jails, swimming pools, public parks, funeral homes, morgues, cemeteries, and municipal services such as police and fire stations. Social customs created further separation. Black people were required to address white people as “mister,” “miss,” or “ma’am,” while white people called Black individuals by their first names or “sister” or “boy,” regardless of age. In commerce, Black patrons were required to enter white-owned stores and food establishments by the back door, and wait until all white shoppers had been helped. When shopping for clothes, white shoppers were allowed to try on items of clothing,

while Black customers were required to make their purchases “strictly on sight.”¹⁷

Growing up in Durham in the early twentieth century, Pauli Murray noticed that “the signs literally screamed to me from every side,” “FOR WHITE ONLY, FOR COLORED ONLY, WHITE LADIES, COLORED WOMEN, WHITE, COLORED. If I missed the signs,” she recalled, “I had only to follow my nose to the dirtiest, smelliest, most neglected accommodations. . . . The world revolved on color and variations of color.” Murray continued, “It pervaded the air I breathed. I learned it in hundreds of ways. . . . The tide of color beat upon me ceaselessly, relentlessly.” “These separate and inferior Black facilities,” historian Ibram X. Kendi wrote, “fed Whites and Blacks alike the segregationist idea of Blacks being a fundamentally separate and inferior people.”¹⁸

Segregated education was a cornerstone of the Jim Crow system. Although the North Carolina Constitution adopted in 1868 under Reconstruction gave all people in the state “a right to the privilege of education,” it also required separation of the races in public education. Black schools operating under Jim Crow possessed only a fraction of the resources available to schools attended by white students. A review of Black rural schools conducted by white state agent Nathan C. Newbold in 1914 concluded that “the average negro school house is really a disgrace to an independent civilized society.” According to Newbold, these schools revealed “injustice, inhumanity, and neglect.” For Murray, her “seedy, run-down school” in Durham conveyed the message that if Black people “had any place at all in the scheme of things it was a separate place, marked off, proscribed and unwanted by the white people.”¹⁹

Supporters of segregation believed that Black people were not only different from white people but also inferior. Between 65 and 70 percent of white survey respondents in Guilford County, North Carolina, in the mid-1950s believed that Black people were inferior to white people with regard to “responsibility,” “morality,” and “ambition.” Fully 75.6 percent of respondents preferred segregated schools. “It remained unthinkable” to whites, according to historian Melissa Kean, “that any good could come from the breakdown of the strict bars that kept these threatening people away from whites, especially white youth.”²⁰

Because “inequality and pretense saturated all their interactions,” historian Jason Sokol explained, “whites actually harbored a racial animosity [toward Black people] rooted in a lack of knowledge.” The experience of southern novelist William Styron was typical. “Whatever knowledge I gained in my youth about Negroes,” he wrote, “I gained from a distance, as if I had been watching

actors in an all-black puppet show.” Segregation was so pervasive in the Jim Crow South, Sokol noted, that it “inspired little reflection.” If white people did notice segregation, one observer said, “it was in the way they noticed water flowing from a tap or hot weather in the summertime—it was unremarkable.”²¹

All these Jim Crow rules, customs, and attitudes were in place at Duke University until the early 1960s. No Black students were admitted to Duke’s graduate, professional, or undergraduate schools. When Black pastor R. Irving Boone asked President Edens in 1957 if he could complete coursework for a master’s degree started at the Union Theological Seminary at Columbia University, the Duke president said no. “No doubt you are familiar with the traditional admissions policy of Duke University,” Edens told Boone. As “there has been no change in this policy,” Edens wrote, “I am unable to give you a favorable reply.”²² For as long as Duke’s “traditional” admissions policy remained in effect, this response, with minor variations, was repeated each time a Black student asked about admission.

Duke had no Black faculty members. None served in university administrative or clerical positions, and none worked in the library. Black workers dominated the “unskilled” subordinate positions, such as working in the dining halls and hospitals or as maids for undergraduates in the dormitories. They also served as groundskeepers, janitors, and dormitory switchboard operators. But of 1,666 officials, managers, and professionals at Duke in 1964, only seven—.4 percent—were Black. In contrast, among 1,230 laborers and service workers, 1,059—or 86 percent—were Black. Labor organizer and leader Oliver Harvey, who came to Duke in 1951 to work as a janitor, summarized the situation. “You didn’t have any equal employment opportunities, or anything like that,” he recalled. “There were no black people in the office unless they cleaned it up. . . . We cooked the food served in the dining hall and, daggone it, can’t eat in the dining hall.”²³

Segregation defined all aspects of campus life. Until 1962, dining facilities on Duke’s East and West campuses were segregated. With no Black undergraduates, dorms were all-white, and the rare Black campus visitor was prohibited from staying on campus overnight.²⁴

Duke Hospital had similar policies. The wards were segregated, and when Black patients and visitors attempted to sit in the main lobby, they were asked to move to a smaller, less attractive location. Medical Center Christmas parties were segregated. William G. Anlyan, dean of the medical school, recalled in his memoir that “there were always two water fountains and two bathrooms, and that this division even went so far as the morgue at Duke Hospital, which

came with four subcomponents differentiating sex and color.” “The same was true of the blood bank,” Anyan reported, “where there was a separate, recognizable stamp to mark blood that had come from black donors.”²⁵

