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Interview with
JAMES L. ROGERS

Place of Interview: Denton, Texas

Interviewer: Moray Comrie

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Approved:

James L. Rogers
(Signature)

Date: October 23, 1980

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Oral History Collection

Dr. James L. Rogers

Interviewer: Moray Hume Comrie

Place of Interview: Denton, Texas

Date: October 23, 1980

Mr. Comrie: This is Moray Comrie interviewing Dr. James L. Rogers for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on October 23, 1980, in Denton, Texas. I'm interviewing Dr. Rogers in order to obtain his recollections concerning the integration of North Texas State College and University in the period from 1954 to 1961.

Dr. Rogers, to start this interview, before you came to North Texas, were you a Texan yourself or born elsewhere?

Dr. Rogers: I was born in Missouri, but moved to Texas as a youngster and moved around the country, partly in the army and partly in and out of graduate school, but I am primarily Texan in background.

Mr. Comrie: Your degrees are from Texas universities?

Dr. Rogers: No, they are from three states: Minnesota, Texas, and Missouri, in that order.

Mr. Comrie: And when did you arrive on the faculty here at North Texas?

Dr. Rogers: September of 1953.

Comrie: Did you go straight into your position as press liaison officer?

Rogers: I came here as both a member of the journalism faculty and director of the News Service.

Comrie: Director of the News Service. But I gather, from what you have said previously, that you were not directly involved in any of the events over the next few years in that you were not in direct contact with them?

Rogers: Not in terms of the decision-making bodies, the deliberative process, but rather in the role of learning, during the events or immediately after the events, what had transpired and helping to establish a policy or a means of communicating those facts internally and externally for the community.

Comrie: When you arrived here in 1953, this was before the Brown v. Board of Education case. What sort of reaction was there on the campus when that verdict was given?

Rogers: I don't recall at all.

Comrie: Not at all?

Rogers: It was a case that applied to the public school level. I'm sure there must have been discussion of it because it was widely reported in newspapers and national magazines, but local reaction just isn't part of my recollection.

Comrie: Was there any anticipation that integration might come to the college?

Rogers: I suspect there was speculation, rather than anticipation,

although it probably reached the anticipatory stage as soon as some lawsuits were filed directly at the level of higher education, the one closest to us, of course, being the suit for admission to the University of Texas School of Law of Hemon Marion Sweatt.

Comrie: If my date is correct, that was 1947. Or is my date wrong?

Rogers: I think it was more . . . well, perhaps it was, although it seems to me that it had to have been after that. I seem to have a recollection of a photograph in Life magazine of a former reporting student of mine who had become active at the University of Texas in a variety of ways, and it seems to me that there was a picture of him with Hemon Marion Sweatt on the campus. It would seem to me that that was in the 1950's, but I'm not precisely sure of that. At any rate it was late 1940's or 1950's, I believe.

Comrie: I was dubious when I came up with that date. It didn't seem right at the time. Now the direct result of that case here at North Texas was the application of the first black doctoral student.

Rogers: Yes. I was informed by the president of the college that there had been an application from a Mr. Tennyson Miller for a summer session of 1954 and that his application had been accepted, without question, based on knowledge of the Supreme Court finding in the case of Hemon Marion Sweatt. The critical point for the State of Texas was that we were

still held to be under the court doctrine of "separate-but-equal" that had prevailed for, I suppose, the entirety of the twentieth century, and that in the case of advanced specialized education--in the case of Sweatt, a law school--separate-but-equal was found to be not prevailing and that a state would be required to admit a Negro student to an available advanced specialized schooling if there were not such an institution for segregated Negro education. Since there was no doctoral program available in the field of education in the State of Texas at either of the publicly-supported, segregated black institutions, North Texas admitted this one applicant.

Comrie: How did the university community respond to (this)?

Rogers: There did not seem to be much serious question, as I recall it. Of course, we're more than twenty-five years in the past there. But basically it was a mature person; it was someone in graduate school; and it was taking place in summer school. None of those factors are characteristic of what school was like in the long sessions of those times, so it was a fortuitous time for a first admission of a Negro to have taken place. I don't recall that there was any severe controversy involved in it at all.

Comrie: What major differences would there be between the school in summer school and in the full semesters?

Rogers: The enrollment in summer session was predominantly graduate students, predominantly mature individuals, and in those days, especially, predominantly schoolteachers returning for graduate study. Far, far fewer of the undergraduate students, and far fewer students in any way, period, attended summer sessions.

Comrie: There was--as far as I could find--no further applications for admissions from black students for another year, but I did find a reference in the Campus Chat to the establishment of an "Integration Committee" on the campus in the period between July, 1954, and May, 1955. Was there any suggestion on the campus that there was some initiative being taken by the university toward integration?

Rogers: I don't even recall the existence of that committee.

Comrie: There seems to have been a student committee which is mentioned once in the Campus Chat as having been active.

Rogers: I don't have any memory of it.

Comrie: Then in June, 1955, the first black undergraduate application was received. What were the circumstances surrounding that?

Rogers: Again, my recollection was of being told by the president, to whom I reported as News Service director, that there was such an application--and I don't know in which month that occurred--that the application was denied because to admit this man would be to violate statutes of the

State of Texas, and that subsequently there was filed in federal district court a lawsuit on behalf of Mr. Atkins, seeking admission to North Texas State College as an undergraduate student.

Comrie: Have you any idea why Atkins chose to come here?

