

“Integration With Dignity”

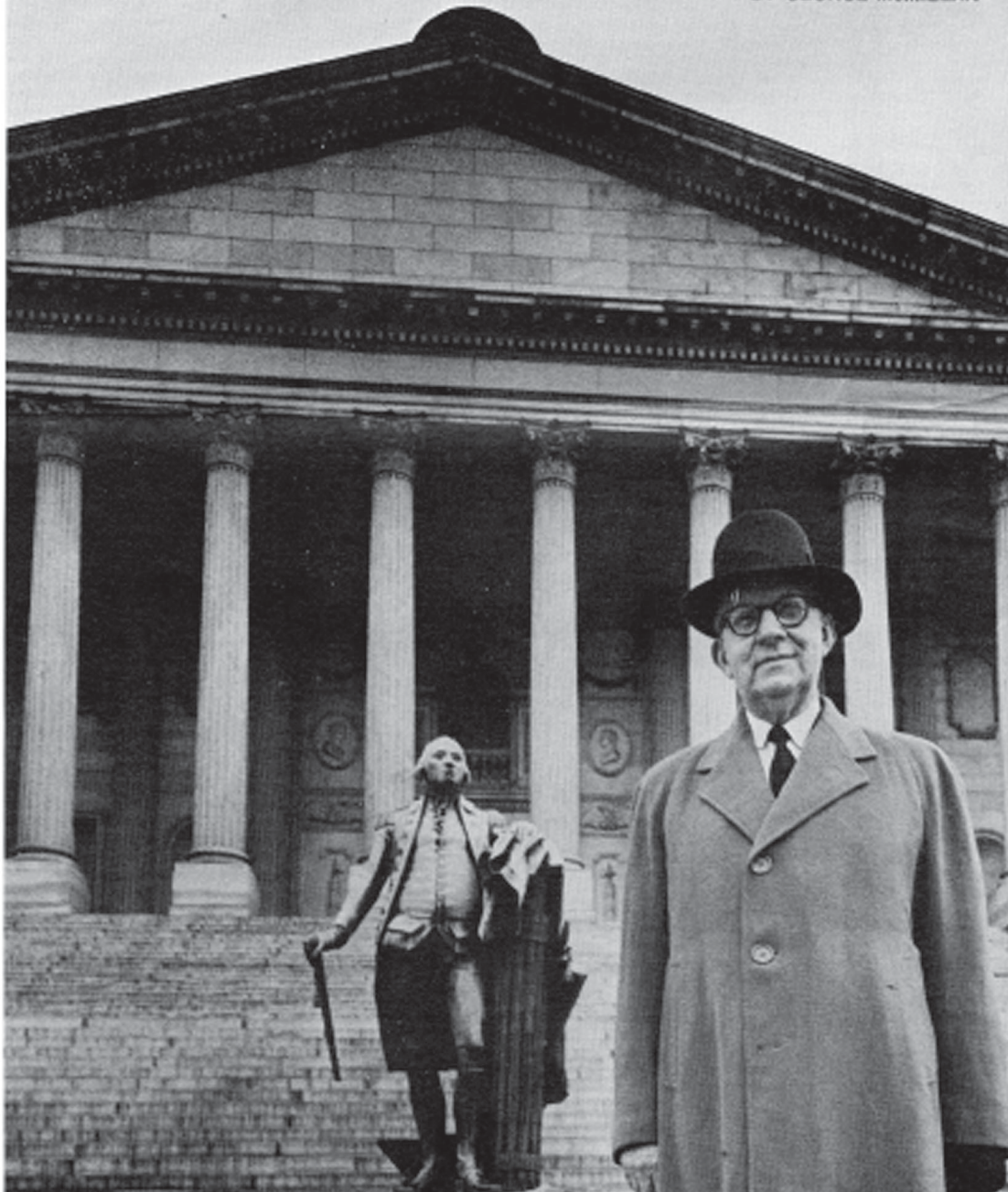
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INTEGRATION WITH DIGNITY

The inside story of how South Carolina kept the peace.

BY GEORGE McMILLAN



*State Senator
Edgar Brown stood
foursquare for
law and order.*

A small group of responsible citizens plotted to avert violence.

At 1:30 P.M. on January 28, 1963, a bright but cold day at Clemson College in the Piedmont hills of South Carolina, some 160 TV, radio, magazine and newspaper reporters waited quietly for the first Negro student to enroll in a white school in South Carolina.