Through the early 1960s, the Southern Conference of the Methodist Church, a key Duke constituency, was “overwhelmingly in favor of segregation,” recalled divinity school professor W. Waldo Beach. As a result, Duke University Chapel was segregated. Seating for Black parishioners was limited to the south transept, and Black people were not permitted to preach or otherwise lead religious services in the chapel. After learning in Duke’s student newspaper, the *Duke Chronicle*, that Black scholar and educator Benjamin E. Mays would be speaking on campus in Page Auditorium, James T. Cleland, dean of the chapel, wrote to Duke president J. Deryl Hart in November 1960, “I am doing a slow burn.” He continued, “Sir: If Negroes may speak in Page Auditorium under University sponsorship, then, in the name of God and of his Christ, why cannot one preach in the Duke Chapel? I know that the Church does not give moral and spiritual leadership on great social issues. But may we not be allowed to catch up with the moral bandwagon?” Almost three and a half years would elapse before preacher and theologian Samuel DeWitt Proctor became the first Black speaker at Duke Chapel.²⁶

Consistent with the power of Jim Crow, segregation also applied to campus activities. At the football stadium, a sign labeled “colored entrance” marked off a separate section—in the corner of the end zone—for Black spectators. A report prepared in 1962 explained that “the Negro section at the outdoor Stadium is predicated on the assumption that Negroes prefer to sit together and that such separation avoids ‘incidents.’” No such “preferences” or “incidents” could be documented. The Duke golf course gave priority to Duke students, faculty, alumni, and staff—all of whom were white—and Black golfers had their applications to play denied. Journalist Barry Jacobs reported that when John McLendon, the Black basketball coach at North Carolina College who was later inducted into both the Basketball Hall of Fame and the College Basketball Hall of Fame, asked to see a game at Duke’s indoor stadium, “he was told he could attend if dressed as a waiter.” “Dixie,” the de facto national anthem of the Confederacy, was routinely played at sporting events and the Confederate flag was displayed.²⁷

Eleven fraternities and two sororities on the Duke campus had clauses in their national constitutions prohibiting Black students from joining. The constitution of the Kappa Alpha Order, for example, provided that “no infidel; no person of the religion of a Jew; no person of African or Oriental

descent . . . shall be eligible to membership in the order.” Even when there was no written policy excluding Black members, many Greek organizations required that each pledge obtain a “hometown” or alumnus recommendation as a condition of membership. Others required that the national chapter of the fraternity or sorority approve each member of the pledge class. Either by express prohibition or application of these requirements, the vast majority of fraternities and sororities at Duke were open to white students only.²⁸

In Page Auditorium—Duke’s primary performance space—tickets were sold to Black patrons only in a circumscribed mezzanine area. In 1955 the campus theater group sought permission to allow Black audiences to attend its plays at Page with racially mixed seating. Duke administrators said no.²⁹

As a result, there was rarely if ever any official interaction between white and Black people on the Duke campus. Black academics visited only infrequently and, while on campus, were required to use scarce segregated toilet facilities and prohibited from eating in campus dining halls. Among those who had to work under these restrictions was John Hope Franklin, who became a preeminent Black historian and Presidential Medal of Honor winner. While researching his groundbreaking 1947 book *From Slavery to Freedom*, Franklin was not permitted to use the public restrooms on campus.³⁰

Leading Black theologian J. Deotis Roberts learned of Duke’s restrictive racial policies when, in 1951, he inquired about attending a summer research program on campus on the topic of “Christianity and the Law.” Beach, one of the codirectors of the program, responded belatedly to Roberts, explaining that his delay was “due to the necessity . . . to clear with the University administration as to the policies which we will need to observe for you as a negro, should you still be free and able to come.” Beach reported that while all the library facilities, carrel space, and research facilities would be fully available to Roberts, “the question of housing and dining facilities has represented an awkward point.” Beach advised Roberts that, should he come to Duke over the summer, “it would be necessary to ask you to make your own housing arrangements in Durham,” since the campus dorms were for white residents only. As to the “borderline question of dining facilities,” Roberts was told that his campus dining options would be limited to “various snack bars around campus . . . open for general trade” and lunches in the faculty dining room. The segregated university dining halls would be off-limits. Beach concluded by assuring Roberts that the limitations “in no sense should inconvenience you or hamper your full participation in the program.”³¹

Segregation also extended beyond campus. A “restrictive covenant” in the deeds for home lots in Duke Forest made available by the university to faculty and administrators prohibited the sale, transfer, lease, or rental of the parcel to “persons of Negro blood.” The deed included a clarifying “proviso” that the restrictive covenant “shall not be construed to prevent the living upon the premises of any Negro servant or servants whose time shall be employed for domestic purposes only.”³²

Segregation in off-campus activities was an accepted part of university life. University organizations, including academic departments, fraternities, sororities, and student clubs, routinely held school-related functions at the segregated Hope Valley Country Club. Membership in Hope Valley, the premier country club in the area, was highly valued. A list published in 1967 showed that many Duke administrators and faculty belonged to the club; moreover, the university reimbursed some of its senior officers for membership dues.³³

Consistent with all of this was Duke’s treatment of its Black employees. The workers “were treated as sub-humans,” Harvey recalled. “You worked there ten and twenty years [and] if the supervisor didn’t like you, he’d tell you he didn’t need you anymore. People were absolutely afraid. . . . I never worked at a place as bad as Duke or as racist. You talk about slavery, it was absolutely so at Duke because people almost had to beg to keep their jobs when they were the least little aggressive.” Like many others, Harvey had a pointed way of referring to this paternalistic employment structure in which the university held unchecked power over the working lives of its nonacademic employees and paid, at best, subsistence wages. “It was,” he said, “a plantation system.”³⁴