Rogers: My knowledge there would be completely inferential. I have no direct knowledge. I did not talk to anyone who was representing him or who had enabled him to obtain legal counsel, so I can only give you the speculation that a test case was being arranged, that North Texas State seemed to be a desirable place in which to make such a test attempt, perhaps because of its location, perhaps because of some speculation on someone's part that it might be a reasonable move in this setting. It was the general feeling that this was not just a casual student walking up . . . and, in fact, a Negro student in 1954 would not just casually walk up and attempt such a thing in that setting. He would . . . well, let me phrase it this way. I think it would probably take considerable courage on the part of an individual to attempt this and to enroll. It was not a setting in which pleasant consequences could be expected to be in the majority.

I don't know, however, if Mr. Atkins ever personally visited the campus. I am reasonably certain that he never actually enrolled on the campus. The inference

at the time was that he had no intention of enrolling, but that may be a mistaken inference.

Comrie: I noticed that he's been to school at Little Rock, Arkansas, and my foreigner's understanding of things is that that was a difficult place at the time, and . . .

Rogers: Yes.

Comrie: . . . I thought there might be a suggestion of a test case. You said that the location of North Texas might be suitable for such a case. How would North Texas differ from others?

Rogers: Well, this particular area was not marked completely by the "Old South" atmosphere. "East Texas"--in quotes and in initial capital letters--has a cultural background accompanied by a very high density of Negro population over a good many years. It was predominantly agricultural, and by agricultural I mean farming as contrasted with ranching farther to the west. The ranch country in Texas, to the south and the west, has a very close Spanish-American heritage. If you dig into linguistic geography, you will discover that the speech patterns of East Texas are "Old South" and that the speech patterns of West Texas are ranch-country Spanish. You can draw a linguistic atlas line between those two territories. You can also do population density studies.

Now Denton was becoming--it was moving toward becoming--a far suburb or "exurb" of Dallas, and, to a lesser extent,

Fort Worth. Interstate highways had not yet been constructed; it was not as close psychologically or in time of travel as it is now; and the metropolitan area was certainly far smaller. But it was becoming urban; it was having more population influx from the north. There was in the counties from which we drew traditionally--well, in the more recent years the largest proportion of our student body--a lesser proportion of either Spanish-speaking or Negro population, and yet there was enough of a black population in the metropolitan area and nearby that a pool of interested students could certainly be expected to seek higher education.

To the east was Commerce, Texas, home of East Texas State--very definitely deep, deep East Texas "Old South." To move on over, there was Stephen F. Austin State, Houston, College Station, other towns probably potentially more explosive in the perceptions of some.

You must understand this is all speculation. Nobody ever said this is what somebody did or this is why Denton seems to have been a forerunner in a lot of things in connection with integration as compared with other Texas institutions. Population and location surely must have had an influence in these events and in the decisions that some people made.

Comrie: And if there was a speculation that it might be a test case,

what was the reaction on the campus to the use of this institution as a "test-bed"?

Rogers: I don't know that anybody conducted a scientific study of campus attitudes, and I don't know that anyone could have accurately portrayed it if he were speaking right at that time, so I am reluctant to answer your questions in terms of any precision.

In the entire period of time that you wish to discuss here, there was obviously a strong sympathetic sentiment amongst what would then, of course, be white faculty and white students. It was welcomed by a substantial number-- I couldn't put figures or percentages to how substantial. There were more traditional--perhaps in some perceptions, more rigid--faculty members and administrators who either resented, resisted, or perhaps feared the consequences of change, and I think there were students who brought from their homes attitudes which were hostile to such developments. Again, my perception would be that they were not a vocally large number but significantly present and sufficient to cause concern. How's that for an approximation?

Comrie: I gather, again from my reading, that that must have been very much the case. The editor of the Denton Record-Chronicle in February, 1956--a little bit later--congratulates the North Texas students on the contrast to the University of Alabama, but it does mention that there was a . . .

he hints at a negative element . . .

Rogers: Yes.

Comrie: . . . on the campus.

I also found in researching this case that Dr. Matthews at the time gave as a reason for turning down Atkins the overcrowding of the university. He said it was "102 percent full."

Rogers: That's a surprise to me (chuckle). I don't recall anything like that. Certainly, it was a time of explosive growth. It was a time period in which we might add anywhere between eight hundred to twelve hundred students in a single year. It was a time in which I recall that we were "farming out" freshman women into Denton family homes, saying, "Please take these students so they'll have a place to live until a vacancy opens in the dormitory." It was a time period in which commuting was not very commonplace--a situation which has almost reversed itself in more recent years. And so from a housing viewpoint it was crowded. That is correct. From a class schedule viewpoint, it was exceedingly difficult to get enough new faculty hired and to get classrooms available at enough hours. That is true. I don't recall, however, that that had any relevance to this case or even that that statement had been made. I'd just forgotten that.

Comrie: He also made a reference to a long-term policy of the university to, in fact, phase in black students. It wasn't

clarified in the press, but it seemed to be that they would begin accepting students at different levels over the next few years. Did you have any knowledge of that at all?

Rogers: I had no direct knowledge of policy or plan. I know that . . . well, let me back up and explain the difference between then and now. There were no open meeting laws in effect in the State of Texas, no freedom of information acts of the type for access to public records of the kind that are much more commonplace both in federal and state statute today. This was truly a generation ago. For that reason the meetings of the governing board of this institution, that is to say, the board of regents, and of most public bodies in the State of Texas--school boards and boards of regents, especially--were generally secret and closed, not attended by members of the press. For many years, even though I was the chief public information officer of the institution, I did not attend meetings of the board of regents. Sometimes I wasn't even aware that the board was going to meet or had met. That is totally different than the standard procedure and commonplace happening today.

