

THE POLICY AND PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION: THE TCU AND THE DESEGREGATION OF TRENTON SCHOOLS, 1944-1955

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ABSTRACT AND INTRODUCTION

In an emotional letter sent on April 28, 1945 to Dr. Paul Loser, superintendent of Trenton schools, Mrs. Marie T. Peters argued that it was time to take action and bring an end to segregation, not just for her own children who she wished could attend the school in their district, but for all black children in the United States. She then ended her letter on desegregation stating, "I hope Mr. Roosevelt did not live and die in vain."¹ This, and so many other letters to Dr. Paul Loser and the Board of Education on the behalf of black parents in Trenton, outlines the staunch opposition that the black community had toward the segregation of their children. They simply wished to be a part of the community of Trenton as a whole, but were instead treated as second-class citizens. Beginning in 1943, a battle for such rights would begin in the court system, and through the various methods and actions on behalf of the Trenton Committee on Unity (TCU) coalition, integration would become a reality. The TCU was prepared to take the actions necessary to pressure the Trenton school system to integrate, even after the court ruled in favor of this in 1944. But, what strategies did this group of Trentonians use? How does the formation of this group, and the methodology that is used, compare to other fights for desegregation of schools? What can the story of Trenton tell us about the desegregation of schools on a national historical scale?

The battle for the desegregation of schools was waged throughout the United States, ranging from Little Rock, Arkansas (1957) to Milwaukee, Wisconsin (1976). In Little Rock Arkansas, black citizens and local leaders initiated the 1956 lawsuit that would force the Little Rock Board of Education to desegregate. It would then be the NAACP that would take up the legal mantle against violent segregationists, and Governor Orval Faubus.² In Atlanta, Georgia, the fight towards the desegregation of schools began with the NAACP's efforts in the court system, which resulted in a slow start to desegregation as a result of *Calhoun v. Latimer* (1959). Then, in an attempt to avoid any violence, in the spring of 1961 a large biracial group of citizens in Atlanta formed the Organizations Assisting Schools in September (OASIS). This coalition used an information handbook – *Background: Atlanta* – to disseminate information about Atlanta's transfer system, provide important statements from city leaders, and organize workshops on the matter of desegregation.³ In Charlotte, North Carolina the business elite were prepared to work with the black community to bring about desegregation. While some were prepared to fight for desegregation, the NAACP would eventually bring about desegregation through a busing plan in the *Swann* (1971) case.⁴ Lastly, in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, the Milwaukee United School Integration Committee (MUSIC) was formed in 1964 – comprised of both black and white support, as well as that of the NAACP – with the goal of bringing about desegregation through protests, sit-ins, and boycotts. Failing to desegregate schools in this way, the leader of MUSIC, Lloyd Barbee, decided to file a lawsuit a year later, which would result in the *Amos v. Board* (1976) case that brought about desegregation.⁵ With that said, although Trenton did not have the violence seen in Little Rock, nor the more overt protests from Milwaukee, its story is comparable to that of these other cities. Trenton, like Milwaukee, allows historians to better understand that the segregation of schools was not simply an issue of the South, but one of the many problems that the United States faced collectively. Trenton is part of a bigger picture not just about school desegregation at a nation scale, but also about race relations. The story of desegregation in Trenton, although understudied, is thus crucial to making sense of both the integration of schools and people on a national level.

THE IMPACT OF HEDGEPEETH AND WILLIAMS V. BOARD OF EDUCATION

The history of the desegregation of schools in the city of Trenton began with the New Jersey Supreme Court case *Hedgepeth and Williams v. Board of Education* (1943-44). In June 1943, Janet Hedgepeth and Leon Williams were designated to attend the all-black New Lincoln School. While all of the other white children would be transferring to Junior High School No. 2 in their current district, Hedgepeth and Williams would be forced to attend the much further away segregated school in Trenton.⁶ Matters were made worse knowing that the New Lincoln School was in an inferior state compared to the other schools, with certain courses lacking and an unsanitary playground.⁷ Due to the distance and the poor conditions, both Bernie Williams and Gladys Hedgepeth objected to the assignments and requested that their children be transferred to Junior No. 2. The decision to do so came down to the superintendent, Dr. Paul Loser (1932-1955), who upheld the policy of segregation and, by September 1943, had yet to process their requests to be transferred.⁸ Such lack of action sparked a movement that would benefit the black community in Trenton for years to come in the same way as Atlanta.