Duke’s treatment of its all-Black housekeeping staff reflected this same mentality. Through the mid-1960s, Duke employed a team of maids responsible for “preparing” the rooms of undergraduate men Monday through Saturday during the semester. Work involved routine cleaning tasks such as making beds and emptying trash. “Maids would wash windows, get up on ladders and wash walls,” Harvey recalled. In addition to moving dressers and turning mattresses, maids “would help carry light furniture and baggage from one area to another one.” Working daily from 8:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m., each maid was responsible for up to thirty-two beds, they were prohibited from eating or drinking on the job, and they had access to only limited restroom facilities near the various housekeepers’ offices. These restrooms were marked with a sign stating “Colored Women.” In keeping with Jim Crow codes of behavior, maids, as well as other Black workers at Duke, were required to address

students as “mister” or “miss.” Students, in turn, would call these workers by their first names.³⁵

The workload was often overwhelming, especially after the findings of an “efficiency” study conducted for the university in 1966 were implemented. “Just too much work for any person to do in five hours time,” one maid commented. “It rushes me too hard trying to do this work,” another said.³⁶

Even more problematic, Duke’s maids, like the university’s Black janitors and other service workers, received poor wages. There was a “plantation-type mentality in labor relations” at Duke, A. Kenneth Pye, dean of the law school, pointed out, where “people were terribly underpaid.” The “old way of running Duke,” he explained, “was you hired ten Blacks to do the job of two and you paid them a tenth of what they should be paid.” Under this system, Duke’s maids were paid \$0.43 per hour in 1951. By the start of 1959, the hourly amount was \$0.65 per hour, earning maids a paycheck of \$19.50 for a standard thirty-hour work week. By 1965, wages increased to an average of \$0.85 per hour, far below the federal minimum wage of \$1.25. Maids “had to go from house to house and clean up for white folks to survive,” Harvey recalled, “or else they went on welfare.” Duke’s all-Black janitorial staff fared little better. As of January 1966, Duke’s highest-paid janitor earned \$2,808 per year, almost \$200 below the poverty threshold. “In addition to low wages,” Harvey recalled, Duke’s nonacademic employees “had hardly any fringe benefits at all. No holidays, no sick leave.” Maids and janitors could be asked to work more than forty hours per week at their supervisor’s discretion and received no increase in hourly wage for “overtime” hours. Making matters even worse, through the mid-1960s, Duke’s service employees had almost no recourse to address job-related grievances. As the *Carolina Times*, Durham’s Black newspaper, wrote in 1959, Black nonacademic employees at Duke effectively found themselves in “peonage.”³⁷

Given how entrenched Jim Crow segregation was at Duke, any change in the university’s racially exclusive admissions policy would not come easily. At least through 1957, a majority of the university’s trustees supported segregation. All but a handful of trustees were from the South, affiliated with the Methodist Church, and alumni of Duke. A substantial number had been serving on the board since the 1920s. Growing up in the Jim Crow South, Beach noted, many trustees had a “habit . . . of accepting the pattern of polite, not vicious, segregation in education, in political affairs, [and] in cultural affairs.” Klopfer agreed, commenting that segregation was “consistent with the value systems many trustees grew up with.” The university had “a long,

inherited, established practice of accepting segregation,” explained Robert E. Cushman, dean of the divinity school, and there was “an inertia that had to be overcome.”³⁸

Those who favored desegregation at Duke faced the challenge not only of changing the votes of trustees but of doing so under a decision-making process requiring civility and consensus. In his book *Civilities and Civil Rights: Greensboro, North Carolina, and the Black Struggle for Freedom*, historian William H. Chafe explained that civility—“courtesy, concern about an associate’s family, children, and health, a personal grace that . . . obscures conflict with foes”—was the cornerstone of the “progressive mystique” that defined racial attitudes in North Carolina. For Chafe, civility was “a way of dealing with people and problems that made good manners more important than substantial action.” Because of the importance of civility, North Carolina progressives believed that “conflict is inherently bad, that disagreement means personal dislike, and that consensus offers the only way to preserve a genteel and civilized way of life.” Since conflict “will permanently rend the fragile fabric of internal harmony,” Chafe explained, “progress can occur [on matters such as race] only when everyone is able to agree—voluntarily—on an appropriate course of action.”³⁹ The requirement that a consensus favoring desegregation emerge on the board before any change in policy could occur shaped Duke’s consideration of the issue over many years. It also gave those who favored the status quo a strong platform from which to resist change.

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The 1950s saw no change in Duke’s racially exclusive admissions policy. Approached by external constituencies seeking a change during this period, Edens simply counseled patience. When urged in 1953 by Methodist minister and Duke alumnus Bill Wells to desegregate “in the name of Jesus Christ!” Edens responded, “It is difficult to judge the proper timing in the hesitant steps of social progress.” He cautioned that “a University is a highly complex organization and changes in pattern of thought and activity will have to come slowly.” Alumna Helen Morrison also urged a change in policy in 1953. The Duke president replied, “It would be impossible for me to predict how soon a change will take place.” Identifying himself as a “gradualist,” Edens told Morrison that it was his “firm conviction that Duke University can and should admit negroes only when the community and constituency are prepared for it”—an example of the power of civility and the “progressive mystique.”⁴⁰

While Edens gave little indication to external constituencies that Duke's restrictive admissions policy was a topic of discussion, the gears on desegregation had in fact started to move. The issue was raised initially in 1948 when divinity school students presented a resolution asking that the school consider desegregating. Welcoming the "fellowship, stimulation, and fuller Christian cooperation" that would exist if "Negro students were to join us in our common Christian study," the students put forth a "request" that those in charge of the school give "serious consideration" to the admission of Black students to the divinity school "without affecting the general university policy." Other petitions, expressing what future provost R. Taylor Cole described as a "Christian concern for the segregation policy," were presented in 1949 and 1951.⁴¹ Still, no action was taken.