Now given that setting, you can understand that I was always dealing second- or even third-hand with information and sometimes not on a timely basis in the sense of immediately after the conclusion of the meeting. As was

the case at a lot of institutions of that time period, institutional policy was not necessarily set down in writing and publicly accessible. That's another, somewhat different, set of circumstances, although policy can still be rather obscure even in this day and age. It definitely often was in those times.

Given that, I understood really that the basic question of when and how and how rapidly we might accept Negro students--I'm using the word "Negro" because it was a 1953 word, (chuckle) as I would use "black" if it is a 1960's and 1970's word--the decision as to when, how, how fast, was really in the hands of that governing board. That meant that a president could recommend, based on his own judgement or based on advice from others that he might solicit on the campus, but that he could only recommend. It is my impression that President Matthews was much more responsive to the prevailing campus sentiment--that he much more shared it--than did a majority of the board of regents. I believe, knowing how he had to work with that board over many years, that there must have been a long and arduous process of education and persuasion to the political realities on the part of the president with the board of regents. I understand from second-hand information that there were members of the board of regents who did not wish to capitulate in any way, did not wish to plan

admission of Negroes and thought that it was bad, and, when faced with the prospect of court suit, wished to contest the suit fully and vigorously.

At any rate, again it is my understanding that when the case came before the judge in federal district court in Sherman, Texas, that those university officials who were called in essence cited as their reason for denial of admission of Mr. Atkins the statutes which prohibited the enrollment of any save whites. And it was my understanding that there was not really an elaborate or drawn-out hearing in the case. The judge listened to that and said in response to the college, its governing board and its administrative officers, "You are hereinafter enjoined from denying admission to any applicant on grounds of race." That was reported and, to the best of my knowledge, was not appealed. It was accepted sometime during that fall of 1955, which made available then, as the first possible date of formal entrance into the student body, the spring semester of 1956.

Comrie: That judge's name was Sheehy, I think?

Rogers: That, I don't recall.

Comrie: And the ruling was given in December.

Rogers: Yes.

Comrie: The first undergraduate student to enroll was a Mrs. Sephas.

I take it that in the light of the judgement and the

prevailing atmosphere on campus there was no immediate agitation about this in early 1955.

Rogers: I don't recall that there was any activity, much discussion or anything, once the fact was known that the court case had been decided. Then I suppose in January of 1956 it was known that one individual, Mrs. Sephas, had applied and had been admitted. She was, as I recall, a mature woman, not a recent high school graduate, but was an undergraduate. She was from Fort Worth, and I suppose she was proposing to be a commuting student. At any rate, the issue, at that time, of dormitory residence was not raised. It was admission to the student body.

To the best of my knowledge there was only this one student--undergraduate. It's possible that there might have been some graduate student concurrently enrolled, a doctoral student under the prior agreement, but I just don't know. One of the interesting things, if someone were to try to track it back, is that during that time period all of the admissions forms, the student record forms, made no reference to race, since it was assumed that there would be no black race represented. Indeed, a historian might have a very difficult time just on the basis of official registrar's documents guessing games in some of those early semesters was, "How many Negro students are there enrolled right now?" Now I got

this question as a publicist for the institution, and I would have to answer, "I don't know," because there were none counted, officially; and yet I know that somewhere in the registration process, somebody was making little tally marks (chuckle) and had an unofficial count so that this would be known. So far as I know, there was one undergraduate student in the spring of 1956 and perhaps a doctoral student or two, but I don't know about that.

Comrie: Now contemporaneously with this, in Alabama there were black students enrolling there, and there was . . .

Rogers: There was one, I know, and her name was Mrs. Autherine Lucy, and it was so contemporaneous it was the same day (chuckle). On the very same day that Mrs. Sephas was enrolling here, Mrs. Lucy was enrolling at the University of Alabama. She was pictured on national television, NBC and CBS that I recall. And angry mobs gathered as she was driven up to the campus in an automobile and got out. People in the crowd threw rocks at her. I think they may have even frightened her back into the car, and she had to leave on one of the attempts to enter the campus. She was under a court-ordered admission, too, I believe.

At any rate, word reached a lot of newspeople, and those same two national networks said, "Hey, over there in Texas there is a black woman entering, and they are not throwing rocks at her. Go get pictures." And that

introduced a somewhat stressful and turbulent period of what today we would call "media relations," especially in that President Matthews' primary concern was that to point to the fact that nobody was throwing rocks at Mrs. Sephas was to invite somebody to come and throw rocks at her. That's an interesting dilemma to someone who feels that you have an obligation to report to the public the facts about a public institution, but who at the same time feels some concern that there be no danger created for a person in a most unenviable and frightening position, being the only undergraduate black and the only woman black in an all-white setting.

Comrie: President Matthews' whole policy from this time onwards, anyway, seems to have been to play down what was happening here as much as possible.

Rogers: Quite clearly. And this, of course, I know by direct experience because these were instructions to me. He said, "We do not want anything to happen to Mrs. Sephas or to any other student; we do not want to invite rabble-rousing." It seemed to him that if our campus and Mrs. Sephas were shown on the same CBS or NBC news as the Alabama problems that we would have the same problems. He feared that there would be enough antagonistic individuals in Dallas and in Fort Worth who would see this and say, "Let's get in the car and go up there and throw rocks at

Mrs. Sephas." And he really genuinely believed that was a probable consequence.

Now at this stage some of the press relations were directly between him and them. And that's rather natural. A "stringer," a correspondent, that is, for a network . . . at that time I don't believe any of the national networks had bureaus in Dallas, anybody stationed right there as they now will. This might be a person who was also a staff member of that network's affiliate station in either Dallas or Fort Worth, or it might be somebody freelancing. But at any rate, there were individuals designated by those two networks--I don't recall ABC at all. But maybe they were some from them--who wanted to come up and on camera interview Dr. Matthews and on camera, in class, interview Mrs. Sephas. And that's where the conflict between the president and the television cameraman or representative arose.

