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Bridges and Doors that Enhance Diversity & Interculturalism

In this issue, we focus on social justice and those individuals who have tirelessly advocated for equality. Our theme “*Bridges and Doors that Enhance Diversity & Interculturalism*” highlight the leadership of social activists who have been instrumental in advancing the growth and development of Black faculty, staff, and students. More than 40 years ago, the Geier “consent decree” empowered faculty, staff, and students of color to achieve, lead, and dream at Tennessee institutes of higher education. Ms. Geier retired in September 2011, but she will complete her term on the Diversity Advisory Council, which ends on June 30, 2012. In February, Annazette and Charles Houston spearheaded the yearlong celebration of UTK African American achievements, which began with a march and culminated with a gala. With more than 800+ participants, the gala highlighted the accomplishments of individuals who advocated for change, opened doors and built bridges to establish diverse learning environments. As we define and redefine our roles and responsibilities at UTK, it is important that we continually nurture and support our students who will become the global leaders and change agents of the future.

J. Camille Hall, Chair, Commission for Blacks & Associate Professor of Social Work



The Geier Consent Decree Years Fulfilled and Unfulfilled Promises the Conversation Continues

In 1968 Rita Geier filed a lawsuit against the state of Tennessee challenging the legality of maintaining a segregated system of higher learning. This case became known as the Geier case. Ms. Geier’s goals for this case were to right historic wrongs and balance the scales concerning racial discrimination in higher education. She hoped its greatest impact would be to institutionalize a pathway of opportunity for African Americans and others who lacked it. For nearly four decades the Geier case went through litigation while blowing and gaining steam. In December 2011, two months after she retired, Ms. Geier agreed to discuss aspects of her law career as a litigator, change agent, leader, and role model.

Q: Why did you decide to return to TN? What decisions led you to UTK? I was born in Memphis, Tennessee but my father was a Methodist minister so we moved a lot. From age 4, to my senior year in high school, I lived in Lebanon, McMinnville and Nashville, Tennessee and in Little Rock and Pine Bluff, Arkansas. After my father passed, my mother moved us back to Memphis, TN. At age sixteen I graduated from Melrose High School. There was no thought of me going to college further away than Nashville. I enrolled in Fisk University where I had an excellent liberal arts education that was enriched by being in the Honors Program. After Fisk, I went to the University of Chicago and earned a Masters degree in History where Dr. Franklin and Daniel Boorstin, later the Librarian of Congress, were my academic advisors. The University of Chicago is predominantly a graduate school, which means that the Masters is not a significant degree since almost everyone was pursuing a PhD. I soon realized that the only career for a Historian was in academia, I felt that I needed to test the waters to see if that [being in academia] was what I wanted to do. My first return to Tennessee was for that purpose, and the position I was able to get was as an Instructor of History at Tennessee State (TSU). It turned out to be a fateful decision, because thus began the experiences at TSU that led me to challenge the legality of the state’s dual system of higher education. It was a decision that also led to me to Vanderbilt Law School and an exciting legal

career in Nashville, Seattle and Washington, D.C before my second return to Tennessee when I came to UTK in 2007.

My second return to Tennessee was similar to the first in that it occurred at a crossroads in my life when I chose a new career path. I had continued as lead plaintiff and an active strategist in the Geier case, which was filed in 1968 and concluded with the 2006 Geier consent decree, which ended after 38 years. In those interim years, I enjoyed a challenging and fulfilling law career as a litigator, general counsel and head of the largest administrative appeals organization in the U.S. My husband and I had also raised two wonderful sons and had active civic and social lives in Seattle and Washington, D.C. I often remarked though, somewhat wryly, that the Geier case was the longest running event in my life and had gone through as many twists and turns. In the decades prior to the consent decree, for instance, the Federal Court had issued its landmark decision finding that despite the ending of legal segregation in higher education, Tennessee operated a *dual* system; one for blacks and one for whites, and it [Geier consent decree] had an affirmative duty to dismantle that system and to eradicate its vestiges. In 1979, the Court also mandated the merger of UT Nashville into TSU, the first time in history that a white campus had been merged into a predominantly black university. In 1984, the parties entered a Stipulation of Settlement that, among other things, set goals for enrollment of “other race” students at each state university and provided “Geier” scholarships to encourage blacks to enroll in majority white colleges and vice versa. Summer institutes to prepare and encourage blacks to pursue law and medical educations were also established. The Court also oversaw an elaborate set of “carrots and sticks” to provide incentives to campuses for hiring “other race” faculty and administrators and to provide grants for recruitment, visiting faculty appointments, funding for minority graduate degrees and professional development. Over 5,000 Geier-funded scholarships were awarded under these initiatives. The initiatives were