With no help from the Trenton educational system, the two and a half mile walk to New Lincoln School, and the reported poor learning conditions at the all-black school, the two mothers filed a lawsuit against the Board of Education of Trenton. Despite the previous customs of the Trenton school district, Hedgepeth and Williams were prepared to fight for the right of their children to attend the school closest to them. Due to their connections with the NAACP, the organization constructed the legal defense that would take them to the New Jersey Supreme Court in less than a month. The lawyer designated to them for this trial was none other than NAACP lawyer Robert Queen, who was known for his legal battles against segregation in Trenton.⁹ With the help of the NAACP, which would be instrumental in desegregating other school districts such as Charlotte, North Carolina, Hedgepeth and Williams had the opportunity to change the history of education and race in Trenton.

Loser's testimony on the segregation of Trenton schools was specifically fundamental to the argument that Robert Queen was forming against the Trenton Board of Education. On October 26, 1943, Robert Queen began by reading to Loser the New Jersey state law against any board of education member discriminating against a student based on color, race, or religion. When Loser was asked whether Hedgepeth and Williams were excluded from attending Junior No. 2 he hesitated at first. Afterwards Loser responded "Yes, in accordance with a policy in keeping with the philosophy of education." Loser then continued, making the claim that not only do minority groups tend to segregate themselves, but that they also had "better opportunities for leadership when segregated." With that said, when Robert Queen proceeded to ask him if he thought that it was advisable to separate minorities such as the Italians for this very reason, Loser stated that he had not really thought about this. Loser also specified that in his opinion such groups were less likely to segregate themselves.¹⁰ Paul Loser, through his testimony, outlined his feelings on segregation towards minorities, yet when asked about White minorities those ideas were nonexistent. In other words, Loser may have been harboring some negative feelings towards the black community in Trenton, which he manifested in his desire to justify their segregation.

On January 31, 1944, the New Jersey Supreme Court was unanimous in its decision to side with Hedgepeth and Williams. Chief Justice Newton Potter stated that it was "unlawful for boards of education to exclude children from any public school on the ground that they are of the Negro race." With the help of Robert Queen, these two mothers were able to defy the odds, winning a battle not just for their own children, but for all Black children in Trenton. Such judicial history was made that in 1954 this case would be cited during *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (1954) case. But, as this case came to a close, and Leon and Janet went off to attend Junior No. 2, the battle for the desegregation of Trenton schools was far from over.¹¹ Although the State Supreme Court case reaffirmed the notion that the Trenton board of education could not discriminate against black children, it appears that they were prepared to delay the integration of public schools. It would take greater effort on behalf of the black community in Trenton to bring about the necessary change.

THE TRENTON COMMITTEE FOR UNITY TAKES A STAND

In order to counteract the delaying of integration, the Trenton Committee for Unity (1944-1972) was formed to act as a counterweight – much like OASIS and MUSIC would act as. Constructed of a group of

activists, including both blacks and Jews, the organization's goal was to not only educate the public on race, but to also mitigate the continued forms of discrimination occurring throughout Trenton.¹² One of the cornerstones of this organization was the Civic Problems Committee, which was formed specifically to tackle violations of human rights and instances of overt discrimination. Depending on the problem at hand, this committee would work with others, such as the Education and Public Relations Committee, to assist and empower individuals of various minority or racial-based groups.¹³ One of the committee's greatest issues at the time was the battle over the desegregation of Trenton schools on behalf of black parents in Trenton.