He absolutely denied permission of any television cameraman, reporter, writer, to go into that classroom. His view was that the classroom was sacrosanct; it was that faculty member's and that teacher's; and that he would not disrupt the educational process. He did--and I suspect reluctantly--help arrange for some television cameramen, perhaps from two channels--a local channel and a network--interview Mrs. Sephas out on the campus,

but not inside a classroom.

This refusal angered some of them, but I don't know which ones. Dr. Matthews told me very shortly afterwards that he was what he called "threatened" by one of the network correspondents telling him something to the effect that "If you do not cooperate with us and allow us to go into the classroom and take those pictures, I will make you look like a villain and show you up in a bad light for all the viewers across the United States." Had he known Dr. Matthews, he would have known that that automatically shut the door in his face (chuckle) because this was not a man to be threatened by anybody (chuckle).

He would not allow himself--that is, President Matthews--to be photographed, and be interviewed live on--no, live's the wrong word for the technology of that date--to be filmed on sound film on this issue. He did permit himself to be photographed with silent film, and he did give a statement which could be read. As I recall, his voice was never taped or used.

My recollection was a very partisan reaction at the time, and my recollection remains as partisan, that at least two of the Dallas-Fort Worth channels seriously distorted the events as they happened in order to make the institution, but particularly the president, look bad, and they took his written statement and selectively

used it so as to, I think, misrepresent the facts of the case.

It was a tough press relations problem; it was a tough news coverage problem. I don't know whether the institution handled it properly or not. I suspect, from a biased point of view, that the institution handled it better than the television personnel did.

I don't recall that there was much difficulty with print media, with the newspaper people. They reported it, and I don't recall that there was any difficulty in their access to the information they needed or interviewing people they needed to interview.

But, after all, national network television was really . . . news, particularly, was really only about four years old at that time. The country had not really been linked by coaxial cable, microwave relay, until about three-and-a-half to four years before this time, actually. And I don't mean that people are any more enamoured of some television reporters today (chuckle), but certainly it was an unsophisticated area of reporting compared to newspaper professionals at that time.

Comrie: You mentioned two channels. Would you care to identify them?

Rogers: I don't actually know for a fact. I am certain that WBAP of Fort Worth, Channel 5--that was its designation at that time; its call letters have since changed--was

one of those stations whose local coverage I would classify as somewhat abusive. That was probably an action on the part of the one reporter who did it, not as a matter of station policy of necessity at all. I do not know which of the networks was involved. I was told at the time, and I am sure it was either NBC or CBS. Again, I am sure it was not a staff correspondent. I am sure it was what you would call a "stringer" out in the field, perhaps one employed by one of the Dallas or Fort Worth stations.

Comrie: Was there an equally sympathetic response from other channels?

Rogers: Oh, I think that all of this had to do with access to the news, and I don't think you would get much argument from most people that television, from its infancy right to the present time, is made up of people who are of a rather aggressive nature in their coverage. They arouse the hostility not only of some news sources but also of the print media representatives who get shoved around by them from time to time. That's not an indictment of television news so much as a recognition of its character, its equipment, and . . . more so in earlier days than now, even. Its equipment made it intrusive and disruptive in a setting. I think the Heisenberg Principle of scientific research enters into this, and when you get a medium of that kind, it begins to enter in and alter the nature of the news event itself, that is, it becomes such an active participant.

There is no way that any news medium, but television especially, can stand back from and not actually affect the measurement of the thing being measured, (chuckle) as the scientists would worry about.

Comrie: I did notice that the local Denton paper seemed to be sympathetically . . . the editor did make a reference to other newspapers in the metropolitan area as not being so sympathetic in this.

Rogers: Yes, well, this is sort of hometown, (chuckle) neighborly relationships. The managing editor at that time was a graduate of our journalism program; he had been the editor of the student newspaper. He was a very calm and temperate individual. He and I had a very strong and an effective personal relationship. He had a very good relationship with the president and other staff members, and they were sympathetic to one another. I don't mean that that meant the editor would automatically give somebody guaranteed sympathetic kid-glove treatment. I mean that it was a small-town setting, and it was one in which you were far more likely to encounter an already sympathetic understanding of mutual problems.

I believe that most of the factual events of that time were reported in the Denton paper. I don't believe that there was any frantic or stressful surroundings to their news gathering efforts. They were at home, and they knew

more how to go about dealing with the people who were there.

Comrie: The student newspaper itself . . . a thing that struck me was that there was so little editorial comment or correspondence about what was going on.

Rogers: Yes, and it was by effort and design.

Comrie: By effort and design?

Rogers: Yes. I don't recall at which point in any of this--perhaps a bit later than, say, just February, 1956--but during the course of this time, I was, of course, not only the director of the News Service, but I was also a member of the journalism faculty. My office was in the Journalism Building, so I was surrounded by journalism students. The offices of the student newspaper were in the same area, and the college print shop, so we were all in the same environment. And I was really assigned to talk to those students.

I knew that they were essentially pro-integrationist, that they were anti-violence. They were against anyone who would try to do something remotely resembling white supremacy, Ku Klux Klan, or anything else. But I think they wanted to write a whole lot more than they did. I can recall sitting down in a meeting with the staff and explaining to them the institutional philosophy of, "We need to make this work; we need to avoid counter-reaction and violence; and the best way to do that is not to brag

too much." Just as President Matthews did not want national television standing up and pointing and saying, "Hey, look! They're not throwing rocks over there," he would prefer that none of the papers in the territory stand up and say, "Hey, look how nicely things are going at North Texas." In both cases he felt this was waving a red flag to potentially antagonistic, and violent, individuals.

