

DELTA OF TEXAS CHAPTER
PHI BETA KAPPA
TEXAS CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY



INITIATION PROGRAM
HONORING PHI BETA KAPPA INITIATES
AND THEIR GUESTS

Texas Christian University
Fort Worth, Texas
Auditorium, BLUU
8 May 2014
2:00 p.m.

2014

INITIATION
of Members-in-Course

Officiating:

Peter Locke	President
Michael Strausz	Vice President
Ze-Li Dou	Secretary
Greg Friedman	Guide
Rob Garnett	Treasurer
Bob Frye	Historian

PHI BETA KAPPA INITIATES

Ancona, Susanne Jacqueline
Beckrich, Kyle Shane
Benson, Courtney Elizabeth
Brown, Scott Lynn
Causey, Rachel Claire
Coppola, Kellie Ann**
Dillon, Caroline Holton
Doyle, Megan Renee
Ehrhardt, Lucas Neal
Ehrhardt, Marcus Glenn
Erwin, Alexandra Lea
Garofalo, Linley Jeanne
Gessouroun, Ryan Morris
Godwin, Melaineey Brooke
Hermes, Emily Kathryn
Hodges, Abby Kathryn
Khan, Omar Muhammad
Learned, Jessica Marie**
Lewis, Katie Linn

Mathews, Margaret Annie
Morton, Mary Margaret *
Muller, Taylor Ann
Murzyn, Zoey Ann
Nix, Melissa Leigh
Rea, Elizabeth Ashley**
Rhoden, Madeline Grace**
Richards, Kirby Michelle
Rodriquez, Katherine Amber
Sargis, Landon Joseph
Sherman, Matthew James
Shircliff, Sydney Michelle
Wells, Paige Elizabeth
Wiles, Jenna Danielle**
Wilkins, Hannah Kate *
Wood, William Matthew
Wooley, Allana Nicole**
Zani, Kaye Marie *

** elected as a junior

*degree conferred

ADDRESS

“The Examined Life”

Dr. Linda Hughes
Professor of English

ANNOUNCEMENT OF
THE JAMES W. NEWCOMER AWARD
TO THE OUTSTANDING
SENIOR SCHOLAR IN LIBERAL STUDIES

2014

by Dr. Michael Strausz

Katie Lewis

The Examined Life

Thank you, Dr. Locke, for inviting me to speak today and congratulations to all of you who are being honored. I think I can identify with everyone here today. As an initiate of Phi Beta Kappa, I have experienced the honor that comes with election. As the mother of a daughter (now Heather Johnson) who was initiated into Phi Beta Kappa, I know that for family members in the audience, this ceremony is about your special son, daughter, grandchild or sibling, not a speech or a ritual. As a faculty member and former PBK officer, I also share with my colleagues the conviction that it is important to mark the intellectual inquiry and critical thinking that lie at the heart of liberal arts education. So I will hope to engage in that inquiry while keeping my remarks brief.

On hearing my title, many of you no doubt thought about your lives as students and all those tests, starting in elementary school and continuing right through this week, that have examined your knowledge and skills again and again. Each of you has truly led an examined life in that sense, and for graduating seniors, knowing that undergraduate exams are gone forever must be one of your joys today. I hope, though, that many of you heard in my title an allusion to two of the most famous thinkers in liberal arts tradition, Plato and Socrates in "The Apology of Socrates," which is Plato's rendition of the defense Socrates made to the judges of Athens. Socrates devoted himself wholly to intellectual inquiry in the form of searching questions and rigorous analysis of the answers, including his own, for logic and consistency. As Socrates explained, on hearing an oracle pronounce that he himself was the wisest of men, Socrates, knowing his own limits, felt this could not be right and so determined to question men renowned for their wisdom. In every case, he concluded that he was wiser, since those he questioned were

convinced that they really were wise, whereas Socrates at least knew in how many ways he was ignorant. For unmasking supposed experts as well as received opinion through his questioning, Socrates was accused of corrupting the youth of Athens and put on trial. Only after Socrates was found guilty and condemned to death did he make the statement that inspires my talk: “I say again that the greatest good of man is daily to converse about virtue, and all that concerning which you hear me examining myself and others, and that the life which is unexamined is not worth living” (Plato 26). Socrates was willing to die rather than abandon what he called his “philosopher’s mission [to search] into myself and other men” (Plato 17). I maintain that Socrates’ mission is the mission of liberal arts education and of every one of us who claims to be educated. Note that Socrates underscores that we must continue to question ourselves as well as the world around us if we hope to keep improving our knowledge and society. So one of my purposes today is to call on each of you to continue the examined life as members of Phi Beta Kappa and graduates of TCU.

