

Interview with Dr. Lorenzo J. Greene

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Other excellent students were Harold Holiday, Sara Spencer, Dorine Johnson, Augustus Low, Juanita Kidd, now a judge in Philadelphia, Lillian Anthony and Dr. Odell Thurman. Miss Pouncey, now the wife of Dr. Thurman, was the first black women lawyer in Kansas City, Missouri. August Piper, outstanding physician in St. Louis; Gertrude Whitley, Flora Freeman, Edward Beasley, Hadley Hartshorn, and Charles Holloway were among the most outstanding students we had. From 1954 down to today, of course, we have had a coterie of excellent white students, too. By and large, our graduates are doing the work of society in various parts of the world. They cover all fields, including business men, teachers, lawyers, engineers, judges, physicians, musicians, journalists, politicians, opera singers, and the like.

Were salaries at the two universities comparable?

Salaries were never comparable at the two universities. Lincoln University salaries were consistently lower than those at the University of Missouri. In this connection one of the things that we had to fight, when I first came here, strangely enough, was the idea of the President. He thought that Lincoln teachers were overpaid, despite the fact that there was a considerable gap between the salaries of teachers in the Arts and Sciences at the University of Missouri and those at Lincoln University. The main reason, however, was the meager funds appropriated for Lincoln by the legislature.

How did the 1954 Supreme Court Decision affect your personality?

Very little, if any. I taught the same as I had been teaching before. My effort, my intent, and my practice had always been to teach students - not black students. And so, with the above attitude,

when the Decision came, with the backing of many whites, as a result of my community work, the students and I got along extremely well. I can think of only one difficult situation (and that really wasn't difficult). In the fall semester of 1954 several white freshman students enrolled in one of my classes. Sitting in the rear of the room, they started laughing and talking as I lectured. I stopped for a while and looked at them, but they continued. This time I informed them that I was here for business, and presumed they were too; they had no right to waste the other students time. And if they didn't care to remain in the class they could go to another section. I made it clear, however, that if they left my class I would not readmit them, no matter who said so. I had no more trouble thereafter.

How did the Supreme Court affect Lincoln University?

It affected Lincoln University in many ways. First it opened up the University to all students. Many white persons had wanted to come to Lincoln University before, in order to gain permanent teaching certificates which required a degree. Many had been teaching on temporary certificates based on two years college work or high school diplomas, some had not even finished high school. A few white persons had even threatened to sue to enter Lincoln University. They claimed they were being discriminated against. At least two or three persons told me that they had that action in mind. It also affected Lincoln University by increasing its enrollment. In the first place, the all-white local junior college was closed, and many of the students enrolled at Lincoln University as well as in other schools. Many families in this area could not afford to send their children to the University of Missouri, Rolla, Warrensburg, Springfield, or outside the state, not to speak of private colleges. The result is we have a complement of white students which now is equal to, or probably in excess of, the black enrollment. It

affected Lincoln University, too, in another way. It caused us to broaden our offerings, because many of the white students coming here, as well as an increasing number of Negro students, wanted majors in business, science, and other fields, which we were not prepared to offer to our students at that time. It also affected Lincoln University by increasing the number of white faculty members.

Later on we dropped the law and journalism schools because black students could now attend both the law and journalism schools at the University of Missouri. The Lincoln School of Journalism became a Department.

Also, I think, it affected Lincoln University in that salaries began to become more nearly comparable to those in the school of Arts and Sciences of the University of Missouri. The Decision naturally developed more rapport between the two schools. True, on the other hand, we lost some black students, who formerly came from St. Louis, Kansas City, and other communities and states. Some went to community colleges, others attended four-year colleges, and still others attended colleges outside Missouri. On the other hand, we increased enrollment through stepped-up recruiting of both black and white students. By so doing, I think there occurred a diminution in the quality of students who formerly attended Lincoln.

How did the 1954 Supreme Court Decision affect the community?