This was the message I gave to the student editors. I said, in effect, "We hope that you will share this view, and it appears that we share the same goal. We would like to make the integration plan succeed, and without harm to anyone and without violence. It appears to us the way to achieve that goal is not to go out excessively and attack others or brag on ourselves. We're hoping that you will keep that in mind in planning your editorial policy."

Now whether some of them perceived that as administrative threat and coercion, I don't know. They could have. If so, I didn't detect it at the time. I would have felt badly about some direct and overt censorship of news stories which said, "You may not print this," but I didn't feel badly about this particular mission because I thought it was, as I say, an area in which we had common goals. It isn't anything that would be done today, however; the

scene is so different.

Comrie: Over the next few years, presumably the number of blacks enrolling grew. You mentioned that Mrs. Sephas was a mature student and that she didn't come into the dormitories or residences. When did blacks begin to come into the dormitories?

Rogers: Now dormitories are a separate question, and I have a hard time placing dates on them, but into the student body it was the next succeeding long-session semester.

Now I believe there were a fair number who may have enrolled for the summer but again probably not your standard, just-out-of-high-school undergraduates. The following fall, though--although I have no idea what their number would have been, and by today's standards it would have been very, very few--I have a notion we are now talking in terms of dozens of undergraduates--and I think perhaps largely freshmen--showed up.

Now there were a lot of contingency plans and policy decisions, and there were speeches by the president to the faculty about what was going on. There were also instructions sent out to individuals who were thought likely to come in contact with possible problem areas. The speech to the faculty members, as I recall, was somewhat different than perhaps some kinds of policies today, but basically it was boiled down to really one sentence of

advice from the president to the faculty members: "Treat each student exactly the same." Now that then more specifically became, "Don't grade anybody sympathetically."

Now that's a more controversial kind of a policy area. What can you do here? Again, you need to understand something of the setting of the Texas Legislature's attitude toward some kinds of educational policy. It was true then, and it is true today, that the legislators did not want to pay for remedial instruction at the college level, and if anything was taught of a remedial, sub-college level, it would draw no support whatsoever from the State of Texas, nor could we spend any money toward that purpose. It was just simply prohibited.

Now that puts you in an extremely inflexible position in confronting a group of Negro students coming for the first time to this institution. It becomes even more difficult if you recall that there were virtually no integrated high schools from which these students would come. It is far worse still if you recall the terribly pathetic level and quality of education being provided in these all-black public schools. These Negro students arriving in 1956 were academically doomed to substandard performance on this campus, and you have to place that in a context that makes that even more stark in that we had absolutely no admission requirements to this student

body other than graduation from a high school in the State of Texas with a specified number of credits in certain subjects--no entrance examination, no cut-off point on the score.

And so that was a tough one. As I say the president anticipated it and said, "Do not grade anyone sympathetically." Now he didn't mean, "Treat them unkindly," but he meant, "Do not give give grades to people who can't make them." That message was clear. That was quite a dilemma for a faculty member to take on this. I'm saying, in effect, that here are people seeking opportunity that have never had this kind of opportunity before, and then there's an instruction which said, "Give them the same treatment as everybody," which was philosophically, absolutely sound. We're trying to extend equality to them; yet, since the majority of them apparently were not equally prepared--as the white students whose classrooms they shared--then this was just a built-in moral, educational, ethical, human dilemma.

Again, our statistics of that period are very difficult to handle. First, we didn't keep very good statistics in those days, anyway, compared to the more sophisticated information systems we attempt to build on student bodies today. Secondly, we were not officially recording race. Thirdly, it would be a very difficult thing to go back and

track the grade records of students. Somebody somewhere was doing it, though, (chuckle) by informal means. Somebody who was counting people who went through the registration line was somehow also counting the number of drop-outs and was also attempting to calculate those who were placed on scholastic probation or who were not allowed to return to school for academic reasons. And we had a procedure where you would have to "lay out" one semester if you did not make even minimal academic achievement--before you could return.

Okay, on that basis the informal reporting that was being made, and I do not recall that this was being reported in the press--when I say "informal," I mean that it was word-of-mouth, that the president gathered this information from whatever informal techniques, and that he communicated informally to faculty members so they would know what the situation was--indicated that the probation and forced academic drop-out rate for the blacks at that time period was seven times as great as that as for the whites.

I suppose, given those sets of circumstances, you would call that predictable. And I believe it was felt then--and I suspect in hindsight that that was a correct feeling--that only when a significant number of Negro students had gone through twelve grades of public schooling would we

begin to see a really significant improvement in their capacities to equal opportunity. And, of course, even today I don't know that we're sure that that had been achieved because now we've had all the other phenomena taking place "out there," outside the direct control of this institution, such as white flight with blacks then becoming the majority groups. And apparently we'll have sub-standard public schooling again. So I'm not pretending that we've solved the problem; I'm just saying it was absolutely at its worst at that time period.

All right, other events were happening. I've said there were instructions from the president to others. The most noticeable one was the instruction to the football coach. The coach says, "What do I do if a Negro shows up?" And the president says, "Treat him like everybody else." Two Negroes showed up that fall, and one of them turned out . . . you could treat him like everybody else, but he turned out not to be like everybody else. He turned out to be one of the finest football players anywhere; and he turned out to be a great publicity attraction everywhere he went.