Living the examined life isn’t always easy. It killed Socrates, after all. Asking hard questions can be uncomfortable and unsettling, moving us out of our comfort zones and our assured sense of how things are. I’ll speak for myself here. On one hand my job as a professor is to make students think hard and consider whether consensus opinions are valid or not; as a humanities researcher my job is likewise to question whether our received notions of literary history or a work’s cultural significance are really borne out by the evidence. On the other hand, it is all too easy for me to get complacent, not to trouble myself too much about what we all “know” or to question how things “are done.” To illustrate, I’m going to give an example of becoming uncomfortable and being forced to question what I thought I knew, and the conclusions that emerged from this process of examination.

Surely one thing we can all agree about is our pride in TCU. My best friend in graduate school, Deborah Downs-Miers, who has a TCU BA and MA, so impressed me with the education she had received that when a position in the TCU English Department opened up, I applied. I not only got the job; I gave up tenure to come to TCU. It was one of the best career moves I ever made, and two weeks ago I received a pin for 25 years of service.

Some 10 or 15 years ago, however, I received a jolt. I was having dinner with TCU alumni from several decades earlier when one of them casually stated, "Of course there were no black students when we were at TCU." I froze. This was not the TCU I knew. Suddenly the fact that everyone at my table was white acquired new significance, and I was all the more uncomfortable since this audible comment was made against the backdrop of servers, many of whom were persons of color, bringing plates to the table. I had always taken pride in knowing that our institution founded in 1873 by the Disciples of Christ ministers Addison and Randolph Clark had been co-ed from the beginning, at a time when this was unusual. It had never occurred to me to ask if it had also been inclusive in terms of race, especially when enhancing the diversity of TCU had been an ongoing priority since my arrival. That moment at dinner stands for me as an example of the challenge that Socratic examination can pose, when the reality I had assumed was suddenly brought into question, and I could either cover it over and make peace with the discovery, or face it and readjust my knowledge.

What does it mean to know that part of the legacy of TCU is a racist past? Even to pose the question strikes a dissonant note, I realize, on a day of celebration like this. But that is why I decided I should revisit the matter for this talk. A key method of liberal arts education is the need to research an issue and look at multiple points of view, not just one. Though I'm sure I could have investigated even further, I'll share what I have learned. It wasn't the kind of topic

that could be dealt with by a google search, so I turned to a resource familiar to me from my role as a humanities researcher: a library's archive. When I sent a query to TCU's Special Collections, Library Specialist Lisa Pena informed me of a folder entitled "Minorities at TCU" and kindly offered to scan the materials for me. Most of what follows is from that folder, which included documents from 1951 to 1989. An article from the November 2, 1951 *Skiff* confirms the difficult past I had stumbled against at the alumni dinner. A few African-American soldiers had completed evening courses at TCU during World War II, and black students had continued to attend some evening classes—but only evening classes—up to the time of this article. A news release cited in the article as authorized by the Chancellor did not show TCU at its best: "For the past ten years, we have wanted to avoid any action which would cause any people to point to us and say 'Texas Christian University is pioneering and pushing out in the matter of non-segregation'" ("Negroes Attending"). It was true, then. TCU had practiced segregation and in November 1951 it was not eager to end the practice.

But that was not the only perspective, as a letter to the editor of the *Skiff* from a 1950 graduate of TCU made clear. Rhodes Thompson unmistakably sounded the keynote of the examined life when he wrote to question TCU's official policy in a letter published November 30, 1951. Citing a recent editorial that repeated the point I've mentioned, he continued: "Such statements are in opposition to the very purpose of a Christian university, and certainly contradict the very principles and ideals which I received in the classrooms of TCU....'White' Europeans are perplexed by the wide gap between our professions and our practices....there are serious doubts as to what we mean when we speak of liberty and equality. To ... [avoid] 'involving ourselves in any discussion of segregation or non-segregation' ...is a denial of the

democratic process of free discussion, as well as a refusal to recognize the basic denial of democracy which segregation is" (Thompson).

Perhaps not surprisingly, given Thompson's comments, Brite Divinity was the first to open its doors to African American students, admitting three to its graduate program in Fall 1952 ("3 Negroes"). Undergraduate education at TCU, however, continued to exclude blacks for more than another decade. Harris College of Nursing next broke the color barrier in Fall 1962 when it admitted a junior and two seniors to complete their nursing requirements; and the September 25, 1962 *Skiff* ran a headline of "Harris College Desegregates" illustrated with a photo of Mrs. Allene Jones with the Nursing dean, the caption identifying Jones as "the University's first Negro undergraduate student" ("Harris College"). No other TCU schools joined in ("Nursing College") until January 1964, when TCU's Board of Trustees met and voted 21-4 to end segregation (Minutes). One board member resigned in protest, but integration proceeded peaceably and amicably in Fall 1964—though not all barriers fell immediately. Two more years passed before James Cash, now a member of TCU's Board of Trustees, was recruited as the first black basketball player to participate anywhere in the Southwest Conference (Downing). But TCU's 91 years of discrimination based on race had come to an end.