Without any progress toward the integration of Trenton schools for the 1944-1945 school year, parents began to mail letters to Paul Loser and the Trenton Board of Education during the end of April in 1945—some of which the TCU would later use to strengthen their cause. Many of these parents were hoping to transfer their children to the school closest to them after seeing what happened in the Hedgepeth-Williams case. While others more specifically hoped to provide their opinion on the matter in order to support these other parents or clarify the opinions of black parents on the matter.¹⁴ Taken together, these parents represented the beliefs of many in the black community in Trenton on the matter of school integration. One of the first notable letters came from Louise E. Hayling, who believed that black parents should be allowed to send their children to the school of their choosing under New Jersey law. He personally experienced discrimination when he sent his children to the Monument School on Pennington Avenue, only to be told that they had to attend the New Lincoln School. It was only when he went to fight for the rights of his children that Dr. Loser finally approved their transfer well after the *Hedgepeth-Williams* case was decided.¹⁵ Similarly, in another letter, Mrs. Gladys Hedgepeth wrote to Dr. Loser stating that separate schools for certain minorities was a form of discrimination that prevented social progress. She also made point that black mothers were against the notion that an all-black school was beneficial to black students in any way.¹⁶ Black parents in Trenton, including Mrs. Marie T. Peters, were able to relay their opposition to desegregation through these letters. This coming together of many black citizens from the community was another common thread seen in many cities dealing with desegregation of schools, such as in Little Rock, Arkansas. In Trenton, specifically, instead of having to fight Dr. Paul Loser and the Trenton Board of Education individually, they could stand together as one voice, which would strongly be echoed by the TCU.

Before taking any further action on this matter, the TCU decided to write and speak to Dr. Loser to see if he was more willing to help them end this issue. Although he was receptive and understanding of their ideas, he was also, at the moment, open to the opposing viewpoints that other groups were providing him. Interestingly enough, possibly holding some feelings against Robert Queen, the TCU stated that Dr. Loser preferred to work with them over the NAACP, which he himself labeled as "over aggressive."¹⁷ Nonetheless, as in the *Hedgepeth Williams v. Board of Education* case, Dr. Loser made his segregationists beliefs clear to the President of the TCU, James Kearney Jr. (1944-5). Dr. Loser not only believed that "the majority of colored parents wish their children to attend Lincoln School", but "that Negro Educators of the highest authority say that segregation in the junior high school period is best." He saw his method of transferring students as a way of accommodating the few parents that wished to not have their children go to the New Lincoln School. It was also apparent that Dr. Loser did not fully understand that blacks were being treated unfairly with regard to hiring and placement of teachers in the district.¹⁸ It would thus take parent letters, multiple meetings, and memorandums from April to August of 1945 to help Dr. Paul Loser better understand the issue at hand.

Seeing the anger and anguish of many of these parents, as well as hoping to address segregationist ideologies that individuals such as Dr. Loser held, the TCU was prompted to write the "Memorandums on Trenton Public Schools" in May, 1945—a style of circulating information that would be used by OASIS. Here, the TCU could express all of their grievances for the Board of Education to take in and process in deciding when to bring an end to school-based segregation in Trenton. The first memorandum asked for the removal of *The Merchant of Venice* from classrooms due to its anti-Semite views. Their opinion was that the current anti-Semite viewpoints would be deepened by teaching such material to children. Although the majority of the TCU's efforts were dedicated towards empowering black individuals in Trenton, the group was also made up of Jewish activists and leaders that were interested in furthering the causes of Blacks and Jews alike. The second memorandum asked for all

children to attend schools in their respective neighborhood school districts, as well as for at least two black teachers to be moved to be full time faculty at the high school. This request was supported by various educators and leaders across the country, such as Edgar Dale (Ohio State University), who stated that segregation was “a moral evil no matter where or how practiced.”¹⁹ These two requests demonstrated the focus of the TCU on not only helping blacks in the community, but also their focus on other minority groups, including the Jewish population of Trenton.