Through the 1950s, trustee opposition to desegregation remained strong. Barney Jones recalled that "the generally conservative and provincial outlook of the Board was nowhere more evident than in its studied, southern-styled avoidance of the integration issue." The board, according to Jones, was "determined to keep Negroes out of the university—at least as long as possible." Edens shared this view of the board, telling Cole, after discussions with key trustees, that desegregation faced "the determined opposition of a large majority of the Trustees."⁴²

In late 1956, a group of students wrote letters directly to board members advocating for desegregation. One such letter was written to trustee Edwin L. Jones by undergraduate Anne Corpening. She expressed the hope that Jones would "keenly feel the necessity of revising, as quickly as possible," racial policies that "speak of intolerance, retrogression and moral indifference." The response Jones sent to Corpening shows just how unimaginable he found the prospect of desegregation to be. Stating that Corpening's letter "could be answered intemperately," Jones instead responded by raising "a few questions."

1. Should the Trustees of Duke University permit conditions at Duke that are not permitted in the homes of the students who comprise the student body of Duke?
2. Do your father and mother practice social and racial equality with the Negroes in your home?
3. Why should Duke discriminate against the qualified white students who are clamoring to get into Duke University so as to admit Negroes who would create problems, probably impossible to solve?

4. Aren't the Trustees charged with the responsibility toward white students for whom the University was founded?

5. Why should the Trustees begin to practice discrimination against the white race?

In Jones's opinion, Duke had been founded to serve the needs of white students. Desegregation meant social equality between the races. This would be unthinkable in any Duke family home and amounted to reverse discrimination against the "white race."⁴³

In early 1957, divinity school students published a petition addressed directly to the board requesting that the school's racially restrictive admissions policy be eliminated. Although he knew he did not have a consensus, Edens decided that the time had come for the trustees to go on record on desegregation. To buttress the case for desegregation, Edens provided the trustees with a letter from James Cannon III, dean of the divinity school at the time, who insisted that the "standing of the university" would suffer if Duke retained its racially exclusive admissions policy. It was an "embarrassment" for a national institution such as Duke to be "out of step" with its peer schools, Cannon argued, pointing out that its divinity school was one of only two in the South that had not eliminated segregation or announced plans to do so. "The problem of assimilating the few Negroes who would be eligible for admission to the Duke Divinity School," Cannon concluded, "is a minor one compared to the problem of further delay." On this basis, Edens asked for "discretionary authority . . . to admit negroes to the Divinity School if and when properly qualified applicants should apply."⁴⁴

In response, the board voted to keep the divinity school segregated. When the newspapers reported the trustees' action, Edens received multiple letters. "I wish to commend you and your Board for the stand you have taken with reference to admitting negroes to the Divinity School," Whiteville, North Carolina, attorney J. Bruce Eure commented. "The races are separate and distinct and should stay that way." E. J. Burns, a member of the Duke class of 1927 and law school graduate in 1929, was "delighted" that "no Negroes will be admitted to Duke Divinity School." Again, racial mixing was the key concern. "It seems so unnecessary and unwise that our young white and negro students be mixed up socially and in our educational institutions," he commented, expressing his desire "to send my daughter to Duke . . . provided we can keep Duke for the white students."⁴⁵

The volatility of the race issue became even clearer at the racially mixed North Carolina Mock Student Legislature meeting in November 1957. At the

opening of the two-day session, the student delegation from Duke's Woman's College proposed to rescind laws prohibiting racial intermarriage in North Carolina. The bill passed the legislature, which drew harsh criticism from North Carolina congressman Harold Cooley. "I do not know of anything that has happened in the Student Bodies of the various colleges of this State that has aroused as much unfavorable criticism as that bill," Duke trustee P. Huber Hanes Jr. wrote to Edens. "I cannot conceive of any self-respecting young girl being a party to endorsing a bill of that kind." T. Conn Bryan, a double Duke graduate, told Edens that the resolutions, even if proposed in jest, "are abhorrent to everyone who has even a modicum of personal and racial self-respect." Another alumnus told the Duke president that several of his friends "who now have daughters at Duke have 'blown their tops' to me and have been so incensed that they have threatened to take their children out of school."⁴⁶

In response to the furor, Edens wrote a low-key letter to the trustees and faculty to defuse the situation. While "sorry the incident occurred," the Duke president saw it as part of students with "immature and half-reasoned ideas and actions" growing up.⁴⁷

After the February 1957 board vote on desegregating the divinity school, Edens ceased any further efforts to address desegregation with the board. Edens had concluded, Cole recounted, that "moral suasion . . . would not move [the board] toward gradual desegregation." He knew where the board stood and was, according to Barney Jones, "determined that a wedge not be driven between himself and his Board." In fact, Edens soon resigned from the Duke presidency following an internal power struggle involving the Endowment in February 1960. He was replaced on an interim basis in April 1960 by J. Deryl Hart, a respected member of the medical school faculty.⁴⁸

Meanwhile, concern over Duke's racially restrictive admissions policies continued to crystallize on campus. The *Duke Chronicle* published regular editorials condemning segregation. Under the headline "Barbaric Tradition," the student newspaper declared in late 1955 that segregation "is anti-democratic, anti-Christian, harmful propaganda to the rest of the world and incompatible with the idea of a university." A growing number of graduate and undergraduate organizations and faculty joined the divinity school in pressing for a change in university policy. In 1959 the Men's Student Government Association and the students and faculty of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences pushed publicly for desegregation; and in 1960 law students, students on West Campus, and incoming graduate students also made known their opposition to the school's racially restrictive admissions policy.⁴⁹

When the Duke trustees finally voted to end the school's racially exclusive admissions policy in 1961, however, the decision was not made because of pressure from internal or external Duke constituencies. Rather, desegregation was approved only after a majority of trustees came to believe that the continuation of segregation at Duke would threaten the school's progress and block its path to national prominence.