statewide and significantly benefited all public colleges and universities, including all UT campuses. Another major focus of the Stipulation of Settlement and later the consent decree was to upgrade and strengthen the academic programs, administration and facilities of TSU, at a cost of approximately \$200 million, to make it more competitive in middle Tennessee and to better serve the state government and area businesses through the new downtown Avon Williams campus.

In 2001, the Geier case entered a new and final stage after negotiation of a consent decree among the parties prompted by a combination of factors: litigation fatigue on the part of the State and a willingness to take the steps that met the legal standards for a unitary system of higher education; recognition that its self-interest in a strong economic and civic infrastructure and competitiveness for jobs and resources required the education, training and leadership of all races, socio-economic groups in the state; the failure of the State's efforts to get the case dismissed following the Supreme Court decision in a similar Mississippi case; and the high cost of continuing litigation. Under the consent decree the State invested an additional \$77 million to further increase student, faculty and staff diversity and retention through scholarships and academic programs. Approximately 1300 African American students at UTK received Geier-funded scholarships and additional minority faculty and staff recruitment and hiring occurred under the consent decree that ended the Geier litigation in September 2006.

During the implementation of the consent decree, I became acquainted with UTK Chancellor Loren Crabtree and UT Vice President for Equity and Diversity, Theotis Robinson. I had also been invited to speak several times at the UT Law School and was developing relationships with others at UT. Chancellor Crabtree's vision for UTK was reflected in his commitment to continue and build upon the gains of the Geier litigation and to increase diversity on this campus through the Pledge and Promise Scholarships and his commitment to interculturalism through Ready for the World. We had discussed the necessity of measures to continue and expand not only racial diversity, but also the broader diversity of ideas, experiences and perspectives to enrich the academic and cultural environment at UTK. I believed strongly in the *educational* as well as the social benefits of diversity, and that achieving those benefits required two things: 1) substantial diversity in the student body and faculty and 2) a curricular and co-curricular environment that stimulated learning *from, with and about* members of a diverse community. I was extremely honored to deliver the December Commencement address at UTK and my discussions with Chancellor Crabtree and others while here led me to believe that UTK had a vision and sound plan to realize those benefits. Shortly after, Chancellor Crabtree inquired if I might be interested in coming to work at UTK to help achieve the goals we shared. He proposed a dual appointment as Associate to the Chancellor to help lead Ready for the World and as Senior Fellow at the Baker Center where I could pursue development of some of the educational and health policy issues that concerned me. After consideration of the personal and professional impact of such a move, I accepted the offer, retired from the Federal government in August 2007 and began my journey at UTK September 1st. That's how and why I returned to Tennessee the second time and specifically to UTK and Knoxville.

What are some of the things you've learned from this experience? I've tried to learn from everything throughout my professional life, and I'm amazed how much of my thinking is confirmed by experiences with different people and organizations. The paramount thing that's been confirmed in my UTK experience is that the bold, strategic leadership is the key to successful change. These are indispensable qualities to realize the benefits of diversity. Goals and resources must be aligned to support diversity as an essential component of quality in higher education. Leaders must not only be the chief strategist for diversity, but also the chief advocates who are consistently vocal and visible building broader and deeper "follow ship" among students, faculty, and even trustees. I strongly believe that my work on behalf of the Chancellor demonstrates the great potential and need for a full time Vice Chancellor position to help provide that leadership and ensure strategic coordination and accountability throughout UTK. If we believe that faculty and student diversity are essential to quality education, then UTK must make that a top priority use of its resources, no matter how scarce they may be or become. Whatever the size of our budget, we cannot sacrifice quality.