The third memorandums called for the proper laws related to desegregation, the center piece of their argument, to be followed. These are the same laws named by Robert Queen in the *Hedgepeth Williams v. Board of Education* case a year earlier. The fourth memorandum held many of the letters that the TCU collected from concerned parents in the past months. The point of these was to demonstrate that not only were educators in high positions against segregation, but so were black parents in Trenton. Lastly, the final two memorandums contained comments from various other sources on the topic of desegregation. One notable addition was that of W. E. B. DuBois, who stated that “just as long as Negroes are taught in Negro schools and white in white schools...just so long shall we lack in America that sort of public education which will create the intelligent basis of a real democracy.”²⁰ Together, this document demonstrated to the Board of Education that the TCU was prepared to argue for the rights of the black community in Trenton. Their goal was not only to make their opinions on segregation evident, but to also argue against the segregationist viewpoints that were held by those in the Trenton community. With the law in their favor, they would no longer allow for the Board of Education, or Dr. Loser, to stand in the way of the rights of black children in Trenton.

THE INITIAL DESEGREGATION OF TRENTON SCHOOLS

It was on May 24, 1945 that, during a special meeting, the Board of Education approved new school districts created by Dr. Paul Loser. The main reason for this was described as the natural outcome of the *Hedgepeth and Williams v. Board of Education* case, not as the efforts to bring change on behalf of the TCU. Nonetheless, this decision resulted in New Lincoln School losing its status as a school for only black students, placing it in the regular rotation of schools as Junior #5, as of July 9, 1945. When the initial desegregation was followed through, 229 students would be reshuffled from New Lincoln School to the other schools in Trenton, while 491 students would be moved to the newly named Junior #5. With that said, the issue of actually transferring both teachers and students was not addressed. In terms of teachers, the plan at the time was to maintain all New Lincoln School teachers in their current roles, which was advised against in the TCU’s second memorandum. But, possibly more troublesome was the notion that the Board of Education was unable to decide both how to actually reassign students to their new districts, or how to go about dealing with transfer requests post reassignment. During a meeting in early June, the Board of Education left the process of transferring students post-redistricting to Paul Loser, who appeared to be stalling by asking for a definition of the transfer policy – a technique seen in places such as Atlanta, Georgia.²¹ Nonetheless, such a major decision caught the attention of many Trentonians, all of which had their own opinions, beliefs, and ideas of how school integration, and overall race relations, were and needed to progress.

On June 8, 1945, the editor of the Trenton Evening Times, James Kerney, Jr., wrote an editorial to the people of Trenton in which he described his overall approval of the plan to desegregate Trenton schools. The editor depicted desegregation as a step in the right direction for not only unity but democracy itself. But, he believed that further steps could be taken, such as the hiring of more black teachers – a technique that does not appear to be as evident in other efforts to bring about school desegregation. The first response to his article, titled “Forthright Stand” (June 15, 1945), was a mixed reaction from John H. Morrow, the chairman of the Trenton NAACP Membership Drive. Although he highly approved of the stance the Trenton Times had taken, he would never be truly satisfied until schools were fully democratic and positively addressed racial issues. This letter was followed by a message from A.S. Hancock, the head of the English department at Trenton Central High School, titled “Upholds Negro Rights” (June 18, 1945). Hancock was very much in favor of desegregation of schools, going as far as to say that maybe black children should be dispersed evenly throughout all of the schools of Trenton. In response to Hancock, I.L.L., a Jewish citizen, wrote in “Inter-Racial Problem” (June 21, 1945) about how he could not understand why individuals, meaning blacks, would want to live

somewhere where they were not respected or wanted. On one hand he took a more realistic stance in that he believed some white teachers may not be in favor of teaching black children, but on the other hand he thought that blacks should not 'force themselves' upon the white race.²²

