

Minorities Get The Squeeze

If the current recession does cut into North Carolina's jobs, minority groups—blacks, women, Indians, farmworkers, and welfare recipients—will be hurt the most. About 18 percent of North Carolina's citizens are poor, some one million people, according to federal income guidelines. And if poor

people are now receiving some form of welfare, or will need help during a recession, they won't get rich in North Carolina. From 1963 to 1976, state and local expenditures on each person increased threefold (\$232 to \$926). During the same period, however, the portion of the state budget spent on public welfare per person remained at 8.2 percent, lower than the rates of Mississippi or Alabama, usually considered to be the poorest state in the country. Meanwhile, from 1970 to 1976, the state's per capita income was growing at the *slowest* rate of any Southern state (except atypical Florida), and left North Carolina ranked 40th in the nation in 1977. Those most affected by these measurements are black, one of every four North Carolinians.

In 1970, the median family income for North Carolina blacks was \$4798 compared to \$8524 for the state's white families and \$9958 for U.S. white families. According to a study published in the *North Carolina Review of Business and Economics* in July, 1976, the black earnings deficit is due to two distinct influences: first, a concentration of blacks in the lowest paying jobs (white workers in these jobs also get the lowest wages); and secondly, blacks being paid less than whites in the same job, which is illegal. The study found that if blacks were paid the same as white workers doing the same job, the deficit would be decreased 44 percent. If the distribution of black workers among occupations were the same as the white distribution, the deficit would be decreased by

Four black students from North Carolina A&T College help launch the civil rights movement with this sit-in at Woolworth's in downtown Greensboro on February 1, 1960.

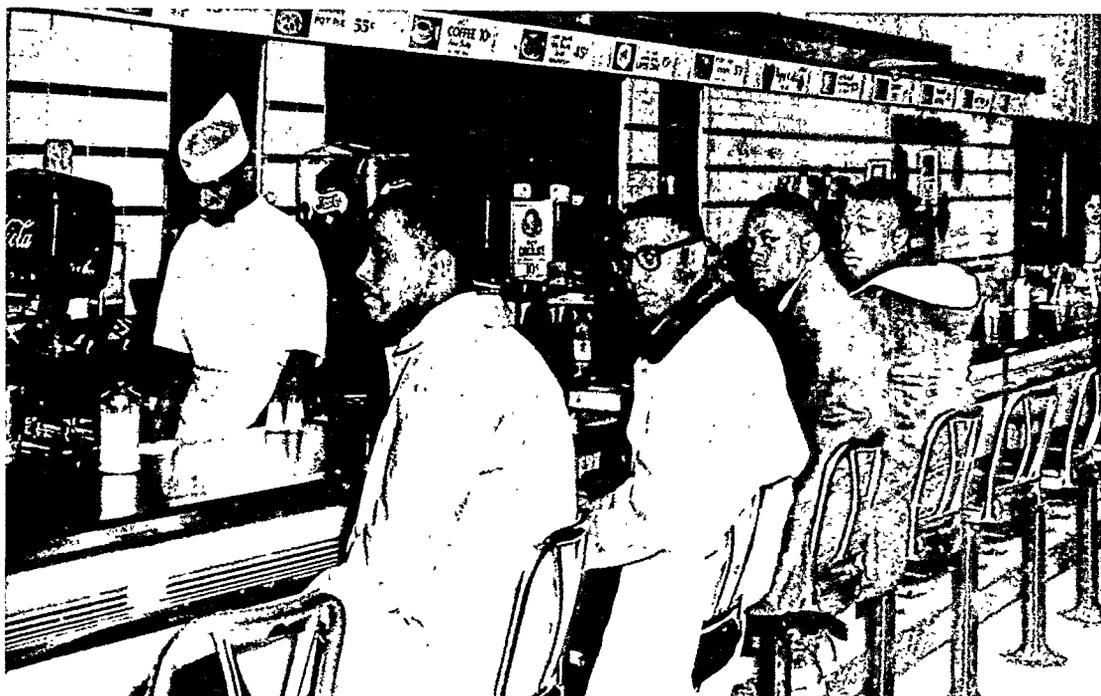


Photo from the *Greensboro Daily News*, courtesy of the N.C. State Archives

56 percent. If both changes were made, the black earnings deficit would be zero and average black earnings would increase 80 percent. Among the study's conclusions, manpower planners were urged to utilize increased legal assistance to eliminate the illegal sources of the deficit.