Well, that is very difficult to say. I believe that at first the State had to give its opinion through its Attorney General as to whether or not Missouri would obey the High Court's mandate. That compliance was forthcoming during the summer of 1954. To ascertain what the State Attorney General's reply would be, the West Central Division of the Missouri Association for Social Welfare through its committee on Race Relations, at which time I was chairman, arranged a luncheon panel

at which various people, representing a cross section of opinion in the States, were invited. You see, what Missouri would do dependly largely on the opinion of the Attorney General (who at that time was Mr. Dalton). Therefore, we held this meeting at the Missouri Hotel in Jefferson City to attempt to ascertain the public's attitude toward the Court's mandate. Included among the panelists were two editors, one from the local paper and one from the St. Louis Globe Democrat. We tried to get the Editor of the St. LOuis Post Dispatch, but he was out of town. There were two white business men, two clergymen (one Catholic and one Protestant), two women of the community (one black and one white), and two high school students (one black and one white). Oh yes, we also had Judge Sam Blair and the Commissioner of Education for the State, Mr. Wheeler. This was the first such meeting to be held anywhere in the country to see how a State would comply with the Supreme Court mandate to outlaw segregated public school education. To our gratification, everybody on that program from the Commissioner of Education on down, stated that the Supreme Court Ruling should have come long ago. I can never forget the statement by a white high school student who said that this decision would build a **bridge** which would join the two races in harmony. Well, another effect on the community was, of course, concerning the enrollment of white students in Lincoln, and it caused, I think as I mentioned before, the improvement of Lafayette Street. Lafayette Street was a sort of ghetto with certain undesirable, as well as some desirable, places. For instance, there was an old hotel which certainly did not have a good reputation. There were also a couple of restaurants, grocery stores, and a filling station on the street which were done away with, much to the detriment of the local Negro economy.

How did the 1954 Supreme Court decision affect the nation?

It had a tremendous affect on the nation. I think the affect is

still going on, because the 1954 decision, which declared segregated schools unconstitutional, inspired the determination for blacks to seek desegregation in other areas, not only in politics and business, but recreational and public accommodations. The Supreme Court Decision brought on the bus rides in order to make sure that Supreme Court mandate outlawing segregation on busses, trains, and other public transportation really meant what it said. Then, of course, there were the "sit-ins" of the 60s by students in North Carolina. For a while there were Administrations who were seemingly favorable. Under the Kennedy Administration and the Lyndon Johnson Administration there were such things as the Public Accommodations Act of 1964, and especially the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and Federal protection as well as support for Negro votes. It changed the whole complexion of the South. That section has seemingly made more progress toward desegregation than the North. I presume that is because the South realized it had a golden opportunity insofar as human relations are concerned. In the North there were no laws by which blacks were prohibited from attending certain recreation activities, and so forth. But there were customs and deceptions. . . hypocrisies which often achieved the same end. That was true of living conditions and jobs; they got the hardest and the lowest-paying jobs. It was a great day for the black person when opportunities were opened to them in various areas, such as employment, housing, public accommodations, and so forth. However, there is much more to be done, and it looks to me as if for several generations yet we will be fighting for the same thing that we are striving for now--first-class citizenship.

You asked me something about the militants. I just want to say that the military surge, which came after 1965 and 1966, certainly made the Negro feel that blacks, as a people, have nothing to be ashamed of; it made them conscious of the fact that they had done something for world

civilization, which they never knew, and which the world, and especially the blacks should know. It does not mean that the study of black history (Negro history or whatever you want to call it) began as a result of the civil rights movement. It did not, because at Lincoln University it was being taught when I came here forty years ago. What I'm trying to say is that the militants demanded courses in black studies be set up in various white schools, among them the most prestigious universities in the country, like Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Columbia, in the East and going around the West Coast. Some of these were worthwhile courses and some were taught by persons who had the training. But there were relatively few blacks trained in black history at that time. Yet, so great was the demand that many of these schools hired whites and/or blacks even ministers to teach such courses in other schools. They acted as counselors for black students, and frequently their main job was to keep the black students more or less quiet. Now there has been, it seems, a leveling off of these studies. Money is tight and some of the black students did not want the studies in the first place, or they wrongly regarded them as subjects exclusively meant for them. Consequently, many schools are either cutting down on black studies or are phasing them out altogether.