The Negro's name was and is Harvey Gantt, and many people expected his imminent arrival to bring on one of the nation's worst racial explosions. In fact, of course, it did nothing of the kind—as everyone who has followed the case is aware. But behind that amazing fact lies a complex and fascinating story that has never been told until now.

For the peace with which Harvey Gantt entered Clemson was no mere lucky happenstance. Violence did seem clearly in the cards. South Carolinians are notoriously passionate when it comes to defending the South or southern "customs." The logic of South Carolina's history and the force of her traditions argued that Clemson would be another Oxford, Mississippi.

South Carolina was the spiritual, cultural and financial center of the South when Mississippi was still Indian territory. The fact is that South Carolinians created the South as a politically self-conscious region, led it out of the Union, and then fired the first shot of the Civil War.

Elaborate security precautions had been made to protect Gantt at Clemson, and his routine for the day had been scheduled with the precision of an astronaut shot. He was to arrive at Tillman

Hall, the old brick administration building, any minute now. He was to go inside and register, come out another door, walk 35 yards to his dormitory, visit his room briefly, and then walk another 750 yards to the architectural-school building to be interviewed by the dean. The press—more than waited for James Meredith at the University of Mississippi—was ready.

At 1:33 P.M., only three minutes behind schedule, a black 1959 Buick sedan came slowly up the drive, parked in front of Tillman, and Gantt stepped out.

There was a frantic jostle. Tripods clanged as they were hastily dragged into position. Cameras whirred and clicked. Voices began to be heard talking sententiously into microphones.

But that was the action, all of it. It was one of those moments when the paraphernalia of coverage overwhelms the event. It was excitement without substance.

The only sign of an "angry mob," aside from the press, was an assemblage of about 200 students, standing with their jacket collars turned up against the wind, laughing at the antics of the reporters. There were still 100 or so of them around when Gantt came out of Tillman. But by the time Gantt emerged from his dormitory, only a handful were there to watch him start his walk to the architectural building. The reporters who had been following Gantt fell back, leaving him to the TV and radio men, who kept sticking microphones in front of the young Negro's mouth, in-

sisting, "Come on, Harvey, say something!" But he was silent, and the campus was now deserted.

For the press, the day was over. And nothing had happened. Not one thing. South Carolina, emotionally the deepest Deep South state of them all, had met and peaceably passed its most serious racial crisis since the Civil War.

Why hadn't something happened? What was the explanation for this astonishing turn of events? Had South Carolina learned a lesson from Oxford? Or was it something else? The question was important; if South Carolina could keep the peace, so could any southern state.

The answer is this: When South Carolina's turn came to face the inevitable fact of racial change, its responsible people, its leadership group, its "power structure" took the initiative and handled the crisis with dignity, dignity for the Negro as well as for the white man. This is why the South Carolina story is one of the most significant—and reassuring—stories in the recent history of race relations in this country.

The story begins on July 1, 1961, a day so hot that the Spanish moss seemed to be sweating. At the annual Watermelon Festival in the small Black Belt county seat of Hampton, the biggest businessman in South Carolina stood up and delivered himself of these somewhat astonishing sentiments:

"The desegregation issue cannot continue to be hidden behind the door. This situation cannot satisfactorily be settled at the lunch counter and



Ex-Gov. Hollings asked Attorney General not to send marshals.



Businessman Charles Daniel played the first card in the conspiracy for peace.



Textile executive John Cauthen rounded up advance support from the state's businessmen for Clemson's decision to accept integration without violence.



Robert Edwards, president of Clemson, worked out a security plan designed to prevent friction between Gantt and the other students.

bus station. We have a definite obligation to increase the productivity of our Negro citizens, to provide them with good jobs at good wages and to continue to assure them of fair treatment. . . . By raising their education and economic status, we would raise the whole economy of the state."

Charles Daniel, the speaker, knew what he was doing even if his audience of stunned cotton planters and restless beauty queens did not. Tough, hard-boiled, self-made and ultraconservative, Daniel had hewn together in three decades the largest construction company in the Southeast. Now he had struck the opening blow in a carefully planned effort to save Clemson College. He had joined the ranks of a handful of shrewd, influential and determined men who, in that summer of 1961, pledged themselves to see to it that Clemson stayed open and unharmed, even if it had to integrate.