The Office of Federal Contract Compliance keeps yearly racial and sexual breakdowns on all job categories for companies receiving federal contracts (ranging from J.P. Stevens to Westinghouse in North Carolina). The discrimination record at a company like J.P. Stevens was bad enough to have triggered a company-wide investigation by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. For two years, Stevens resisted the EEOC probe through maneuvers by Whiteford Blakeney, the anti-union legal specialist in Charlotte. The EEOC won the initial procedural battles but the substantive study—and actions—remain to be completed. In one Title VII suit, the courts have forced Stevens to give back wages to blacks and women who were discriminated against in hiring and promotions. Other Title VII suits against Stevens are being appealed. Both administrative and legal channels, by and large, have proved cumbersome and slow in forcing change in the private sector.

More jobs are opening up to blacks and women in the service sector, as they are in industry, but discrimination remains a problem here as well. In Wake County, for example, the percentage of black full-time employees increased from 18 percent in 1976 to 21 percent in 1978, yet blacks have remained largely in the lowest paying jobs.

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Political participation is another measurement of black progress since the civil rights era. Unlike Mississippi and Alabama, where scores of blacks have been elected to office (and where the Voters Education Project spent substantial time and money), few North Carolina blacks have become important political forces. Howard Lee, former mayor of Chapel Hill, has been the most visible black leader, but after narrow defeats for Congress and for Lieutenant Governor, Lee moved to a low-profile post, secretary of Natural Resources and Community Development under Gov. Hunt. The General Assembly has had few black leaders, and those who have been elected have represented traditional interests. Henry Frye, the first black elected to the House since 1899, is an attorney with ties to the banking community. No important black leadership has emerged, however, from new voting blocs created by widescale voter registration drives. In 1980, there are only five blacks in the 170-person General Assembly. The record is somewhat better on boards and commissions, where 11 percent of the appointments are black.

Photo by Billy Barnes



Harvesting sweet potatoes on an eastern North Carolina farm.

There has long been an active black presence in North Carolina's financial community because of Durham's North Carolina Mutual Life Insurance Company and older leaders like Asa Spaulding and John Wheeler. But in contrast to states where the civil rights movement was centered, a newer generation of black leadership has been slow to emerge. Only a few leaders have taken bold initiatives. Attorneys Julius Chambers and James Ferguson, for example, have established wide credibility through the *Swann v. Mecklenburg* school desegregation case, Title VII actions, and defense of the Wilmington 10. Floyd McKissick, in attempting to build Soul City, has not been so successful. In recent years, the most political segments of the black community have consumed enormous energy defending the Wilmington 10 and 'Charlotte 3, dissipating much of the local organizing, particularly in the schools, when Ben Chavis, Jim Grant and the others were arrested. Gov. Hunt's resolution to the cases—shortening the prison terms enough for release but refusing to grant pardon—indicates the overall posture of a "New South" governor towards black activists.

Unlike blacks, women have assumed strong leadership positions, "one area," Bass and DeVries write, "in which North Carolina does stand out in the South." A bipartisan Women's Political Caucus was formed in 1972, which resulted in women participating widely in electoral politics and reaping the rewards that come from such work. Twenty-one women won seats in the 1979 General Assembly, and North Carolina led the South with 23 percent of its appointive boards and commissions composed of

women. This record built on the work that women had performed in politics for free for so many years. At the same time, the middle and upper income League of Women Voters, Federation of Women Clubs, and National Organization of Women were further enhancing the reputation of women's leadership in the state.

Even so, the primary gains have accrued to the professional classes. Ironically, some women who have benefited the most from the women's movement, people like Susie Sharp and Juanita Kreps, have not been strong women's rights advocates. At the same time, women political activists have often focused on goals, like the Equal Rights Amendment, associated primarily with professionals. Hourly wage earners and welfare mothers, on the other hand, have received fewer identifiable benefits. Despite these disparities, some leaders have become important symbols of change across class divisions and in some cases, have effected substantive reforms as well. Rep. Ruth Cook, for example, guided legislation requiring day care licensing through the General Assembly, a valuable improvement for working women, and Rep. Wilma Woodard has worked for reforms at Women's Prison.