Now in that particular time period, this institution, in common with most others, was not under a "freshman eligible" rule, as we now happen to be. That's something that changes every few years. In short, a student could not participate

in varsity inter-collegiate participation as a freshman; he had to have been here a year and then start participating as a sophomore, and he could letter for three years--his three advanced years. So we had a freshman football team, and there were two blacks on that team. One was an end named Leon King, and the other was a halfback named Abner Haynes. Both were, in athletic parlance, "walk-ons." A "walk-on" is an athlete who doesn't have a scholarship, who hasn't been recruited, and who just comes up and says, "Coach, I'd like to play." This is what happened.

It did not take long for word to move around this campus and the surrounding territory that there was one heck of a fine football player down there with those freshmen. Large crowds would assemble at practice sessions just to watch him. Freshmen games that year may have been the best attended (chuckle) than in a long time. We hadn't been under the freshmen eligible rule very long. Just a few years before that freshmen were playing. So it attracted a lot of attention, and the man who attracted the real attention was Abner Haynes. In his sophomore year, which was his first year of full eligibility for varsity competition, we had just entered a much larger and more prestigious athletic conference. We had left a very small and nondescript sort of conference called the Gulf Coast Conference and had entered a conference of much larger

schools over a wider area with "major" ranking in athletics.

This was the Missouri Valley Conference, and we entered playing such teams as Oklahoma State University, University of Houston, Tulsa University, and Drake from up in Iowa. Not all the schools were in football, such as St. Louis University in Missouri and Bradley University of Illinois, but they were national powerhouses in basketball. So we had a much more interesting setting in which this was played. And in Abner Haynes's first appearance in the Missouri Valley Conference--and in the first appearance in Denton, I believe, of any Missouri Valley Conference team, Oklahoma State University, which was presumed to be much better and more powerful than North Texas--Abner Haynes made his debut. To the best of my knowledge--if this is accurate enough for you--I think he ran for 105 yards that night, which is always assumed to be rather good--when you passed 105 yards. And the game was surprisingly close, and we weren't embarrassed by it, and there was a lot of attention focusing on this.

And that introduced our black athlete era. Essentially, I suppose, it was the first in the State of Texas. I guess that would have to be researched very carefully. Perhaps there were some junior colleges, perhaps out in West Texas, where a black athlete played before that, but I don't know

of one. And in essence--well, I'm certain--it was ten years to the fall before a Southwest Conference athlete, black, played football. It was Jerry Levias over at S.M.U., and we found it rather amusing up here that they were going through the alarms of this novel experience and that they were receiving threatening mail against him because he dared to play for Southern Methodist and in the Southwest Conference. That was "old hat" up here by that time; we'd been doing it a decade.

There were problems when our team travelled. Prior to that, in a single season, we would play in football the University of Mississippi, Mississippi State College, Mississippi Southern College. Two of these schools have changed their names since then, but they were the three public institutions in Mississippi. We immediately severed relations with those institutions. They were "Old South", and they didn't play against blacks. We had problems when we went on the road into some cities. There were difficulties in finding a place to stay. Our football coaches and our players would not accept any unequal treatment of Abner or any other black athlete. They would look after their teammates; it was a very loyal kind of relationship.

At the same time Abner didn't live on the campus in the athlete dorm. He had a relative over in East Denton,

and he lived over there because we hadn't integrated housing. It was kind of a weird paradox. You look back on it now, and it seems unreal--the way those things worked. That was a part of the philosophy of gradualism. We started having Negro athletes, but we didn't start having them in the dorms at the same time. There was presumed to be some kind of gradual approach to this to prevent open conflict. I simply report that and don't editorialize on it, but there it was. That's the way it was done.

But when we were on the road, wherever that team stayed, Abner and others were going to stay there, too. Now that meant when we went down to play the University of Houston that that team chartered a train, a Pullman, and they stayed down in the railyard and slept in those Pullman cars because they couldn't find a Houston hotel that would accept that black. It meant when we went to Louisville, Kentucky, that we found a hotel which would accept our team, but we couldn't go down the street to eat at the cafeteria--and we usually fed our team in a cafeteria--and Abner and one or two others said, "Oh, you go on down over there," and the answer was "No." The team stayed and ate in the hotel dining room, which had accepted the team.

When we went out to El Paso, some of the downtown hotels where we had stayed for years on football trips would not accept Negro athletes, but a Ramada Inn way out

on the edge of town would. Shortly thereafter, in Abner Haynes's senior year, when we were invited to the Sun Bowl to play on December 31, in the annual Sun Bowl game, we were going to stay out there a full week. There would be a very large party, and the band would be out there, and a lot of school officials, so our business was very valuable, and all the hotels asked us to stay with them--there was no question about blacks being accepted. But I was very proud of our football staff. They paid more money, and we went back to the Ramada Inn, which had taken our players on an equal footing, and would not go to those others. That was kind of an expression of an esprit within one of the small units. I think you could track some others like it, but they weren't as visible. You know, football in Texas is very visible.

There were situations of getting Negroes integrated into other kinds of student activities--into music groups. The University of Texas down in Austin had had a terrific hassle and a public "rhubarb" and a threat of legislative retaliation because they had scheduled a Negro soprano to portray a role in an opera which cast her in a romantic lead opposite a white man. I know this was anathema. And I suspect there was some edginess reflected up here. I think maybe some music groups that went on tour in East Texas perhaps did not take Negro students with them because

the obstacles were too great. I'm not sure of that, but I suspect there were some problems at that time, although the effort was made to try to get Negroes integrated into all phases--to try to carry out the president's order, "Treat every student alike."