The little group included besides Daniel: Robert Edwards, Clemson's president, a hard-driving textile executive who had been brought to Clemson originally as vice president in charge of development; Edgar Brown, chairman of Clemson's board of trustees, state senator from Barnwell County, president pro tempore of the state senate and the Daddy Rabbit of South Carolina politics; John K. Cauthen, executive vice president of the South Carolina Textile Manufacturers Association and the most skillful lobbyist in the state; Ernest F. Hollings, the handsome young governor of the state, who was making new industry the focus of his administration's effort; Wayne Freeman, editor of the *Greenville News* and one of the five nonlegislative members of the Gressette Committee, the state's clearinghouse for racial problems, named for State Senator Marion Gressette.

It was a loose, informal coalition; the five men never met as a group. If there was an understanding between them, it was that each would do what he could in whatever way he thought best to fulfill their common intention.

The seed of this understanding was planted in the spring of 1961 when Edwards called Cauthen about something else. Before hanging up, Edwards asked Cauthen if he thought the state's businessmen would be willing to share some of the responsibility for the problems that would arise if Harvey Gantt, who had applied for admission to Clemson in January, 1961, was finally admitted to the school on court order.

A "monster" to be stopped

Cauthen was sympathetic, and he went to work. South Carolina is a small, unusually cohesive state, and the lines of communication between its seats of political and economic power cross and recross at dozens of points. Cauthen sent feelers and messages along these interior lines, found support not only from businessmen but also from men like Hollings and Freeman and Brown, who are not.

By the end of the year Cauthen, Daniel, Edwards and the others had, in "talking around," let it be known that there was an important body of opinion in the state that firmly believed in law and order at all costs.

This was a solid achievement. But it was still an "inside" one. When Governor Hollings toured the state in the fall of 1961 he was shocked at the kind of talk he heard. He told me, "People thought I ought to have some magic to stop the monster that was about to gobble us up, or else

they expected me to go to jail. It looked to me like it was high time we started sobering people up before it turned out to be too late."

Having been turned down on his first application, Gantt reapplied for admission to Clemson in January, 1962.

It was Hollings's custom to hold an off-the-record press briefing the week before the General Assembly convened, and he seized that moment to strike a blow.

"Before 1962 has passed," he told newsmen that January 9, "South Carolina's legal defenses will fall like a house of cards. You might as well start preparing your readers for the inevitable. We are not going to secede."

Not long after this the authoritative *Columbia State* began to give extensive, detailed coverage to Gantt, forcing by its example other newspapers in the state to treat the story as fully and as fairly. They did.

But there wasn't much news about Gantt and Clemson during the spring and summer of 1962. It was election time in South Carolina. Hollings ran for the U. S. Senate, trying to unseat the wily old veteran, Olin D. Johnston, in the Democratic primary, and got clobbered. Donald Russell, a wealthy Spartanburg lawyer who had served in Washington as an assistant to James F. Byrnes when the latter was Secretary of State, was elected governor to succeed Hollings, to take over in January, 1963.

Gantt's second application had never been formally acted upon, and the young Negro, represented by N.A.A.C.P. attorneys, filed suit in Federal court on July 7, 1962. What this meant did not hit hard in South Carolina until September 30, when rioting broke out at Oxford, Mississippi.



Before a joint session of the legislature, Gov. Russell praised Clemson's handling of the crisis.

Mississippi indirectly called for help, and there were South Carolinians—plenty of them—who felt that Governor Hollings should go at once to Governor Barnett's side. A member of the state house of representatives, A. W. Red Bethea, insisted that Hollings lead a motorcade of South Carolinians to Oxford. Hollings refused—and was rewarded with a batch of insulting telegrams.

Other South Carolinians began to back up Barnett. Russell praised Barnett's "courage and resolution," and said he was "hopeful that Barnett's conduct may be invaluable to us in demonstrating the strength of Southern conviction." State Senator Marion Gressette, Mister Segregation in South Carolina, the man who is chairman of the state committee set up to "discourage" integration, called on the South "to rally to the support of the great state of Mississippi."

Hollings's silence stood out and annoyed some South Carolinians. Farley Smith, longtime executive secretary of the Citizens Councils of South Carolina, remarked, "It is inconceivable to me that South Carolina, of all southern states, has not, through its governor, made its position crystal clear."

