



Norman Pollock's recollections about the ODU during the time of the civil rights movement
from his oral history interview in 1999

Interviewer: Was there tension on campus during the time of the civil rights movement?

There was an absence of tension; there were no black students. Of course, when the first black students came, there were very few, so few that they were totally singular. In the middle 60s, I guess the first year I was here, they organized the Human Relations Council. Human Relations Councils were big all over the south in the early 60s, where forward-looking people wanted to bring the races together to form a Human Relations Council [the official name of the organization was the Virginia College Council on Human Relations.] Willard Frank was part of that. It was formed in 1963, I think. It was happening in 1964, when I came here. The council was composed of black and white students, and the objective was to bring them together. They did tutoring at the Betty Williams School in Virginia Beach, and for some whites, it was their first contact with blacks.

It was an experience of doing things with others and it expanded, widened their horizons. The council was one of the casualties of the greater integration. The world did change in the later sixties for the better and the necessity for it went away. It was basically a means of bringing black and white students together. I think for many of the African American students, it was a way of feeling more attached to the university, and I think there was a real feeling of being excluded from activities. Until there was a fraternity that was largely black or accepted them, they had no Greek organization-not that that's the most important thing. But it's symptomatic of the way things were generally. It was difficult for blacks to feel comfortable in activity situations, and I think the Human Relations Council helped to overcome that. And of course it gave a vent to white students who were interested in getting involved in civil rights, and whose parents attitudes were not nearly as progressive as theirs. You got into some demonstrating, and one white student came home one Sunday night from... I'm not sure what, because it shaded over into opposition of the war in 1965.

It may have been a war demonstration in Washington-and when he got home his bags and everything, all his belongings were packed on the front porch. He was out of there. His dad wasn't willing to put up with that. So that was kind of the atmosphere of that long-ago time. What I'm saying is, the same students who got interested in human relations tended to oppose the war and get involved in those protests. Most of the black students on campus and some white ones who were sympathetic were in it. I can remember discussions in class, though, when I first came. Students were still very resistant to the idea of integration. The school closings in

Norfolk were just five years in the past, and there were plenty of students who had never gotten over it.

That persisted into the early 70s, I guess-the residual, overt willingness to say so. By the time the early 70s came, the whole atmosphere was different. Black faculty members were starting to come, and the number of black students was so great that you seldom had a class that was all white where a student would feel free to express these ideas. So even though they may have had them, they didn't express them.

Full February 16, 1999 interview (no audio available):

<http://dc.lib.odu.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/oralhistory/id/593>