The Forgotten Minorities

Each year, 209,000 men, women and children pick apples, beans, peppers and other vegetables on North Carolina farms. From May to September, another 29,000 migrants travel into the state, coming up the east coast stream that starts in Florida. Of these, 13,000 go to 314 camps in Sampson, Harnett and Johnston counties alone. A high percentage are black; about one of every six is Chicano.

Dennison Ray, director of Legal Services of North Carolina, views the state as "one of the very worst for migrants and farmworkers," but few think of this as a "farmworker" state. While migrants' wages are now covered by federal minimum wage law, no Cesar Chavez has organized a serious advocacy or watchdog structure in the state. Consequently, conditions remain beyond the law and more wages end up in the crew leaders' pockets than in the workers'. According to a U.S. Department of Labor study, a migrant pays an average of \$35 per week to a crew leader for food, but that food costs as little as \$5.

In addition to working the vegetable-growing counties in the east, migrants travel into the apple orchards in western counties like Haywood. The geographical division creates some problems both for advocacy groups such as the Farmworker Legal Services, and for enforcement agencies, such as state and federal labor officials.

Not far from the Haywood County migrant camps are 6,000 Cherokees on a Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) Reservation. In the 1830s, 1,000 Cherokees hid in the Smokies when federal troops forced the tribe on a "Trail of Tears" to Oklahoma. The descendants of

those protestors depend today, ironically, on a tourist trade that caricatures the Indian of the wild West. On the edge of the Great Smokey Mountain National Park, the most visited in the nation, the town of Cherokee has become an overcommercialized strip featuring tomahawks, moccasins, and headdresses made in Taiwan. The irony of such dependence came full circle in the 1979 summer season when high gas prices kept many tourists at home. Because of the low local revenues generated from tomahawk sales, the

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Cherokees had reduced local services last winter.

Like the migrant population, the state's Indians are divided by the industrial Piedmont. The other major tribe, the Lumbees, are concentrated in Robeson County. They don't have to contend with the isolation of a reservation, but because they do not have official BIA tribal status, the Lumbees do not receive BIA benefits. For many years, Robeson had three school systems—white, black, and Indian—exacerbating the problems of pluralism. Today, moving towards integration, discrimination remains, but opportunities also surface. In the J.P. Stevens organizing campaign, for example, the workers' committee is approximately one-third black, white and Indian. The Indian presence has lessened the black-white tensions that often occur in union efforts here. Like the Cherokees who refused to die under forced march, the Lumbees have fought hard to maintain their tradition, perhaps best symbolized by the Indian-oriented college, now Pembroke State University.

Pembroke's origins go back to the Croatan Indian Normal School, which began as a single structure

The original Old Main, built in 1887.

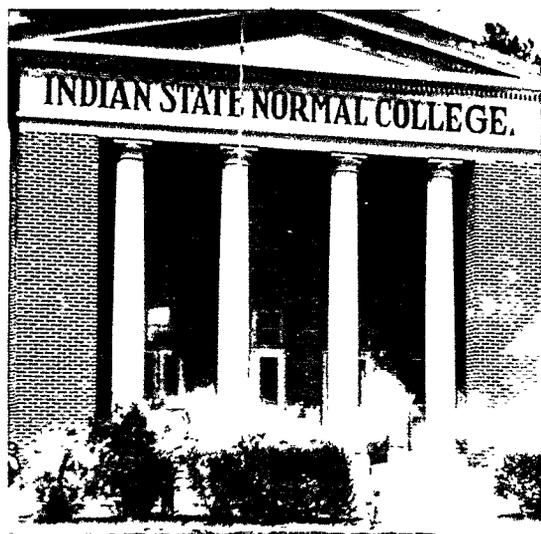


Photo courtesy of Pembroke State University

built in 1887 with Indian labor and money. Later known as "Old Main," the building became the campus landmark. When Old Main burned in 1972, the Lumbees rallied and rebuilt it. In 1979, the Lumbees rallied again, this time vigorously debating the four choices proposed by a selection committee from which to choose Pembroke's new president. Two of the candidates were Indians, both North Carolina natives. Neither was picked by the UNC Board of Trustees, leaving various Lumbee factions feeling at least disappointed if not extremely bitter.