I may be wrong, but I do not think that to this day there had ever been a social fraternity or sorority on this campus to accept a Negro member. There are black fraternities and black sororities, but I don't think that they have ever integrated. As I said, I may be mistaken--there could have been--but it is certainly a rarity if it has happened.

We were, it seems to me, painfully slow in coming to a resolution of the housing question. There was pressure from parents involved in that. Again, it was a philosophy of gradualism; again, it was the summer graduate student which led the way; and again, it was women (chuckle) just as in the case of Mrs. Sephas. Women's dormitories, in the summer, admitted graduate women students. That was the gradualism start. I'm sorry that I can't put years on this, but it was not the first year or two. It took a while; it would be on towards the end of the fifties, I suppose, maybe even early sixties. I'm not sure. Then undergraduate women in the long session were admitted to some dormitories. There again, I don't suppose there was a case at first of mixed roommates. I have a sneaky

suspicion--and this is just a vague sense--that perhaps such Negro women as were admitted to the dormitories were carefully placed in those rooms which had semi-private baths, and only Negroes were using those. I know that the philosophy was one of extreme caution and extreme care. Eventually, I know, when they began to have more open integration and when roommate assignment was not allowed on the basis of race, you still hear parental complaints, at least from white parents, that "My daughter got assigned a room with one of them blacks."

All right, then at the last stage, we only had . . . I should say that we didn't have much in the way of men's dormitories. There was an absolutely rigid rule that all women students must stay in the dormitory or university-approved housing, which really meant placing them in the homes of older couples in Denton. It was prohibited that you live out in private rooms or in private apartments--just absolutely verboten. Now some did it and got away with it, but if they were caught, they were probably immediately expelled from school. This was a very tough, regimented kind of student control in those time periods.

Now that meant, if all this rigid requirement for women's housing existed, that we gradually just took up more and more men's housing, and in the last analysis there were only, I think, a couple of dorms available--a couple

of the old quadrangle dorms--which would mean at most three hundred places out of--what--thirty-six hundred or more. I'm not sure of numbers in exact years, but certainly a tiny minority of the housing was for men, and it was substandard. It was some of our oldest and more primitive.

Eventually, there were a few undergraduate Negroes accepted there. But there again, I recall one time I was visiting as a consultant on the campus of one of the private black institutions many years later, the late 1960's or early 1970's, and a member of the faculty from one of those schools came up, introduced himself, and said, "I was a graduate student at North Texas in the summer of . . ." and he told me when. He says, "I integrated your men's housing." So there again, that was a graduate student, older, in the summer, who was the first male. There is a pattern there that you could only infer was deliberate (chuckle).

Then there were some undergraduates allowed in, and I suspect there might have been some friction in the men's dorm. I know that President Matthews felt that young men are more likely to be more volatile and more prone to violence and was concerned with it.

Comrie: You mentioned that North Texas stopped playing some schools and universities. Were there any the other way round, that refused to play North Texas?

Rogers: Well, I'm sure that that was the case with Mississippi.

It was just understood (chuckle). I don't think anybody had any choice. You knew that if you had blacks, you didn't schedule those Mississippi schools. Mississippi and Mississippi State for a while may have been the only so-called "major" colleges that we played when we were trying to move up from "small" college up to "major" college status athletically. I think the explanation for that is that they could not play the northern, mid-western, western major, big-name schools which they now play--and get more money--and, in fact, we always went over to "Ol' Miss" and Mississippi State. They never came here. We always got paid what was then a very large sum of money for guarantees to go there and could help support our athletic program because of it. And I think it was their rigid "Old South" segregation that led to that. Their number of potential opponents was severely limited. We integrated and the number dropped by one. Of course, now they play black athletes, but they were way behind the rest. Of course, we were way behind the Midwest.

When I was a little boy in the State of Iowa, one of my football heroes . . . the first time I ever saw football would have been 1933 and '34. It was a long time before 1956. A young Negro from Fort Worth, Texas, walked on the campus at the University of Iowa and became a sensational running back. His name was Ozzie Simmons. I was a little

boy when I saw Negro athletes, and it was just perfectly natural to me. It was a bit of a shock to move to the South or Southwest.

I guess one other matter that's rather closely related to this would be President Matthews' efforts to suppress knowledge of acts of violence or antagonism. There would be from time to time somebody . . . now we don't know who; it might have been somebody from off campus or it might have been some reactionary student groups. But every once in a while there would be a cross or two appear on the campus. But President Matthews had the grounds crews out very early every morning. He said, "If you see anything, you pull it up and destroy it. If anything is written on a wall or painted on a sidewalk, you get on it immediately, at dawn, and remove it so you don't see it." And I know that on one time, on June 19--"June 'Teenth"--a celebration of the emancipation of the slaves, I believe, somebody got up very early that morning and painted on the sidewalks the phrase, "Nigger Go Home. You Ain't Free Here" and this kind of thing. That couldn't be obliterated, so it was just painted over. The whole thing was . . . these types weren't going to get their message through, and, boy, everybody was told, "You find that and get rid of that."

Somebody might call that a violation of somebody's First Amendment rights (chuckle) and suppression of freedom

of speech, I suppose. But at any rate, that was a part of this strategy: treat everybody alike and don't let there be visible friction, threats of violence, or anything else.

Comrie: Well, the one episode of what seemed to be an obvious demonstration . . . in November-December, 1961, there was picketing of local theaters and restaurants, I believe.