In other words, the primary reason was money, not ideology. Increasingly, the federal government and national foundations were making clear to Duke and other southern universities that grants would stop if they refused to admit Black students. By the early 1960s, the federal government began to advise schools that to be eligible for future government contracts, private universities would be required to have in place nondiscriminatory admissions policies. The Ford Foundation and other national philanthropic organizations also made it known that they would limit grants to segregated schools.⁵⁰ Once fully implemented, these policies would destroy Duke's aspirations to become a leading national research university.

In 1961 Hart determined that opening the university's graduate programs to Black students was essential if Duke was to realize its national ambitions. To present the case most effectively, Hart directed three senior university officers to prepare a memorandum for the board outlining the impact continued segregation would have on Duke. The memorandum covered three areas: the perception of external constituencies, the impact on the medical school, and the consequences, especially on faculty morale, for the rest of the university.

In the memorandum, Cole argued that Duke's racially restrictive admissions policy had "created barriers to the fullest development of Duke University and . . . resulted in a decline in its prestige." The university's segregation policy, Cole concluded, "is a major barrier to attaining the national and international recognition which Duke University deserves." On the impact in the "Medical Area," Barnes Woodhall, vice provost, listed seven potential sources of federal financial support for Duke Medicine. This support—totaling \$16 million over the "foreseeable future"—could well be jeopardized, he argued, if the university remained segregated. In the final section, Marcus E. Hobbs, vice provost, focused on "destruction of the general morale" that would occur if Duke failed to address segregation. He presented a detailed chart showing that the university received approximately \$7 million in federal grants and contracts from 1959 to 1960, money that would be put at risk unless Duke changed its racial policies. Hart and the three university officials asked the trustees to allow Duke's graduate and

professional schools to accept “the small number of obviously well-qualified Negro applicants.”⁵¹

In response, on March 8, 1961, the trustees approved, with no discussion, a change in university policy to allow the admission of students to Duke’s graduate and professional schools “without regard to race, creed or national origin.”⁵² In September of the same year, two Black law students matriculated at Duke.⁵³ In June 1962, after further education and persuasion, the trustees voted to desegregate Duke’s undergraduate colleges. Duke’s first Black undergraduates arrived in September 1963.

This decision achieved the results Hart and others anticipated. Just after the board voted to desegregate the graduate and professional schools, Thomas L. Perkins, Duke Endowment chair, wrote to the president of the Ford Foundation, the president of the Carnegie Foundation, and the vice president of the Rockefeller Foundation to notify them of the decision. All three responded with approval.⁵⁴

More generally, the board’s changes to Duke’s racially restrictive admissions policies were widely praised. “The Board of Trustees deserves hearty congratulations for its action,” the *Duke Chronicle* editorialized. It declared that in desegregating the graduate and professional schools, the trustees had “set a commendable example for other Southern institutions and increased the University’s prestige from a national standpoint.” The next year, A. T. Spaulding, one of Durham’s most prominent Black leaders and chief executive of the Black-owned North Carolina Mutual Life Insurance Company, wrote the Duke president to say that the trustees’ decision to desegregate the undergraduate schools “marked a monumental milestone along the highway of Duke’s history.” The step “will be looked upon as a reckoning point in the years ahead,” he asserted, and “a point of reference in measuring Duke’s future progress and achievement at an ever accelerating rate.”⁵⁵

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Without diminishing the significance of the board’s actions, three points about desegregation are important to note in order to understand what was to occur. First, as at other private HWCUS such as Emory, Rice, Tulane, and Vanderbilt, the decision to desegregate was not voluntary. While Bunyan S. Womble, university board chair, wrote at the time that the decision to admit Black students “did not come as a result of any pressure or petitions, but only after careful and intense consideration over the past few months,” the reality

was quite different. In fact, Womble himself wrote a fellow board member that “if we had been free to follow our own inclinations many of us would not have favored the change.” After private meetings with a group of trustees in Charlotte and Winston-Salem discussing graduate school desegregation, Hart reported to Womble: “I believe they hated to see it come, . . . and although it was contrary to what they had hoped would be the case they would go along with it.” One trustee told Cole of his profound concern over racial mixing by describing a medicine dropper and a glass of water. If one drop of ink passed into the water, the trustee told Cole, it would color it all. Cushman observed that for trustee Edwin Jones, it was “inconceivable” for Duke to seat Black and white students in one room. Again, the concern was racial mixing. Jones feared the “intermarriage of Black and white,” according to Cushman, “more than anything else.” Woodhall was told by a trustee that his wife would leave him if he voted in favor of desegregation.⁵⁶

Second, desegregation was not approved because of moral or human concerns but due to the adverse consequences the university would suffer if segregation were maintained. While Cole on the one hand argued that any claim that the desegregation decision was based “exclusively on economic considerations” was “wrong,” he nevertheless agreed that the “economic argument” was critical to achieving desegregation “at the earliest possible time.” Noting that the board acted to desegregate “on prudential grounds,” Barney Jones wrote, “Probably one would have to concede that integration at Duke was provoked more by economic than moral considerations. We integrated because it became necessary rather than because it was right.” Indeed, Jones looked back with regret that Duke “did not base our action on higher ground.”⁵⁷

