

Charles Burgess's recollections about racial integration at ODU, including A. B. Jackson
from his oral history interview June 29, 2010



I was not here in '58, '59, because that was the year that I was on leave working on my... not completely successfully working on my dissertation. But the situation at ODU was, was... I don't know quite how to describe it. At first, in the early years I was here, I don't think anybody thought about it. I mean all higher education in Virginia was segregated. It was just "God's way." And the sense that something needed to be... that we needed to become an open institution was not really there, but then pressure began to develop... I did not know until many years later and of course now it's well documented, that Lewis Webb was in fact turning away African American students and telling them we've got another institution across the city there that you can go to. I found that out from an African American friend later, that he had been one of the ones who had been turned away by Lewis in person. Gradually, as we became more and more sensitive to the situation nationally, the faculty, particularly the humanities faculty and the people in the history department, sort of took the lead on a lot of this, began to agitate and find ways to try to gain... get some African American students involved in the university.

....

At first he [Webb] was acting under the direct instructions of Alvin Duke Chandler at William and Mary. And he simply was told that he could not. And then later after we separated, which is something I'll come to a little bit later, later after we separated he was still concerned with community pressure and legislative pressure and partially from supporters of Norfolk State who were afraid that we would drain away the top level African American students from them. It... there was even an agreement – a no raiding agreement on faculty. When it became, you know, something that we would... many departments and Lewis himself I think wanted to see us get some black faculty, but we did have an agreement with Lyman Brooks that we would not raid faculty away from Norfolk State. And the only way we got A.B. Jackson was by some... some subterfuge I can't tell you right now because I don't know. But I think that somehow or other he was officially certified as having resigned from Norfolk State and therefore it was okay for us to hire him.

But many of us were involved in activities and in groups that were promoting more understanding between the institutions and between the races. I can remember going to little meetings at people's houses. I remember once being at a house where various people who had just been involved with the Freedom Riders down in Mississippi and Alabama were there and they were sort of the heroes of the group. And they were there talking about their experiences. And I went away feeling, you know, feeling that somehow or other I was not really doing the right thing.

Full June 29, 2010 interview:

<http://dc.lib.odu.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/oralhistory/id/537>