A few days later, in the first week of October, a reporter cornered Hollings. Would Hollings, or would Hollings not, be willing to go to jail to prevent integration of a South Carolina school? "If it works out like Mississippi," Hollings replied, "jail would certainly be the safest place."

He was due to attend the Southern Governors Conference at Hollywood, Florida, the next week. "Faubus and Patterson [Governors Orville Faubus of Arkansas and John M. Patterson of Alabama] were waiting for me to head up a movement to wire and welcome Ross Barnett to the conference," Hollings said. He refused.

If Hollings did nothing to "help" Mississippi, he did something to help South Carolina meet its forthcoming crisis. He sent Pete Strom, head of S.L.E.D. (South Carolina Law Enforcement Division), to Oxford. He told him to study that situation and to come back home and work out with Harry Walker, his legal counsel, a security plan for Clemson.

He laid down three guidelines for Walker: (1) The plan must be foolproof; there should be no question of the need for U.S. marshals; (2) it should be designed to prevent even the possibility of allowing a crowd to gather, and (3) a carefully thought-out schedule must be arranged for controlling the movement of the press.

Through the late summer and fall Gantt's attorneys and South Carolina engaged in a series of legal maneuvers, but by November it was clear that Clemson sooner or later would have to admit Gantt. It was just a matter of time, and there was not much of that.

Meanwhile Cauthen had not been idle. He was "talking around" in those key places he knew so well. One day in the fall, for example, he and Clemson President Edwards went to Hartsville to see A. L. M. Wiggins, the elder statesman of

South Carolina's business community. A former railroad president and Under Secretary of the Treasury, Wiggins was head of the Governor's Committee on Higher Education. "Mr. Wiggins was very strong on our side," Cauthen says.

Up to now, none of the little group had taken a public stand on the case of Harvey Gantt, but the hour was obviously near when somebody must speak out clearly. The occasion arose at the end of December, when a Charleston newspaperman called Clemson board chairman Brown and put to him one of those have-you-stopped-beating-your-wife questions: "Now that it is pretty certain that the Clemson board is going to admit Harvey Gantt, what explanation would you give to the people who elected you, in the event of such a decision?"

Nobody had said that Clemson was going to admit Gantt, but Brown took down the reporter's question in shorthand and promised to give him an answer later.

He called Cauthen in Columbia, Edwards at Clemson. Both agreed to meet Brown in Barnwell the next morning. They talked it over, then Cauthen drafted a statement. Brown released it that day to the Charleston newspaperman but at the same time sent it to the press associations.

"Your premise is false," Brown's statement noted. "If the ultimate decision of the Federal courts directs that Harvey Gantt should be admitted, my position is that the board of trustees and the administration at Clemson College will not tolerate violence on the Clemson campus."

Photographs by Jim Mahan

**The riots
at Oxford, Mississippi, showed
South Carolina
the trouble it could expect
at Clemson.**

Harvey Gantt's reception committee at Clemson consisted almost entirely of milling reporters.

Brown had set the strategy with Cauthen months ago, when he told Cauthen not to hold an open meeting of businessmen, but rather to assemble his forces quietly. Now the strategy was about to pay off. Now the power structure of the state was agreed upon, if not yet openly committed to, a policy of admitting Gantt to Clemson and preserving law and order on the campus at the same time.

The newspapers of the state quickly joined behind Brown, and the opposition was caught flat-footed. The kind of people who might favor making a "protest" had taken it for granted that everyone in South Carolina would agree with them when the time came. They were not organized, not prepared. The Citizens Councils had been, as executive secretary Smith explained to me recently, "mainly a stand-by organization in South Carolina." Present membership is probably "less than 10,000" by Smith's estimate, and these "are not very active." This is not to say that the Citizens Councils favored violence; Smith insists they did not. But in this sense nobody in the South *plans* violence. What some groups do is stalemate and neutralize local and state law-enforcement agencies so that the relative handful of racists who will be violent can come in from the country, often from across state lines, and create chaos.

Half, maybe more, of the battle had been won without a word's being fired in anger. It was not over, not by any means. But men as savvy in the ways of Palmetto politics as Brown and Cauthen knew where their opposition lay.





State Senator Marion Gressette finally bowed to integration.

Byrnes: "Gantt has succeeded in forcing himself into Clemson."