Contrary to I.L.L., Raphael Jones, a citizen of Trenton who was a previous student of Hancock, gave high praise to Hancock in his letter "No Heavenly Segregation" (June 22, 1945), describing his opinions in favor of desegregation. D.J., an educated citizen and writer of "Sees Education Need" (June 26, 1945), responded in favor of I.L.L.'s letter on the side of segregation. In his opinion, blacks were better off on their own without the prejudice of whites; for that reason, he was in favor of segregation until people became more educated on race. Then, M.H.L., in "Schools and Democracy" (June 27, 1945), made the argument that it was one thing to theorize about racial equality, and it was another to try to put that into action. It would only be by mixing together black and white children that they would learn to respect one another by the time that they were adults. Lastly, Theodosia H. Queen, in "For Equal Opportunity" (July 2, 1945), spoke to the idea that blacks simply wished to be seen as all other races were looked upon, knowing that such change would not simply just come but would needed to be pushed.²³ Together, all of these letters to the editor not only described sentiments toward desegregation, but they also displayed the climate of racial issues at the time more generally. Some, such as I.L.L., attempted to rationalize reasons for segregated black students, while others could not stand continuing the practice.

About month after the initial desegregation decision, on July 6, 1945, the President of the TCU sent a follow up letter to ensure that action would be taken—action that was very different from the more overt protests done by MUSIC in Milwaukee. The letter began by stating that not only was the desegregation of schools required by law, but also necessary for true democracy to be achieved. The president then proceeded to discuss the need to desegregate faculty in the district, and the importance of preventing further transfers post desegregation unless deemed necessary.²⁴ In order to supplement the previous memorandums with regard to information about teachers, Harry R. Pine, Chairman of the Civic Problems Committee wrote the "Memorandum on Non-Segregated Faculties." The goal of this document was to demonstrate that in order for the school system to be fully desegregated, this had to include non-segregated faculties. In order to provide evidence for this, the TCU compiled information on July 9, 1945 from leaders in different communities outside of Trenton where faculties were not segregated. Assistant Superintendent of New York City Schools, Benjamin B. Greenberg, for example, stated that he "observed significantly worthwhile relationships resulting from this condition.....Negro and white teachers working together in educational, social, and community endeavors."²⁵ Together, these two documents further outlined the demands of the TCU to improve the Trenton school system, providing greater pressure throughout the month of July for Loser and the Trenton Board of Education.

THE PROBLEMS OF DESEGREGATING TRENTON SCHOOLS

After seeing the initial reaction to desegregation from the community, and taking into account the new information and ideas brought up by the TCU, the Board of Education took action to end segregation in their school system. On July 26, 1945, the Board of Education held a meeting to discuss the matter with Dr. Paul Loser, TCU leaders, NAACP delegates, teachers, pupils, and members of the community as a whole. One of the most disappointing decisions made at this meeting was to delay the integration of schools until at least the 1946-1947 school year in order to provide Trenton with time to prepare for the changes. It was also revealed at this meeting that although Loser had transferred six black teachers from Junior #5 to other schools in Trenton, he approved the transfer of almost 400 white students that were transferred to Junior #5 back to their original schools.²⁶ This was in large contrast to the slow and far less numerous transfer approvals of black students in the past.

Nonetheless, to establish order with regard to future transfers, the Board of Education prepared a resolution to address the integration of Trenton schools and the process of transferring students as of July 1, 1946. They began by reasserting that they would be establishing school districts, with students being assigned to the school found in their respective district. Then, the Board of Education adopted the rule that they would no longer grant transfers unless the student moved to another district, was having health problems because of their current school, or if school authorities or the board themselves felt it was best to have the student moved. With that said, they asserted that no transfers would be granted by them or the superintendent on the basis of race, creed, color, nationality, or the like.²⁷ Together with Dr. Paul

Loser's shifting of black teachers to others schools in the Trenton school district, these resolutions began to fulfill the demands and suggestions of the TCU. Yet, there would still be more time before the integration of Trenton schools would be completed.