Finally, the board vote to desegregate did not mean that long-standing racial attitudes among white leaders at Duke had vanished. If an individual viewed white people as superior prior to the vote to desegregate, this attitude almost certainly continued after the vote. For example, when Womble wrote to reassure those upset by the desegregation decision, he pointed out that the relative abilities of Black and white students would mitigate the impact of the policy change. “On account of the very high standard of requirements for admission, I am sure very few Negroes will be admitted,” he wrote. “With the thousands of white students being turned down each year for lack of space,” Womble observed, “I shall be surprised if any Negroes applying will possess qualifications entitling them to be admitted any time soon.” An unnamed faculty member struck a similar note, predicting in the *Duke Chronicle* that “the search for a qualified Negro applicant may be more difficult than convincing

the Trustees to admit Negroes.⁵⁸ Contending with these attitudes would remain a profound challenge.

With the decision to desegregate, Duke had finally removed a major obstacle to realizing its national ambitions. With financial support solidifying, a strategic plan in place, and the morale of most university constituencies improving, Duke's leaders had good reason for optimism. Only one further step remained to position Duke for rapid growth—selection of a new president to lead the university into the future. The November 1962 choice of Douglas Knight illustrated how far the board was prepared to go to realize its national vision.⁵⁹

Chosen to be president when he was only forty-one, Douglas Maitland Knight brought to Duke qualities of mind and spirit that had helped propel his rapid rise to the highest levels of academia. By the time he reached Duke, Knight's career had already combined scholarship, teaching, and college administration. Although some might wonder whether he was ideally suited to lead a large, southern university, none could claim that Knight was not an accomplished individual of presidential stature.

Born on June 8, 1921, in Cambridge, Massachusetts, Knight did not have an easy childhood as an only child whose father died when he was five years old. Stability was hard to come by for the Knight family. They moved several times a year; indeed, by the time Knight entered junior high school, he had attended thirteen different elementary schools. Pushed ahead by school administrators who recognized his academic aptitude, Knight entered junior high school at age ten.⁶⁰

By the time Knight turned fourteen, a wealthy family friend arranged for him to attend the prestigious Philips Exeter Academy in New Hampshire. At Exeter, Knight found a “sense of intellectual community [he] had never experienced before” and within a few months he was “hopelessly in love with the place.” Finding that Washington DC, his home at the time, had no “magic” for him, Knight cut short his first vacation from Exeter and returned to school early. The elite private school had become the place where Knight felt most comfortable.⁶¹

College and graduate school at Yale University soon followed. Knight earned his PhD in English in 1946 and was immediately appointed to the Yale faculty as an English instructor. Soon his first book appeared, a scholarly study titled

Pope and the Heroic Tradition. Within a couple of years, he was promoted to assistant professor of English. A score of scholarly articles soon followed and, by the age of thirty, Knight's career in academia was well established.⁶²

In 1953 Knight's professional life changed dramatically when he was chosen to become president of Lawrence College in Appleton, Wisconsin. At thirty-two, he was the youngest college president in the nation. The position at Lawrence was important, not only for the experience it offered Knight but because of the college's reputation as the training ground for major university presidents. Lawrence boasted a remarkable statistic: in the thirty years prior to 1953, eleven of Knight's predecessors had gone on to hold the presidencies of prominent universities, including Brown and Harvard.⁶³

Knight spent almost ten years at Lawrence, a school he recalled fondly as "that wonderful little place." This was a happy time for Knight and his family. He recalled his tenure at Lawrence as "a golden few years in which everything seemed to work." A college with around 1,100 students and 100 faculty members, Lawrence suited Knight perfectly. "There was the simplicity of the administrative structure," he recalled, "which allowed problems to be met intimately and immediately." In addition, the college's small size "allowed working intimacies of every sort—often evolving into increasingly close friendships." Although Knight kept up a frenetic pace, he still found time at Lawrence "to rejoice in the excitement of all of it, and time to enjoy that texture of activity in all its richness."⁶⁴

Knight's tenure at Lawrence proved to be a great success. During his presidency, the book value of the college's physical plant increased by 100 percent and the value of the school's endowment by 150 percent. Six major buildings were constructed, and Knight secured the two largest gifts in the 150-year history of the college. In the course of his tenure, he also built a national reputation. He served on more than a dozen national committees for education and religion, often traveling up to eighty days a year. Given these accomplishments, it is not surprising that by the early 1960s, Knight was one of the two or three college presidents most major universities considered when their presidencies came open. After more than nine years in Appleton, Wisconsin, Knight was ready to move on. He expected it of himself, and others expected it of him.⁶⁵

In 1962 Knight was offered jobs at Duke and Cornell almost simultaneously. With a strong sense that there was "something fated and inescapable about the choice," Knight accepted the Duke presidency. Knight found the

chance to be a transformational figure at Duke compelling. “Duke, it seemed to me,” Knight recalled, “had always played under its feet rather than over its head. It had opportunities . . . to be much more of a place than it was. . . . And the opportunity that I saw was for the university to push as hard as it could and then find out what would happen.”⁶⁶

Knight’s selection as Duke president was announced in November 1962. But having committed to remaining at Lawrence until a successor was found, he did not arrive in Durham until August 1963. One can only imagine the sense of limitless possibility that Knight—soon to be inaugurated as a major university president at only forty-two years of age—must have felt as he and his family “stepped in by station wagon [to Duke] late one August morning, to find an official house crammed with our boxes and furniture.”⁶⁷

