

# 50 years later, a look back

Saturday marks the 50th anniversary of the first day black undergraduates attended classes at UNC and in the Southeast.

BY JULIA FURLONG  
ASSISTANT FEATURES EDITOR

In the fall of 1950, then-Student Body President John Sanders stood in front of an all-white crowd at UNC's annual fall convocation and predicted a monumental change was en route.

"I remember saying, 'It is probable that in the course of your stay here we will have black students in the student body,'" says Sanders, former director of the Institute of Government. "And they will be accepted without differentiation."

While Sanders' prediction wasn't exactly on the mark, his prophecy came true exactly fifty years ago Saturday.

On Sept. 17, 1955, Leroy Frasier, Ralph Frasier and John Lewis Brandon — all graduates of Durham's all-black Hillside High School — attended their first classes at UNC. Thus the three became the first black undergraduates to be admitted in the University's 166-year history.

The date simultaneously marked the first time ever that blacks were accepted as undergraduate students at any state university in the

Southeast.

## Life On Campus

Brandon says the culture in Chapel Hill was different from other places at that time.

"We didn't have that large a problem in Chapel Hill," he says. "In my classes, I never had negative-type behaviors shown at me."

The significant thing about what happened here, Sanders says, is what didn't happen.

"The campus placidly accepted

change," he says.

Leaders in the state were adamant that conditions weren't changed, says Charles E. Daye, who became the first black to join the faculty of UNC's School of Law.

But he says, "Students were ahead of the social curve of the time."

Brandon says that even though protest never erupted against their presence, many people still didn't understand why they were at UNC.

"Some people thought the main reason we wanted to go there was because of the females," Brandon says. "In a sense, it wasn't expressed that much but there was a rumor that went around."

On March 4, 1956, The Daily Tar Heel reported that two psychology students found in a poll that the student body "slightly favors" integration.

Sanders says that with students in the 1950s, there was a more mature recognition that change had come, welcome or not.

"That doesn't mean everybody accepted the change," he says. "But it made very little difference in the lives of most students."

All three men commuted 20 to

30 minutes to and from campus their first semester, Brandon says.

The spring semester of his freshman year, Brandon opted to live in a special section of Steele building — which then served as a residence hall — that University officials set aside for him and seven other black graduate students.

"I was in room 34 I think," he says. "I had a medical student as a roommate, (James) Slade."

"Partly as a result of (Chancellor Robert B. House's) decision, separate arrangements were made to try to reduce conflict," Sanders says.

House was known for his conservative stance on integration.

Although dormitories were segregated and remained that way until Sept. 1964, Brandon and the Frasier brothers ate at the same cafeteria as white students without incident.

"The integration of campus facilities came somewhat ahead of other communities at large," Sanders says. "In 1950, there was no place I could have taken a black guest for dinner — in 1960, for that matter."

None of the first black undergraduates were able to catch a movie in Chapel Hill or gain entrance to local landmarks such as the Carolina Inn.

Brandon says he remembers going to a snack bar, but he could most often be found in class or in his room while on campus.

"Most of the black activities

*"The integration of campus facilities came somewhat ahead of other communities at large."*

JOHN SANDERS, THEN-SBP

occurred closer to Carrboro," he says, which was where he got his hair cut and helped wash cars at a service station to make some money.

"I wasn't too social," he says. "But I've been that way most of my life."

The Frasier brothers joined the University swim team but later dropped out.

"They were just like anybody else," Coach Ralph Casey told the Durham Morning Herald on Feb. 9, 1956. "Maybe a little quieter than normal. They worked hard. They were a curiosity at first but that wore off."



COURTESY OF THE MANUSCRIPTS DEPARTMENT, WILSON LIBRARY  
Former professor W. Roberts Mann congratulates Leroy Frasier, his brother Ralph (right) and John T. Brandon on completing math placement tests.

The boys hadn't learned proper study skills at Hillside High, Brandon says.

"We dropped out of school after our third year," says Brandon, who didn't earn the necessary C average after six semesters to pursue his chemistry major. "We didn't commit ourselves like we should have."