Another thing I've always believed that has been confirmed by my experience at UTK is the importance of honest dialogue about race among and between students and faculty and its impact on our thinking and attitudes across the spectrum of socio-economic and political experiences and belief. This is usually tough talk, but necessary and productive if engaged in with civility and a genuine desire for mutual understanding and exploration of common interests. Frank and reasoned dialogue can diffuse tensions and often lead to collaborative problem solving and to achieving shared goals. I know this sounds Pollyannaish, but I know it's possible because I've seen it, I've and done it.

What goals UTK Black faculty, staff and students at should focus on? First of all, I would not presume to tell any of these groups what their most important goals should be, but I can say what I would like to see. I'd like to see Black faculty and staff be more accessible to and engaged with students, especially Black students. The needs of Black student athletes, especially young men, for life coaching are still not being met. I know some efforts have been made, but we have to continue pressing for ways to become involved with these students and help ensure their success off the field. Black faculty and staff engagement with students on an informal basis is frequently most effective, i.e. inviting students to lunch once or twice a month to just talk about whatever is on their mind concerning UTK. Engaging with student groups as advisors is also important, and UTK has organizations that need more faculty and staff support. Advising, contributing organizational or technical expertise, being role models and a sounding board for student decision makers can be enormously helpful and enjoyable.

If UTK were to celebrate the 75th anniversary of African American Achievement, what words of advice would you offer to the chairperson(s)? The yearlong celebration of the 50th anniversary of African American Achievement was an outstanding event that heralded both struggle and achievement at UT and will be long remembered. I don't have words of advice, but I will share some of my hopes for the 75th. If we were to celebrate the 75th Anniversary of African American Achievement at UTK, I hope we will be able to tell an even more impressive story. I hope all the "firsts" will have all occurred,

and we are instead celebrating the full inclusion and significant presence of African Americans and other minorities in every facet of university life. I hope we can point to how African American and other minority faculty and students at UTK are using their energy and expertise to mentor and support poor and minority elementary and secondary students in Knoxville to help them fulfill their dreams of higher education. I hope that we are celebrating more awards and achievements of African Americans and other minorities in academic fields than on the sports fields. I could go on, but most importantly, I hope the 75th celebration can show the tremendous impact that a diverse faculty and student body have had on the quality of education and the social environment at UTK, and that it has indeed made all UTK graduates Ready for the World.

The Geier litigation established what Ms. Geier aimed to achieved: it redressed historic wrongs in Tennessee higher education and it created a framework for opportunity through

programs, scholarships and policies that widened the doors of opportunity for African Americans, other minorities and low income persons to gain the knowledge and skills for better, more productive lives. Her efforts have played a valuable role in changes in the law and in peoples' lives, but she says, "The job is not finished". Many of those programs and accomplishments that were continued and expanded after the consent decree are now threatened by budget cuts and perhaps the unintended consequences of educational reforms that could undermine racial and income integration in public higher education.



The 50th Anniversary of African American Achievements Reflections from Charles and Annazette Houston



Prior to coming to the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Charles and Annazette Houston both worked at Murray State University (MSU). Annazette was the Director of Equal Opportunity and currently serves as the Director of the Office of Disability Services at UTK. Charles held the position of Director of Programs for the Graduate School and was responsible for recruiting faculty, staff, and students. Mr. Houston's combined experience in higher education recruitment and years of service owning and selling corporations led him to UTK as the Director of Corporate and Financial Relations Development Office. He now serves as the Director of Alumni Programs and is Chair of the Black Faculty Staff Association. Charles and Annazette were co-chairs of the 75th Anniversary of MSU Founders Day; this experience was helpful in their roles on the UTK 50th Anniversary of African American Achievement (50th AAA) committee. Shortly after the 50th AAA gala, we asked Charles and Annazette if they would be willing to discuss the planning and implementation of the activities, which highlighted past, present, and future, African American pioneers and trailblazers. They were both eager to share their experiences of the yearlong event.

