

## **Interview with white alumni**

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Interviewers: Abby Butt, Paige Koren, Tyler Lawrence, David Loos, and Samir Moussawel

### **Alumnus #1**

Q: What was your major?

A: I had a double major, biology and art (no minor).

Q: How was your experience at Mercer University? Were you in a fraternity or student organizations?

A: I had a good experience at Mercer, was a member of KA (Kappa Alpha Order), and still am in contact with friends and fraternity brothers that I first knew there.

Q: How did you feel about integration at Mercer University? How did it affect you? Did you have any African American friends?

A: I do recall integration at Mercer and, as such, had no problem with it. However, I do recall a certain amount of reverse discrimination in favor of the black students that seemed unfair to many white students. Funded functions including food and entertainment were provided especially for the black students, and a number of them seemed to be better off financially due to the special treatment they were accorded than many of the non-black students. I remember particularly two black students who were roommates just across the hall from my roommate and me in the men's dorm. Both seemed to have lots of nice new clothing and each drove a relatively new, nice automobile while many of the rest of us (myself included) did not have and could not afford a car and did not seem to have nearly as extensive wardrobe as theirs. However, I don't recall any particular animosity towards the black students by white students but rather the other way around on occasion.

Q: Did your teachers educate you about tolerance for integration?

A: I don't recall any of my professors addressing integration one way or the other. This seemed to be done more on the level of the administration at Mercer where we saw special treatment afforded to the black students rather than an effort to bring black and white together in a closer understanding.

Q: Were there black students in any of your classes? If so, how did you feel about them being there?

A: I'm sure that there were black students in my classes but none that I got to know well, largely because they seemed to want to remain apart.

Q: Were you affected by peer pressure to either like or dislike integration at Mercer University?

A: Although I do recall prejudice from individuals, both black and white, I don't recall any peer pressure either way to like or dislike integration at Mercer.

Q: What years did you attend Mercer University? Graduation Date?

A: I attended Mercer from the fall of 1966 until 1970, when I graduated with an AB.

## **Alumnus #2**

Q: What was your major?

A: I double majored in English and political science.

Q: How was your experience at Mercer University? Were you in a fraternity or student organizations?

A: I was a brother in Lambda Chi Alpha Fraternity. I served on the university Judicial Committee that heard complaints filed against students by other students. (I do not recall any that were based on race). I was on the "Cauldron" Yearbook Staff and was editor of the 1975 edition. I was listed in Who's Who Among Students in American Colleges and Universities in 1977.

Q: How did you feel about integration at Mercer University? How did it affect you? Did you have any African American friends?

A: I don't know how many black students were at Mercer in the mid '70s. We interacted in class, the dorms, in athletics, and in organizations. As a general rule, black students tended to stay to themselves socially. If any interracial dating was occurring, it was rare and discrete. Fraternities and sororities were rather segregated. There were 8 "white" fraternities and 3 "black" fraternities, 4 "white" sororities, and 2 "black" sororities. The exceptions were Pi Kappa Phi which had 2 black brothers and Sigma Nu which had one. The Pi Kap lodge was next to the Lambda Chi lodge, and we interacted regularly. The first black brother in the Pi Kap chapter was Victor Jackson. I remember he wore his hair in a large Afro and that he was well liked.

Q: Did your teachers educate you about tolerance for integration?

A: There were only about five or six black faculty members at Mercer while I was there, and I recall only being in one class with a black instructor. His name was Gary Johnson, an instructor in the Political Science department. I enjoyed his class, and his lecture style was very animated. I recall that he invited all of his students over to his home for a wine and cheese party. (Remember the legal drinking age was 18 at that time).

Q: Were there black students in any of your classes? If so, how did you feel about them being there?

A: I don't recall integration or racial tolerance being a topic discussed in class. Race was discussed in two classes that I took. American literature introduced me to black writers for the first time. I also took an education class which discussed racial/cultural differences. I doubt the term "Ethnic Diversity" was in use yet, but this class was my first introduction to some of the ways cultural differences affects how we communicate and understand one another.

Q: Were you affected by peer pressure to either like or dislike integration at Mercer University?

A: I don't recall feeling any racial tension on campus. I was aware that some white students were less racially tolerant than others. The black students that I knew were very studious and seemed to take school more seriously than some of the white students that I knew. A black student that I knew, named Robert Alexander, ran for class president. I helped him with his campaign. Unfortunately, he didn't get elected.

While I was at Mercer the Tattnell Square Baptist Church was located on campus next to the chapel. The church had the reputation of not allowing blacks (including students) to attend. The church had been there for many years and leased the building from the university. When the lease expired around 1976 the university did not renew it. The building became the speech and communications department. I don't know if the administration didn't renew the lease because of the church's racial intolerance or if they just needed another building. Either way, it removed a symbol of racial intolerance from campus.

Being at Mercer may have influenced my outlook regarding issues of race, justice, and being open to others that were different from me, more than I realize. When I was a senior I met a girl. She was from a small town in middle Georgia, and she was beautiful. We really liked each other a lot. But the more that I got to know her, I realized that she held very prejudiced views regarding race. I could have chosen to ignore it, and for awhile I did. I can't say that is what ended the relationship but for me it was a factor. Had we stayed together it would have been an issue.

Q: What years did you attend Mercer University?

A: I was at Mercer from September 1973 until I graduated in May 1977.

### **Alumnus #3**

Q: What was your major?

A: My majors were biology and art.

Q: How was your experience at Mercer University? Were you in a fraternity or student organizations?

A: My experience was very good. The academics were excellent. I was a member of Kappa Alpha Order. There were other student organizations, but that was a long time ago and I really don't remember.

Q: How did you feel about integration at Mercer University? How did it affect you? Did you have any African American friends?

A: Common to the time, I had a bias against integration. I embraced equality and everything that goes with it, but the rhetoric was insufferable. Having grown up around many black people, I understood their problems but as a white person could not really identify with those

problems. I had several black students in my classes and some were friends. It was not a problem for me, and I never viewed them as anyone different.

Q: Did your teachers educate you about tolerance for integration?

A: For most teachers, integration was a phenomenon that was the current occurrence. Actually, we had a lot of other problems. Viet Nam was raging and many people were drafted out of college if their grades dropped. The teachers who seemed to dwell on integration spent more time on that than they did their subjects. I had a Psychology professor who was obsessed with integration and civil rights. The pressure to embrace her ideals was great and anyone who looked too "preppy" was discounted as either a racist or border-line racist. I resented that. If the environment had been more "tolerant" natural curiosity would have resolved this issues. Given the emphasis on integration and Civil Rights, nothing much was accomplished. I suppose that is human nature - to push back.

There were times that many white students at Mercer felt that we were not as important as the bohemian types, at the time known as hippies, or the minority students. At least that was my feeling. I have never forgotten the attitude and probably will always carry a little with me. Mercer gave me a wonderful academic foundation.

Q: Were there black students in any of your classes? If so, how did you feel about them being there?

A: There were black students in several of my classes, and it was a non issue. Some of them were friends, or at least friendly.

Q: Were you affected by peer pressure to either like or dislike integration at Mercer University?

A: Yes. One of our fraternity brothers was particularly influenced by the psychology professor and her brother who was an administrator. He dropped his membership in the fraternity and told us it was because we were exclusive. The very nature of social clubs is exclusivity, ironic. We all felt betrayed and a little bewildered. Actually, he lost an excellent opportunity to lead by example. As it was, he was simply discounted as another fanatic and a little strange. No one really said much about him after that.

Q: What years did you attend Mercer University?

A: I transferred to Mercer in 1966 and graduated in 1969.