The trouble might come from any one or all three of these powerful men:

1. James F. Byrnes. Still, in his 80's, the same dapper little man with gray felt hat whose picture was once frequently taken on the White House steps, Byrnes is today "a bitter man," according to those who are close to him. When Byrnes returned to South Carolina in the 1950's and became governor, he convinced the legislature that it ought to levy a sales tax, and he undertook an extensive program of school-building designed to create separate and equal school systems in South Carolina. "He thought the Supreme Court would recognize this," I was told. "He had convinced himself the Court would rule five to four in favor of South Carolina in the Clarendon Case [concerning public-school segregation in Clarendon County]. When it voted nine to nothing against, he turned bitter." As a member of Clemson's board of trustees, Byrnes "wouldn't say yes, and he wouldn't say no," about Gantt. His attitude in board meetings was such that some of the others on the board felt that Byrnes might, if Gantt were admitted, make an independent statement that would, considering his prestige, do serious damage to law and order.

2. State Senator Marion Gressette. Gressette was No. 2 in seniority in the senate, a man whose sincerity and integrity have never been questioned in the legislature. Every bill that might affect or be affected by a change in the status quo in segregation went to the Gressette Committee. From Calhoun, a Black Belt county in the Low Country, Gressette announced to the press that he was praying every night over the Clemson situation, and it is significant that not even the worst cynic doubted his statement.

It was almost solely their confidence in Gressette that caused groups like the Citizens Councils to stay dormant. For Gressette to go along with a plan that called for admitting a Negro to Clemson without some kind of protest would be a severe wrench for Gressette personally and for all the people who had had complete confidence in him as an anti-integration warrior. If Gressette came out publicly against admitting Gantt, all the hitherto latent forces of disorder in the state would come alive.

3. A. W. Red Bethea. Bethea is the most forthright racist in South Carolina. If Bethea went to Clemson to lead a "protest," as, in fact, he threatened to do, it would be hard to turn him away. He was both a member of the legislature and a Clemson alumnus.

Cauthen moved quickly to get business support on the line for a public announcement. Eighteen of the state's top textile executives met for lunch at the new, luxurious Palmetto Club in Columbia on January 3, 1963. When they had finished their business, Cauthen passed out three-by-five file cards, read them a statement he had drawn up. It read in part: "The major business and industrial interests of the state strongly approve the

announced [Note: it had *not* been announced then] determination of the board of trustees and the administration of Clemson College to maintain law and order at all times." Cauthen asked the executives to vote Yes or No on the cards, and to hand them in without signing their names. He got 18 Yeses.

The next day the Chamber of Commerce followed suit. Polled by telephone, 70 South Carolina businessmen—52 were members of the Chamber's board of directors, 12 were former presidents and six were officers—unanimously approved the statement. The state bankers' association and the broadcasters' association followed in quick order.

Nowhere in the South in the recent history of racial change had the business community taken such a strong stand *in advance*. Clemson President Edwards on January 3 had a "very serious" meeting with Gressette and some members of his committee. Without acrimony Edwards made it plain that if he was not supported in admitting Gantt and handling the whole situation with dignity, he would resign. He got down to brass tacks with Gressette about the effect of violence. One of the nation's largest manufacturers had made overtures about building a multimillion-dollar plant in Gressette's county.

The state makes its choice

"Senator, if there's a ruckus at Clemson those people won't even plant scrub oak in Calhoun County," Edwards said passionately.

On January 9, Governor Hollings spoke out, in a farewell address to the state legislature.

"As we meet," he said, "South Carolina is running out of courts. This General Assembly must make clear South Carolina's choice, a government of laws rather than a government of men. We must move on with dignity. It must be done with law and order. The state's institutions and all law-enforcement agencies have been charged with their responsibilities."

When Hollings was halfway through, Bethea rose in his seat, took a step as if to leave, but then changed his mind and sat down. The rest of the joint session gave Hollings an ovation. "They were *impressed*," a legislative correspondent told me later.

The next night Hollings called Attorney General Robert Kennedy and outlined the security plan which by now had been worked out. He told Kennedy that U.S. marshals would not be needed. Kennedy promised not to send them.

On January 12 Hollings held a meeting in his office for a final review of the security plan. Donald Russell Jr., son of and assistant to his father, the incoming governor, was present and took a copy for his father to see.

The plan is probably the most complete and carefully thought-out one ever drawn up in the

United States to meet the threat of racial violence. None of its details have ever before been made public.