What goal(s) did you have for 50th Anniversary of African American Achievement? Did you accomplish them? If so, how? If not, why? One of the goals was to make sure this was a yearlong celebration. Second, it was also important to celebrate this historical milestone as a university and not just an African American focused event. While it involved desegregation of people of color, it was an historical milestone for the entire university. It is important to point out that desegregation at UTK was peaceful because people took pride in being "Volunteers". Fifty-years ago this [admission of 4-undergraduate students] was a university wide effort then and it [50th AAA celebration event] was too. The committee was comprised of students, faculty, staff and administrators of various racial/ethnic groups. There was estimated 500-700 students, faculty, staff, administrators and community members of different racial/ethnic backgrounds who participated in the campus march

which took place in February (i.e., from torchbearer to the University Center). We believe that both goals were accomplished.

Name (3) three things you've learned from this experience?

"You need to have a good budget; get buy in from everyone on campus; and planning early is very important (at least a year out)".

In what ways have colleges/universities changed since you were a student? When we were students things (e.g., students, events, etc.) were more separated; nowadays, there is a broader spectrum of people on campus and a different type of culture. UTK is more inclusive, but still not where we [UTK community] need to be. However, the faculty, staff, and students are more receptive to varying points of view and they [i.e., administration] listen to concerns.

What are the most important goal(s) Black faculty, staff and students at UTK should focus on?

Mentoring and staying attached and abreast of what is going on around the campus is important. Mentoring programs that support mentoring should expand and promote unity and togetherness (across the board). Annazette and I invite students to our home and allow them to enjoy "home away from home; "we [faculty, staff, administrators] should be doing this on campus".

If UTK were to celebrate the 75th Anniversary of African American Achievements, what words of advice would you offer to the chairperson(s)? The challenge is to have the honorees, e.g., Theotis Robinson, Charles Blaire, etc. tell their stories. They may not be available; the committee will need to be creative.

How has this yearlong celebration impact your professional and personal development? Both our personal and professional development has grown as a result of having had the opportunity to work with people from different backgrounds and knowing that we were in a position to make a difference.

2012 Chancellor Award Recipients

Gene Mitchell Gray Pioneer Award Jayanni Webster

Jayanni Webster is a senior whose dedication to justice is seen in her College Scholars projects on post-conflict education in northern Uganda. During a six-month stay in Uganda, she met victims of horrific violence. When she returned, her primary goal was to teach the children there about peace and reconciliation. That theme of peace and justice without bitterness are also central to her Baker Scholars project. She serves as president of UT's chapter of Amnesty International is involved in the UT Jazz for Justice. She was nominated for her compassion, her respect, and her depth of human understanding, which is described as remarkable and simply breathtaking.



Hardy Liston Jr. Symbol of Hope Award Annazette Houston and Charles Houston

The 2012 award was presented to Annazette and Charles Houston, whose leadership and vision have been instrumental in the university's promotion and expansion of diversity and equality. They were leaders in organizing the university community in celebration of fifty years of African American achievement. Their work led to memorable events, such as a commemorative walk and the 50th Anniversary Gala, where more than 800 people paid tribute to UT's fifty years of integration.



African American Hall of Fame Award Jane Smith Redmond

The 2012 honoree is Jane Redmond, whose ability to adapt and bring people together has been invaluable to the university. Redmond retired from UT in 2008 after a twenty-six-year career. She combines a strong work ethic with an ability to connect to students, faculty, and community leaders. She has served as assistant vice chancellor for student affairs, director of the Office of Multicultural Student Life, director of the Women's Center, interim chairperson for the Commission for Blacks, and committee member for the Women of Color Summit.

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Website: <http://web.utk.edu/~cfb/>

Email: cfb@utk.edu

Listserv: commblks@listserv.utk.edu



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