Those first African-American students who were willing to forgive or at least set aside TCU's segregation history and shoulder the challenge of being a tiny minority among a sea of white faces are TCU heroes. In addition to Allene Jones and James Cash, there was Ivory Dansby, who joined TCU in Fall 1965 and experienced little overt discrimination, though she noted that black women were paired only with other black students in dorms and found the stereotypes of African Americans in an American history textbook insulting (Buchholz 13-14). In 1968 Ronnie Hurdles became the first African American cheerleader at TCU (Downing).

Some white TCU community members were also working from within for change. When I came to TCU in 1989, my friend Deborah reminded me of something she had told me years earlier, that Joey Jeter in Brite Divinity had gone to Mississippi for the Freedom Rides to register African Americans to vote. Knowing about this ethical leader from my earliest days at TCU was in fact one of the reasons I had been so shocked to learn about TCU's history of segregation; and my wish to examine this history today was in part motivated by awareness that there was a bright counterexample to share as well as a dark episode from TCU's past. Dr. Jeter, formerly Granville and Erline Walker Professor of Homiletics, retired from Brite Divinity in 2010, but he kindly agreed to meet with me this past April 7, for I wanted to ask how his own examined life had led him bravely to risk the dangers of being a Freedom Rider. He and I hadn't talked long before I discovered another erroneous prior assumption on my part. Because he was a professor when I arrived, I had assumed that he was a faculty member when he traveled to Mississippi in 1964; I had even imagined a cadre of Brite faculty traveling as a representative of the university. But not so. Joey Jeter was an undergraduate, a junior in the middle of his fall semester when he set off for Hattiesburg. On the night of his arrival he had to flee from whites at a local filling station who turned menacing when they figured out why he was in town (Jeter, "Experience"). Two days later he drove a carful of African Americans to the local court house to register, but they were met by a blockade of police officers and troopers who first said the county clerk was unavailable and, when the would-be voters and Joey started walking toward the court house, arrested all of them for trespassing—on public property, no less. In jail Joey was immediately separated from his black colleagues; when he was told a few nights later that he was free to go, a cellmate advised him to look out the window and stay put. Outside were several pickups full of white men who were waiting for him—and who might well have killed him if he had ventured

outside. Eventually he made it back to TCU—only to learn that the Chancellor was threatening to expel him because he now had a criminal record as well as the reputation of a trouble maker. I hope all of you in the Honors College will appreciate that it was Dr. Paul Wassenich, a professor of theology who founded TCU's Honors Program, who defended the young Jeter, whose college career then continued (Jeter, "Experience").

But that was not the last time Dr. Jeter's Christian principles and ethical commitments, as well as friendships with African Americans, prompted him to question the status quo and speak out. In 1970, as Rhodes Thompson had been in 1951, Joey was an alumnus who continued to care about his alma mater. When Dr. Jeter and I met, he shared with me a letter dated January 15, 1970 addressed to the TCU Chancellor, asking the Chancellor to deny having suggested that Ronnie Hurdles, TCU's first black cheerleader, not touch any of the white cheerleaders in public. Otherwise, Jeter wrote, "despite my respect for you and our friendship, [I must] label your action racist ... and dehumanizing in a most un-Christian fashion ... and call you to account for your deed" (Jeter, letter). The reply, which he also shared with me, expressed surprise at his tone but didn't deny the allegation. But the prohibition on mixed-race cheerleader contact was abandoned the next year (Downing).

I close with one more undergraduate student from this time period. It was Mark Wassenich, son of Dr. Paul Wassenich and today still an active member of the TCU community, who as TCU's student body president in 1963-64 set the goal of achieving integration at TCU. First working with the chancellor and faculty, Mark Wassenich then took "the request to the Board of Trustees" (Downing). And that is how it came to pass that on January 23, 1964, TCU's Board of Trustees voted to end segregation.

What do I feel I've learned from examining rather than ignoring this painful episode in TCU's history? First, it is a reminder that even those leaders and institutions that we love and most admire can err, and that we owe it to them as well as ourselves to question the status quo. Second, I have been reminded of my own limits, not only because of my hasty generalizations that TCU had always been inclusive or that Dr. Jeter had gone to Mississippi as a faculty member, but also because I know I have never done anything as brave as those African Americans who integrated TCU or Joey Jeter, who stood against injustice in Mississippi in 1964. More positively, examining this history reminds all of us that TCU students can lead and teach faculty and administrators as well as learn from them. I urge each of you, as current students and prospective alumni and alumnae, never to cease living the examined lives that your education has equipped you to lead. For by living the examined life you can not only change the world but also undertake the sometimes more challenging task of changing your community, your neighborhood, and the perspectives of your friends and yourselves. Thank you, good luck, and good speed.

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