In Knight, Duke had a president with youthful vigor, an Ivy League pedigree, and a national reputation that personified its aspirations. Knight’s selection as Duke’s fifth president was met with almost universal acclaim. Wright Tisdale, chair of the trustees’ Presidential Search Committee, predicted that under Knight’s “warm and inspired leadership . . . Duke will attain an ever higher and more distinguished position in the educational world.” The *Duke Chronicle* saw Knight as a man who could bring greatness to the university. Observing that there are those who believe “there is too much nostalgia and resistance to change for the South to take the lead in intellectual spheres,” the *Duke Chronicle* found that “the selection of a man so obviously dynamic, who at 41 already has behind him nine years at the helm of a distinguished college, is the greatest single step taken in recent years toward enhancing this university’s position.” Combined with other factors, Knight’s selection gave Duke the ingredients for a “juvenescence which will soon lead this university to new heights of achievement.” Perkins and Tisdale suggested that copies of the *Duke Chronicle*’s glowing write-up on Knight be forwarded to all alumni.⁶⁸

Knight, in fact, did bring an array of strong qualities to the Duke presidency. He had passion, vision, intellect, tremendous energy, the humanism of an English professor, and administrative experience gained from his successful tenure at Lawrence. Lost in the excitement over Knight’s selection, however, were aspects of his background that made him, in retrospect, an unlikely pick to lead Duke in the early 1960s. For one, Knight was hardly an ideal cultural fit for a southern university that had only recently desegregated. In 1963 Duke was still very much a conservative southern school and Knight was a northern liberal. He was Duke’s first president from outside the South

and almost everything about him—including dress and personal style—spoke of the Ivy League, not the Atlantic Coast Conference.⁶⁹

Knight recalled his mother telling him “I knew you were in for trouble” when she saw the Durham paper’s headline describing the new Duke president as “Yankee Born and Yale Educated.” Knight wrote, with at least some overstatement, that “when the Duke trustees decided to look outside their own region for a president . . . they were taking a step as new and controversial as the admission of Black students had been. It called forth some of the same reservations, and it would have some of the same disruptive consequences in the turbulent years to come,” he observed.⁷⁰

Alumni reaction to Knight reflected how geography shaped people’s perceptions. Although “looked upon pretty generally in [North Carolina] as a villain,” Roger L. Marshall, director of alumni affairs during Knight’s tenure, recalled, “he was looked on as a great leader in other areas,” such as New York and California. A fellow guest at a faculty wedding reception at Hope Valley Country Club told Knight how one southerner viewed the Duke president. He “stood there in the middle of a social gathering,” Knight remembered, “and said, ‘I just wanted to tell you that from the first time I met you I knew you weren’t one of us.’” Knight found it deeply frustrating that because he was a northerner, some at Duke considered him lacking sufficient commitment to traditional values like family and community. “New Englanders have as much a sense of tradition as most folk in the South do,” Knight explained. “I was not . . . in a mood to accept the idea that I would be regarded as an uprooted interloper, in short, as a carpetbagger of the 1960s.”⁷¹

Some also saw Knight’s religion as an issue. He was a Congregationalist leading a school with long-standing ties to the Methodist Church and a board of trustees composed almost entirely of Methodists. “It was suggested to me by the then chairman of the board that I [change my religion],” Knight remembered. “He just said, ‘It’s perfectly easy to do.’ I had to say, ‘But Bunyan, I don’t do that.’”⁷²

Given suspicions about Knight’s northern, liberal background, the timing of his arrival on campus—just weeks before the university’s first Black undergraduates enrolled—could hardly have been worse. Feelings on racial issues at Duke remained extremely unsettled following the board’s decision to desegregate. The arrival of the first Black undergraduates guaranteed that race would remain a complex problem for the university for years to come. “I was joining a university with great potential stature and a major role to play both nationally and in its own quadrant of the country,” Knight explained. He

continued, “[Duke] was *not* equipped, by nature and location, to absorb sudden change of any kind, let alone disruptive challenges. Its admission of the first Black undergraduates had not yet been digested, nor had the complexity of doing justice to their needs been faced.”⁷³

National and local events also kept race in the spotlight. In the thirteen months between Knight’s selection as Duke president in November 1962 and his inauguration in December 1963, George Wallace became governor of Alabama; civil rights protests in Durham escalated dramatically; Medgar Evers was assassinated in Jackson, Mississippi; Martin Luther King Jr. delivered his “I Have A Dream Speech” to the March on Washington; and President John F. Kennedy was assassinated. When racial issues emerged, Knight’s background deepened the concerns of some that he was not sufficiently aware of white southern racial attitudes and practices. Knight “was not sensitive, he was not aware of the real attitudes and ideas and values of the people in this part of the country,” Marshall recalled. Marshall also thought that Knight misread—and misunderstood—southern character. “He could see rednecks and lynching parties in every thicket,” Marshall remembered.⁷⁴

If Knight lacked experience dealing with white southerners on racial issues, he also had limited experience engaging with Black people. At the start of World War II, Knight remembered watching a Black platoon in Glenn Miller’s Air Force Band perform on the Yale campus. Tremendously impressed by the group’s “dance-march drill,” Knight deemed onlookers like himself, as well as members of the white platoons who performed, “earthbound clods by comparison.” But the point of the story for Knight lies in what he did not say, think, or even consider—“that this was a segregated unit. . . . I felt myself thoroughly emancipated in the matter of color,” Knight wrote, “while in fact I was merely blind to all it meant in barriers or limitations.” Once ensconced in university life, Knight’s view of race, like others in his cohort, remained detached and limited. Knight recalled:

It would be pleasant to write that the American academic community was aware of a great need to educate blacks in the country’s universities and that we were busily devising programs to that end. Of course, such was not the case and never had been. . . . Most of us in northern colleges were not opposed to black students—if they appeared in the normal course of things and were qualified. We were not blocking anyone’s entry; we felt comfortable about our racial attitudes and the way we implemented them—or not, as was the case for most of us.⁷⁵

Knight's tenure at Lawrence provided little opportunity to advance his thinking or sensitivity on matters of race. While the school admitted its first Black students since the 1920s during his tenure, there were few conversations about them other than a brief encounter with a couple of senior trustees who asked, "Why here and why now?"⁷⁶

Duke's size may have also challenged Knight's leadership skills. For one thing, although he had developed a national profile as a successful college president, Knight had only nine years of administrative experience when he became president of Duke. Because he made the leap directly from his Yale professorship to the Lawrence presidency, Knight never served in lesser academic administrative positions, such as dean, provost, or even department chair. Knight's career had offered him the chance to think a great deal about the nature of liberal education, and he wrote that his convictions on this important topic "had reached a high level of coherence during the Lawrence years." Knight's training and experience were "based in a concept of the university and of liberal education totally grounded in mediation, critical discourse, civility and the restraint of uncontrolled dogmatism." He saw universities as "places of civility and debate rather than insult and confrontation." While these words may have described Lawrence during his tenure there, they did not describe Duke. Knight did not fully appreciate the difference, and he worried some of his new Duke colleagues with his pronouncements that the administrative problems at Duke "would not be different [than those] at Lawrence."⁷⁷

While Lawrence may have been only a fraction of the size and complexity of Duke, it had been a perfect fit for Knight's analytical approach. "I had treated my Lawrence and Duke relationships in a highly committed and totally personal way," Knight recounted. "I ignored the political issues once I had made up my mind about the best course of action for myself as the servant of the place," he wrote.⁷⁸ But Duke, when he arrived, was "a university under stress and also in inevitable transition."⁷⁹ Leading a large institution with many competing constituencies would require a new and different kind of political skill than he needed at Lawrence. In this context, Knight's approach to Duke was too passive. Knight wrote later that when conflict erupted at Duke in the 1960s, he sought to be "evenhanded" in his treatment of issues and movements, not to "attempt at leading and guiding them. As a result," Knight observed correctly, "the issues themselves provoked extreme responses [and] our own attempts to avoid these extremes were largely misunderstood."⁸⁰

One person who found Knight's approach unacceptable was history professor John W. Cell. Knight was "the wrong man for that time," Cell contended. "He was a leader for an intellectual community [but had] tremendous insecurity, [and] lack of confidence, and inability to face a crisis situation. Knight wanted to do the right thing but was indecisive." Hobbs agreed. Knight "tended to be a very agreeable person," he explained. "Unfortunately, major administrators, sometimes . . . have to say 'no' either pleasantly or indirectly. . . . That is a degree of political sensitivity" Knight did not have. Robert Ashley, managing editor of the *Duke Chronicle* during the late 1960s, was most succinct. "Tragically," he commented, Knight "had none of the skill set to deal with the seismic changes that were shaking society, particularly universities, and particularly Duke."⁸¹

Griffith, by 1967 the assistant dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, who found Knight "good to work with," wondered if Duke's president was not simply too sensitive to succeed in the rough and tumble of university administration. "His happiest moments, I think, were sitting out under a tree with a class," Griffith observed. "Doug was . . . a humanist," Anlyan commented, and "was too gentle a person to deal with the turbulent Sixties."⁸²

Whatever challenges Knight would face, he brought great confidence to his work at Duke. He had a bold vision for the school. The university, Knight told a large Founders' Day audience days after being elected president, faced an unprecedented opportunity. It could, in the years ahead, move from being a leading southern educational institution to becoming a premier national university. Three reasons made the attainment of national greatness a possibility. One was the "tradition of responsible freedom in the university. . . . This we do not have to create," Knight stated, "and we have the rare chance to extend it, to use it in the service of great causes and high ambitions." Another was the enormous resources Duke had to call upon. "No great university ever has everything it wants," Knight acknowledged, but "the fact remains that much has been given us, and much will be expected." For Knight, Duke's vast financial resources also offered a challenge: "we dare not be satisfied," Knight proclaimed, "until we are a national force in every field which legitimately concerns us." The third reason offered by Knight was perhaps the most significant. It captured the central contradiction facing Duke and its president and mirrored the challenge facing the entire southern region. "It is rare," the president-elect stated, "for a university to be able to draw upon so deep a traditional knowledge of the humane life and at the same time to be a focus for the emerging national strength of a whole region. . . . It will be our privilege . . . in

the years ahead,” Knight told the Duke community, “to make tradition new as no university in the south has done it before.”⁸³

Appropriately, Knight’s vision for Duke encompassed both an emphasis on bold new initiatives and a deep respect for tradition. But many questions remained unanswered. How amenable to change was Duke, given its traditional ways? How would the arrival of Black undergraduates and the persistence at Duke of long-standing racial attitudes and practices complicate the university’s efforts to expand its sights? And could it do so without slighting the region with which it was identified? How effective would Knight be at handling this transformation? Answers to these questions would begin to unfold even as Duke’s first Black undergraduates stepped onto campus in the fall of 1963.