What are some of the special contributions you made to your special field?

I worked as research assistant to Dr. Carter Woodson, the founder and Director of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History. I made a Study of the Negro Church in Baltimore, Maryland and Suffolk, Virginia with Dr. Charles Wesley, a study of The Negro Wage Earner in 1931, a study of Negro Employment in the District of Columbia with Myra Colson Callis, a survey of Negro Housing with Charles Johnson and others, a study for the Missouri Advisory Committee to the United States Civil Rights Commission on the "Desegregation of Schools in Missouri

between 1954 and 1959," and another from 1959 to 1962. Meanwhile, I contributed a section in the book, Battles of the Civil War, published for the Civil War Centennial, plus articles, documents, and book reviews to such periodicals as the Journal of Negro Education, the Journal of Negro History, the History Bulletin, Phylon Magazine, the Negro Quarterly. I have served on the staff of the Columbia University Social Science Abstracts, and edited The Midwest Journal, published by Lincoln University 1949-1956.

I am working on The Negro in the Armed Forces of Missouri, particularly dealing with those black soldiers of the several Negro Regiments. In collaboration with Mr. Holland and Mr. Kremer we did an article on "The Negro in Missouri" for the Missouri State Manual which was dedicated to Lincoln University in 1974. I am also working on The Abolition of Slavery in New England, and The Abolition of the New England Slave Trade. Over the past years I have not been able to give as much time as desired because of health reasons.

Did you belong to professional societies?

Yes, I belonged to the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, the American Historical Society, the American Association of American Historians, the Southern Historical Association, the Missouri State Historical Society, and the Association of Social Sciences Teachers in Negro Schools.

Have you attended professional society meetings?

Yes, I have attended professional society meetings and I read papers at meetings of the Study of Negro Life and History, and of the Southern Historical Society, plus others.

Did the school finance travel expenses in full or part?

That was one reason why we did not go to as many professional meetings as we might have, for the school was very niggardly insofar

as appropriating money for such. For instance, such small allowances were granted, that if we were going to a meeting in Washington, we would have to drive non-stop, There was not sufficient money to stop at a hotel even if one were available to us. If the meeting was in Kansas City or St. Louis there was a possibility of going. Many of us personally defrayed our entire expense.

What was the attitude of the Administration toward your attending meetings?

The department heads and the division head were favorable. The fact of the matter is, both department head and the division head, we may say, got "X" number of dollars and had "X" number of people, so we had to divide the money. Sometimes the persons with seniority would get preference, as far as the division of the money was concerned, and that was very, very little, so teachers had to take most of the money out of their own pocket. I am glad to see that there is an effort now being made to stimulate members of the Divisions to go to meetings and to help them in some way--even if they cannot pay all the expenses, to pay at least part, maybe transportation or the hotel bill. Top administrators, of course, do not have to worry about the cost of attending meetings.

In your own opinion what is the future of Lincoln University?

Well, it is difficult to say. I think Lincoln University is going to last. There will always be a Lincoln University, but I think what we are going to have to do is to try to secure students, with a great potential to achieve higher academic standrads. We also must have more dedicated teachers and administrators. I believe we must maintain higher standards; we must be able to turn out students who can compete successfullly with students from the other colleges and universities. I believe that under a young administrator, like President James Frank, the vice-president and the other administrators and professors we now

have, there will be a strengthening of the University, so that standards will be higher. Just now we have, probably, an unusual number of students on the Dean's list. Now, I'm not saying that we should not have a large list of students on the Dean's List, but I am wondering whether all of those that have acquired that status are really doing the type of work which would enable them to be on the Dean's List in some other college.