It warned all officers of the law: "The state of South Carolina has assumed responsibility of maintaining law and order as a state function, and the state is capable of carrying it out." It told them to "tolerate verbal abuse or similar harassment . . . but, when faced with violation of the law, to perform duties with efficiency and dispatch. . . . If trouble occurs," the instructions said, "remove troublemakers quickly to detention areas set aside for large numbers of persons."

A S.L.E.D. aircraft was to patrol from the sky, police photographers were to be on the campus to take movies and photographs, the sheriffs of adjoining counties were briefed; magistrates were put on duty so that they could issue warrants; fire-fighting and medical equipment was made ready; and a central command post was set up to coordinate all the activity.

An elaborate program of briefing was set up for the Clemson student body and faculty. The student body was to be policed by its own student government. Supervisors were given the right to send students to their individual dormitory rooms.

Students were warned that "gatherings which indicate unnecessary curiosity . . . will be avoided. Counseling, advising and frank discussion should solve most problems. Situations requiring more forthright action will be dealt with firmly and effectively."

The courts began to move quickly. On January 22 District Judge C. C. Wyche complied with the Appellate Court ruling and signed the order admitting Gantt to Clemson. That same day State Senator John D. Long of Union County rose in the upper chamber of the legislature on a point of personal order. It was "cowardly" of Clemson to admit Gantt without a fight, he said.

"I would prefer that my children be raised in ignorance—not knowing 'B' from Bullsfoot—than to see them cringing and bowing before tyranny," he cried out.

Word of the debate reached the house, and Bethea and many of his colleagues came over to the senate, packed the galleries. Senator H. H. Jessen of Dorchester County joined in on Long's side. "South Carolina should not lie down and let itself be walked over," he said.

The time had come for Gressette to take his stand. He rose and began to speak slowly, sadly. "A lot of things happen in life," he said. "We have disappointments. Sometimes I feel like making a speech like my two friends made. We have lost this battle but we are engaged in a war. But this war cannot be won by violence or by inflammatory speeches. I have preached peace and good order too long to change my thinking."

If the legislature now felt that he had failed in his task, Gressette said, he would resign.

When he had finished, the legislature rose and gave him an ovation. And Senator Long took the floor again, this time to propose that the members remain on their feet for a standing vote of confidence for Gressette.

Before the day was over Byrnes issued a statement. "Gantt has succeeded in forcing himself into Clemson," Byrnes said, but he would not be welcomed at the college "by independent men and women of the student body. . . . Thank goodness," said the former Supreme Court Justice, "not even the Supreme Court has ordered that be done—as yet!"

The Clemson board of trustees met with Governor Russell and the Gressette Committee during the morning to set the strategy for making the formal announcement. At noon word went out to reporters that press conferences would be held separately by Russell, by Gressette and by President Edwards—in quick successive order, at two P.M., at two-thirty and at three.

Promptly at two Russell came through a door into a paint-fresh new executive conference room, handed out a few copies of his statement and read quickly: "We shall meet and solve this problem peaceably, without violence."

The reporters scampered across the street to the capitol and heard Gressette read: "Peace and good order must be maintained both on and off the college campus."

Bethea was there, hunched deep down in an upholstered chair, an incongruous figure in the light bark-cloth-papered room. Reporters did not have time to stop and ask him for a comment.

It was a short walk from the capitol to the studios of WIS-TV where Edwards was to read his statement before the cameras. A few seconds after the press corps arrived, Edwards emerged, took his position before a microphone and began to talk: The Trustees approved "complete and good-faith" compliance with the court order, and Gantt was to be admitted "exactly as any other transfer student."

When Edwards finished, someone passed out copies of Cauthen's statement—the endorsement of law and order by the manufacturers, bankers, businessmen and broadcasters. It almost got passed by in the rush.

I had made the rounds with the rest of the newsmen, and, as I started to leave, I saw Brown and Cauthen sitting against a far wall. I went over and Senator Brown offered me a ride back to my hotel. The three of us walked out into the street again.

"Well, John," said Brown, pulling himself erect, cocking his head on one side and then giving Cauthen a smile, "it's been a long day, hasn't it?"

"Yes, it has, senator," said Cauthen, returning the smile, "but I think everything's going to be all right now."

And it was all right

THE END



State troopers checked all students' passes and identity cards at the approach to the college.