Brandon later earned a master's degree in chemistry from the University of Houston-Clear Lake.

## The Impact of Brown

Black students had been enrolled in graduate programs in UNC since 1951, when five men transferred from the North Carolina College in Durham to UNC's law school.

Daye says he doesn't think the undergraduate school could have been integrated before Brown v. Board of Education, in 1954, which struck down the "separate but equal" mandate of Plessy v. Ferguson.

"You had to prove that the education was unequal, which was far more difficult to do for an entire university itself rather than just a law school," he says.

A lawsuit for undergraduate admissions taking place under the "separate but equal" doctrine would have been too complex to win, he says.

Students would have to sue, claiming their education was inadequate for every specific course, he

says. "We would still be litigating today if it weren't for Brown."

## Student Leadership

"Student leadership and advocacy were important in this period," Sanders says. "Especially for instilling the temper of the campus."

Ralph Frasier told The Daily Tar Heel in 2003 that reporters from the student newspaper's staff approached his high school for black applicants.

"This whole effort was initiated by students at (UNC) who, following the Brown decision in 1954, believed that (UNC) should be on the front edge and took the initiative to see if the University would voluntarily admit African-Americans," Frasier had said.

Other groups, such as student government and the YMCA, sent the new students letters of congratulation and offered to show them around campus.

"Student leaders were more aware of racial issues, more concerned with treating blacks justly," Sanders says, adding that he engagement of such leaders was crucial in acclimating the new black undergraduates.

"Vocal students such as those in student government and The Daily Tar Heel had established a pattern of acceptance and not of resistance."

Contact the Features Editor at features@unc.edu.



COURTESY OF THE MANUSCRIPTS DEPARTMENT, WILSON LIBRARY  
Ralph Frasier (left), his brother Leroy (right) and John T. Brandon sit on the steps of the Old Well in 1955. The trio, all from Durham, were the first black undergraduates to attend the University, or any Southeastern college.

## Desegregation at UNC

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| <p><b>1789</b><br/>UNC founded.</p> | <p><b>1877</b><br/>State Colored Normal School at Fayetteville founded.</p> | <p><b>1896</b><br/>The U.S. Supreme Court, through Plessy v. Ferguson, declared separate but equal accommodations for whites and blacks — a decision overturned in 1955.</p> | <p><b>1933</b><br/>A black applicant, Thomas Hocutt, was denied admission to the graduate pharmacy program at UNC. He sued, claiming that his rejection was based on his race.</p> | <p><b>1938</b><br/>The U.S. Supreme Court's 1938 decision in Missouri ex rel. Gaines v. Canada orders the admission of Lloyd Gaines, a black applicant, to the University of Missouri Law School.</p> | <p><b>1939</b><br/>Law school established at North Carolina College for Negroes at Durham in an attempt to avoid the admission of blacks to the UNC School of Law.</p> | <p><b>1950</b><br/>Sweatt v. Painter holds that the legal education at a state law school for blacks provided by Texas to Heman Marion Sweatt was not "substantially equal to that which he would receive if admitted to the University of Texas Law School."</p> | <p><b>1951</b><br/>Based on the precedent set by Sweatt, McKissick v. Carmichael allows five men to become the first blacks to attend the UNC law school.</p> | <p><b>1955</b><br/>Based on the Brown v. Board of Education extension to higher education, UNC admits three black male students, becoming the first state university in the Southeast to break the color line for undergraduates.</p> | <p><b>September 1964</b><br/>Chancellor Paul Sharp announces that the University would hereafter assign students to their rooms without regard to race or color.</p> |
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SOURCE: ROBERT P. JOYCE, CHARLES E. DAYE, THE NEW YORK TIMES

DTH/BOBBY SWEATT

# Campus still sees room for improvement

'Progress made, but more can be done'

BY ALI GRAY  
STAFF WRITER

Walking through the Pit, anyone can see that there is a variety of ethnicities represented on campus.

But just how integrated these students actually are is another issue entirely.

Fifty years ago, the first three black undergraduates enrolled at UNC. Since then, the number of nonwhite students has increased to about 25 percent.