The TCU was happy to see that the distribution of black teachers would occur smoothly, yet they were disappointed with the re-transferring of so many white students. Although no black children requested to be transferred back to Junior #5, Loser approved the transfers of white students out of Junior #5, creating a gap in the student body at this school, compared to a surplus of educators. Thus, not only would there be few to no white students at Junior #5, there would also only be black teachers at the school. As transfers were not provided based on race or nationality, the common reason for a transfer was the lack of some courses, such as typing, causing problems for high school students coming from Junior #5. Along with the new and clear transfer policy, fixing this issue would not only work to bring Junior #5 to the level of other schools in Trenton, but it would also most likely reduce the number of requested transfers. Nonetheless, as the TCU worked to end transfers, many white parents continued to protest the fact that their children were being transferred out of their districts.²⁸ Thus, in order for integration to truly work, the TCU would also have to convince the overall Trenton community of the value of racial equality – yet it is important to note that those with segregationist's viewpoints, although not in favor of integration, were not violent like some were in Little Rock. White parents and students needed to both adhere to, and respect, the transfers to the school in their neighborhood.

In an effort to promote better relationships between different racial and minority groups, while also awaiting further developments with the desegregation of Trenton schools, the TCU began to plan various community based events – as will be done by OASIS in Atlanta. The Education and Public Relations Committee of the TCU was in charge of presenting eight lectures on intercultural relations.²⁹ This involved calling upon both members of the TCU, such as the Reverend Harry Pines, as well as individuals from outside of the Trenton community, such as a faculty member from the Department of Anthropology at Columbia University, to present from February 5 to March 6. The lectures themselves covered a variety of issues, ranging from "Attack on Democracy: Discrimination Against the Negro" to "Culture and Contributions of the Jew."³⁰ Along with other similar events, the Education Committee also distributed numerous pieces of relevant literature to schools, churches, and other groups in Trenton, such as the "Memorandum on Anti-Semitism" and "The Negro in American Life."³¹ All in all, this demonstrated how the different committees of the TCU could work together to produce integration on all levels.

The Executive Committee of the TCU also did their part to further the integration of racial and minority groups in Trenton through their two half hour "Trenton Talks It Over" programs.³² Here, starting September 7, 1946, they discussed prejudice and discrimination within different spheres in the community. That said, with the upcoming school year on September 9, the Executive Committee felt that it was best to tread lightly with regard to school integration and the lack of black representation on the Board of Education.³³ The Executive Committee was also responsible for hosting various movie viewings and other lectures, as well as writing articles, with the purpose of further illuminating relevant issues, such as the integration of schools.³⁴ Together, these events and methods not only furthered integration, but race relations in general.

FROM DESEGREGATION TO BLACK TEACHERS

Despite Dr. Paul Loser's "doubt about the advisability of integrating the system,"³⁵ and the need to have multiple meetings with Loser and the Board of Education, the integration of Trenton schools was completed for the September 1946 school year. As a result of the TCU's efforts before and after the Board of Education's initial desegregation of Trenton Schools, all black students in the Trenton school district were assigned to the school in their neighborhood.³⁶ It was also declared that all junior high students, no matter race or color, would be assigned to Junior #5 if living in that district.³⁷ With regard to teachers, at least two black teachers were present in Junior High Schools #1 through #4, seven black teachers were present in Junior #5, six black teachers were in the six elementary schools, and two black teachers were brought onto the Central High School faculty.³⁸ More specifically, in terms of Junior #5, it was reported that for the 1946-1947 school year 60-65% of the student body and faculty was white.³⁹ Thus, by October 14, 1946, the TCU could report that their goal of integrating Trenton Schools had been mostly successful

with both the removal of the “Merchant of Venice” from Trenton classrooms, and the benefit brought to black students and teachers alike.⁴⁰ By setting their mind to the goals of the community, and using a variety of methods—along with the support of the courts as their foundation—the TCU was able to bring about real, positive change, in a similar way to that of Atlanta, Charlotte, and Milwaukee.