The Lumbee tradition is now in a complex transition: while the Lumbees are being integrated into the mainstream of society (the first Lumbee legislator sat in the General Assembly in the mid-1970s), there is at the same time a stronger public focus on the Lumbee heritage (the Lumbee outdoor drama, "Strike At the Wind," performed near the town of Pembroke, has become a popular statewide attraction). Pembroke State's changing status also symbolizes this transition. Still considered an "Indian" school by many, this University has now become a part of the larger political world of the consolidated University of North Carolina.

The Tar Heel Way

If the politics surrounding the Pembroke University president's position suggest insensitivity, the Tar Heel posture on the UNC desegregation case has painted the plutocracy right into a corner. Prompted by an NAACP Legal Defense Fund suit, negotiations

between UNC and HEW had been in the works for some years. William Friday, elevated to head the statewide system consolidated in the early 1970s, had been reporting steady progress. No one had challenged this stance, particularly "liberal" North Carolina journalists, many of whom had trained only a stone's throw from Friday's home in Chapel Hill.

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But in 1978, the Legal Defense Fund's suit pushed HEW Secretary Joe Califano near contempt of court. HEW promptly escalated its pressures on UNC to integrate. Suddenly, data began appearing to the public for the first time: the black/white percentages throughout the 16-campus system reflected prolonged patterns of segregation; the physical plants at the 5 predominantly black schools were pitifully underfunded; and neighboring black and white campuses were duplicating programs.

These revelations and the HEW threat of stopping federal funds precipitated an intense round of North Carolina-style politicking. Gov. Hunt and President Friday defended the traditions of the university system and explained that the state couldn't possibly compromise the prestige of the Chapel Hill, Raleigh, or Greensboro campuses. Established black leaders joined with Friday in wanting to preserve the identity of the black campuses. Former civil rights attorney

Old Main burning in 1972. Note that "Indian State Normal College" had changed to "Pembroke State University."



Photo courtesy of Pembroke State University



Photo by Karen Tam, Raleigh News and Observer

Charles Morgan, Jr. (right), attorney for the University of North Carolina, and Cleon Thompson, UNC vice-president for student affairs and special programs, at UNC-HEW hearing.

Chuck Morgan came aboard to head the UNC legal team. The state press defended UNC; the legislature spent more on black schools. In the end, public relations, legal maneuvering, and increased appropriations won the round. The fund cutoff was avoided. But administrative hearings have begun in the case's next stage, and the final solution remains unclear.

The same UNC Board of Governors that was jockeying with HEW had only recently shown its true colors on a clear-cut issue. Gov. Hunt had approved a planning grant for a labor education center within the university system, and the legislature had given tentative approval. Thirty states have such university-based programs, including Alabama, Arkansas and Virginia. And in the UNC system, business seminars are standard curriculum. But when the issue reached open debate among the Board of Governors in 1978, persons like State Senator Cass Ballenger, a manufacturer from Hickory, intensified their opposition. "One thing that attracts business to the state is the fact that we don't have many labor unions," said Ballenger. "Everybody talks around it, but it's true." He went on to say that the labor center would represent an "endorsement" of labor by state government. Facing such opposition, Gov. Hunt's support disappeared and the Board killed the center.

The UNC desegregation case continues to be discussed privately and formally negotiated in hearings. What the public is left with, however—especially in light of the labor center action—is the specter of retrenchment at the heart of North Carolina progressivism, Chapel Hill. When faced with federal pressures to integrate, no George Wallace or Ross

Barnett stood up in open defiance. The resistance seems more complex, more subtle. But it remains, nevertheless, resistance. Some on the UNC Board have the university's future as their primary concern, for black and white, and are willing to consider such far-reaching changes as mandatory "districting" at the higher education level, similar to the primary grades. But others involved in the UNC conflict seem to have a different concern at heart: how will it affect the state, and me, politically?

This "thinking" session occurred at a 1959 meeting of the Business Foundation of North Carolina. (L to R): J. Spencer Love, President of Burlington Industries, William C. Friday, President of the University of North Carolina, Addison H. Reece, President of North Carolina National Bank.