Last year, the Chancellor's Task Force on Diversity conducted extensive studies on integration and diversity. They concluded that the University has made large strides since the 1950s, but more can be done.

One of the results from the task force's findings was the creation of the associate provost for diversity and multicultural affairs position, now held by Archie Ervin.

Ervin will lead the University's commitment to diversity and integration in the future.

"I think what you find on our campus is an openness to differences with cross-races," Ervin says.

As more minorities joined the campus environment, the scope of diversity evolved.

Virginia Carson, director of Campus Y, attended UNC from 1967 to 1971. Her continued connection with the University has allowed her to observe integration progress.

When Carson was a student, the number of black students was still fairly small, she says. That number has increased since 1971.

"The change is significant," she says. "That has certainly made a difference, all for the better."

Carson says that although she is not aware of relationships and feelings among the current student population, she has noticed areas where diversity is lacking.

"I wish there were more faculty and senior staff people of color," she says. "I think that's a real issue."

Junior Aaron Charlop-Powers, co-chairman of Students for the Advancement of Race Relations, says the University has a long way to come with the battle of integration.

Walking on campus, Charlop-Powers says he notices that many students associate with students of

similar backgrounds.

"Who hangs out with whom is telling, in my eyes," he says.

In an effort to raise awareness of diversity issues, Charlop-Powers and his co-chairman, senior Clayton Perry, are organizing the annual Race Relations Week in October.

As far as the progress in integration, Charlop-Powers says he finds it difficult to evaluate.

"I think we like to say we're integrated and diverse," he says. "These words are a very easy cop-out to help us sleep well at night. It's very much a myth."

Carson says the University needs to face the facts head-on.

"I don't think a real community is built on false impressions," she says. "There are issues we need to deal with both in the past and present to be the kind of community we need to be."

Perry says institutions such as the Sonja Haynes Stone Center for Black Culture and History have helped foster dialogue on race issues.

"The presence of the Stone Center allows people to view social and cultural issues from a previously unrepresented perspective."

Brandon Hodges, president of the Black Student Movement, said the organization will strive to end stereotypes and cement integration.

"I definitely feel we've made a lot of progress, and those first students would be proud," he says about the

first black UNC undergraduates. "But we need to do more."

Hodges, a business major, says he has observed few black students in the Kenan-Flagler Business School or in the School of Public Health.

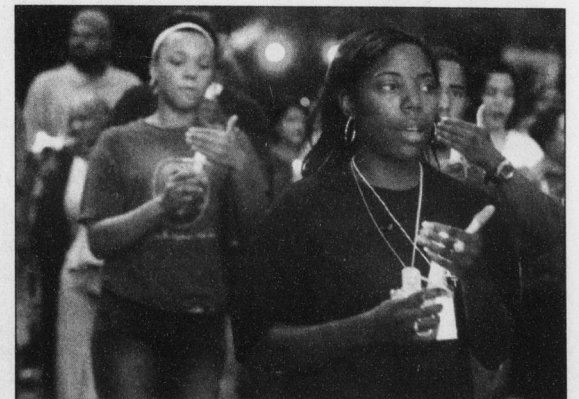
The University needs to focus on specific areas to foster diversity, he says. "We need increased efforts for minorities in these fields."

Sophomore Stephanie Chen, a Chinese-American, doesn't think it's a problem that she is a member of a vastly white campus organization.

"I don't really see myself as different," says Chen, a member of a

*"I definitely feel we've made a lot of progress, and those first students would be proud."*

BRANDON HODGES, BSM PRESIDENT



DTH FILE PHOTO  
Michelle Greene, a UNC alumna, leads a procession in 2004 at the opening of the Sonja Haynes Stone Center for Black Culture and History.

Panhellenic sorority. "They're just my friends. People don't treat me differently. There's no reason to stereotype a group."

She says she is pleased with the status of diversity on campus.

"You always see different races and you can see the organizations that have formed on campus for people interested in other cultures," she says.

Opinions on the current level of integration vary, but the University plans to pursue goals toward increased diversity, Ervin says.

"The more that we discover and become aware of differences that we have as unique individuals, the better off we are."

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