However, as the TCU surveyed what they had managed to achieve throughout the various schools of Trenton, Mrs. Mary Emma Yard, executive secretary of the TCU, proclaimed some skepticism. In her words, even though the TCU had managed to make great strides towards integrating the Trenton school system, it was still too early to determine whether the new school system would in fact be successful. That said, students at Central High School and Trentonians alike were excited to have black teachers across all schools. A vet, in particular stated: “Certainly is about time we wise up. I fought on the beaches of Normandy with Negroes. They can get my vote for president any day.”⁴¹ Yet, even with all of these accomplishments the work of the TCU was not fully complete. By the end of the 1946-1947 school year, it had become clear to the TCU that the next issue they would tackle was the fact that Dr. Paul Loser had not hired any black teachers to the Trenton school system since 1942.⁴² This was a confusing matter, as although there was a multitude of black teachers qualified to teach in Trenton, and Dr. Paul Loser claimed, in early September, 1946, that there was a teaching shortage with a lack of qualified replacements, qualified black teachers were not being hired.⁴³ This was another way for him to drag and slow down the process, as segregationists did in other cities dealing with similar issues. It can be argued then that Dr. Paul Loser, after finally giving into the integration of Trenton schools, was continuing to discriminate against black teachers.

In order fully to address this matter, the TCU compiled the “Facts and Observations Pertaining to Employment of Negro Teachers and Negro Clerks in Trenton Public Schools” on October 27, 1947. The document begins by reiterating the fact that no black teacher has been hired to the Trenton School system since September, 1942, when Mr. Floyd White was hired to be the music teacher at Junior #5. The second point is that since June, 1942, black teachers have been brought on as substitutes to all schools, yet although many were eligible to be appointed to be full-employed teachers in the school system, none were.⁴⁴ In order to further demonstrate this issue, the TCU had also compiled a list of potential black teachers that for one reason or another were not hired. The list included past teaching experience, if any, possible reasons for not being hired, and other pertinent information.⁴⁵ Again, this is the TCU deciding to use a more ‘passive’ means of protesting, versus something like a sit-in by MUSIC.

One example of these potential teachers was Miss Eleanor David, who, although had experience working in the Trenton school system as a substitute, was the president of her graduating class, and had letters of recommendation from the principals of both Junior #3 and #5, was not hired.⁴⁶ Despite her high qualifications, Dr. Loser continually ignored her application and letters, telling her that there were either no positions available or that they had been given to better candidates.⁴⁷ Miss Doreen Jolly, another example, applied for a position as a home economics teacher with seven years of teaching experience at both the high school and college level. Yet, Dr. Loser told her there were no vacancies, while hiring at Junior #5 a white substitute teacher with no experience. Another noteworthy applicant, Miss Theodosia Queen, had been a permanent substitute at Junior #4 between 1944-1945. But, even though there were other teachers that saw her positively, the principal of the school gave her a bad review. The TCU argued that this may have been because of the participation of her father, Robert Queen, in the *Hedgepeth and Williams v. Board of Education* case.⁴⁸ Lastly, Mister Samuel E. Barnes, who was a candidate for a Masters of Arts degree in Physical Education, was the Director of Health and Physical Education at Livingston College, and served in the navy for four years, sought to teach physical education in the Trenton school system.⁴⁹ Yet, even with all of his qualifications, Dr. Loser never replied to his letter inquiring about the position.⁵⁰ Together, these stories paint a grim picture of possible racism on behalf of Dr. Paul Loser—the struggles of these individuals suggests that superintendent Loser discriminated against black teachers who were seeking employment in Trenton schools.

The document on facts and observations of ‘negro clerks,’ in its third point, notes that not only had no teachers been added, but there had also been a decline in black teachers, with seven teachers leaving the school system since June, 1942. The fourth declaration examines the notion that qualified black teachers had been found in Trenton’s past, as well as all over the state of New Jersey, thus making it unusual that none could be found presently within Trenton. The fifth idea found an interesting

connection between the start of the integration process for Dr. Paul Loser in 1943 and the lack of black teacher hiring. Points six and seven outlined the lack of black teachers, yet the necessity for teachers in the Mercer County, and Trenton area. Lastly, the eighth declaration stated that the “door has never been open to the Negro candidate, so for a time we shall have to solicit applications. That we will do, and may the best man win regardless of race or creed.”⁵¹ This was the closing of the document, further pointing to the issue of racism with regard to hiring practices.

In 1948, as the TCU was rebranded into the Trenton Council on Human Relations (TCHR) under President Sidney Goldmann, it became evident to the community that not only was there a shortage of teachers, but there was also some unwillingness to hire black teachers.⁵² The position of a qualified and experienced home economics teacher, for example, was especially desired. This was interesting to note, as just a year earlier Miss Doreen Jolley could have fit such a position, yet was turned away by Dr. Paul Loser. This issue continued into 1949, with the Board of Education arguing in favor of Dr. Paul Loser, stating that he did not discriminate against anyone when hiring teachers.⁵³ Unlike the segregation of Trenton schools, which was the evident and clear discrimination against blacks in the community, racism towards black teachers was more difficult to tackle as it could be disguised behind the desire for the ‘best teachers.’

Now, although the TCHR cared about the issue of black teachers, as it was both a civil problem and employment issue, it seemed that by the 1950s the organization moved on to other matters.⁵⁴ Nonetheless, a report from 1954, titled “The School and the Negro Student,” discussed the eventual increase in black teacher hiring. But, from 1945 to 1953, the number of black teachers at all levels of the Trenton school system had remained at around 36 – this included the decline in black faculty from 1945 to 1946. With all of that in mind, at the time that this report was being written, which was Dr. Paul Loser’s final year as superintendent, there was a significant increase in black teachers in the Trenton school system. The report also notes a trend, over the past ten years, towards further integration of black teachers at the different schools in the system. But, central high school still seemed to be lacking, with only three black teachers at that school.⁵⁵ Thus, by the end of Paul Loser’s tenure, some progress has been made towards the full integration of black teachers, yet there was still significant progress to come. There was also the debate of how much Paul Loser did to slow down this process, something we may never fully know. Yet, the actions of a coalition like the TCU – or OASIS and MUSIC – clearly reverberate throughout.

CONCLUSION

It would only be, in large part, thanks to these, and the many other efforts, of the Trenton Committee on Unity coalition, that Trenton schools, and the city as a whole, would be fully integrated and thrust into the modern era. The desegregation of Trenton schools, eight years ahead of *Brown v. Board of Education*, forced individuals to take sides on the matter, revealing their overall sentiments about different races, as well as the tension of the period. Although the story of the desegregation of Trenton schools is a fundamental point in our history, the ways in which this moment depicts overall race relations may be just as important as the work done by other scholars, specifically in relation to schools in the south. The process of constructing a coalition, like OASIS or MUSIC, from various individuals in the community has often been fundamental to such change in the rights of minority groups – as is evident in so many places, such as Trenton. Yet, Trenton, unlike many other places, did not have violence or large demonstrations to end the segregation of schools. Instead, they met with the administration, distributed information, and participated in other passive forms of action to bring about the change that they desired. All in all, as the TCHR came to an end in 1972, the work of this astonishing group of people was far from truly complete. As they left their mark on history, many other coalitions have formed to pick up where they left off. One such group, the TCNJ Committee on Unity, was recently successful in changing the name of the college’s admissions building, which honored a well-known segregationist from Trenton – Dr. Paul Loser.

AUTHOR NOTE

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APPENDIX

Trenton Committee for Unity (1944-48) Presidents

James Kearny Jr. (1944-1945)

The Very Reverend Frederick M. Adams (1945-1948)

Trenton Council on Human Relations (1948-72) Presidents

Sidney Goldmann (1948-1951?)

John P. Wooldridge (1951-1953?)

William S. Borden Sr. (1953-1957)

William P. Howe Jr. (1957-1961/2?)

Bertha Lawrence (1962?/3-1964)

Thomas Crawford Jamieson (1964)

Leonard Etz (1964-1967/8?)

Dawes Thompson (1968-1972?)

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