Rogers: I think this probably could be characterized as inevitable as we gradually added more and more Negro students and as they gradually became more and more visible in the community, on entertainment stages, on football and basketball fields of play. We were enlarging. See, our enrollment was continuing in this time period, again, that literally explosive growth. At the time this series of events we're talking about started, we had perhaps enrolled 5,500 students, and I suppose toward the end of this time, we were at approximately about 11,000 or 12,000 students, and then more gradually in recent years we've gone up to 17,000 students. But if you take a small college . . . well, in that context five thousand was not small at that time, but still, relatively speaking, if you try to expand a school of 5,000 to 10,000 and enlarge its program scope and everything else simultaneously, you have quite a stressful situation just simply in coping with the growth of facilities and staff. Put the integration into that setting, and it becomes more difficult to handle.

So from a community standpoint, this was a small community. The population of the City of Denton at the time that we started this episode we're discussing was perhaps 20,000 people, including the students who were counted in the census, no more than 25,000. Today we're talking about 50,000 population. It was definitely a much smaller town, much more traditional "Old" atmosphere. It had a much less transient population from all over the United States than that we now see with population mobility. It is almost not quite conceivable as even being the same town and the same place because it was so different.

So here was this mushrooming college in a fairly static population town of traditional nature. That alone creates explosive atmosphere and tension and friction between "town and gown"--that's an old story. Now that community had segregated public schools, segregated restaurants, and not just segregated but closed motion picture theaters. I found that astonishing. Even farther south in the state where I'd been, at least they had what they called their "nigger balcony," and Negroes bought their tickets around at the side, and they went in by their own stairwell and weren't seen by the white patrons. But at least they went into the movies. In Denton you couldn't go to the movies, and without going over to far Southeast Denton, you couldn't find a place to eat, except

on the campus in the school's facilities. Also, it was extremely difficult--even when we opened our dormitories--it was extremely difficult for someone who wanted to live in an apartment or rooming house to find a place anywhere except in far Southeast Denton, which, in traditional vocabulary, would be "colored town."

So there you are. Private housing, restaurants, entertainment places, and motion picture theaters were closed to the Negroes. We were approaching now this birth of social consciousness of American college students, you see. You talk about--what--1961?

Comrie: Yes, it was--November-December, 1961.

Rogers: Okay, 1961-62. See, we're approaching the time of student activism. In other parts of the country, it was beginning to rise. It was more common to find social consciousness among white students. We were beginning to see university-related church groups take more of a social concern and want to have a role. So there was getting to be organization now on the other side. Whereas we formerly feared repression and demonstration from the anti-Negro element, now it was beginning to arise in the other way and press out into the community. And that, I think, led to this--and I think confrontation would be the case--where, led by white sympathizers, many of them with church relationships, as was, of course, to be quite common in the civil rights

movement throughout this period, you had people calling on and attempting to go in and get food service integrated, eventually leading to big plans to picket the Campus Theater, which was the prestige motion picture house.

And then there were rumors of counter-pressure:

"Oh, there's a group from the town up the road, and they're going to come in their pick-up trucks with shotguns, and they're going to shoot at this crowd." There was quite sincere fear of real violence coming out of this.

At the time it was quite vivid, and now I just really have lost a sense of accuracy of detail. I know that there were groups of individuals working quietly behind the scenes. These groups would include people downtown--some businessmen. I suspect that that editor of the Denton paper was one of them. I am quite sure there were representatives of law enforcement in there, and I think their primary and immediate concern was, "What can we do to keep a spark from touching off a real violent thing?" But at the same time there was some dialogue: "How are we going to get the word to these Denton business people who own theaters and restaurants that, by golly, they must open their doors?"

Now that's a very generalized statement, and there were lots of recriminations and attacks of one group against another verbally. There was perhaps at least one faculty member who said he was fired by the university because he

fomented this agitation for integration, and I don't know whether that's true or not. I didn't see it, and I just don't know, and maybe it did happen. I don't know. There was a lot of ill-will generated, and it was probably our worst time with respect to getting this.

Now I think there were angry groups who did form outside the Campus Theater. I think there were pickets, and I think there were words shouted back and forth. There were police there, and . . . you've read the newspaper far more recently than I, and there may have been an arrest or two. I don't recall.

Comrie: I saw no reference to arrests, no.

Rogers: I suspect maybe they avoided it. And I feel that eventually this pressure and the fear of violence and then some kind of a collective conscience in the community began to form enough to get the word to people who owned restaurants and theaters that "You've got to face this, and you've got to accommodate it".

And by whatever means--I'm just not a good source, from memory at least, to give you a real accurate portrayal of what happened--by this means, and with considerable newspaper attention, in town at least by the local daily and by the student paper, we passed over and into that last significant visible barrier, and that is being an island of integration in a surrounding community of complete

segregation. Somewhere in that time frame then, the Denton Independent School District was integrated. It ultimately closed its Negro school just to completely integrate.

And that's really my best recollection of that particular set of incidents. It was not pleasant, and it wasn't pretty, and perhaps not everyone on various sides comported themselves with the greatest wisdom. But I guess perhaps, in retrospect, we were at least fortunate to have achieved the goal without serious injury or loss of life, which conceivably could have happened and did happen in other communities, of course.

Comrie: Did you name that editor?

Rogers: The managing editor of the time period, at least of the first part--well, probably all during these time periods--was Tom Kirkland. As I said, he had been a journalism student at North Texas, had been a student editor, and I perceived him to be an extremely responsible individual, extremely concerned about community progress and safety and the rights of these Negroes as individuals and trying to find a way of moderate accommodation.

Now moderates weren't always appreciated by extremists of either side, and yet I have this feeling, and I think I still hear it today among old-timers: President Matthews did a number of things which were unpopular with the faculty, particularly those members of the faculty whom you would

identify as liberal and more accustomed to the emerging standard of full faculty participation in governance and so on, and so he had a lot of critics with respect to some of the ways in which he implemented some of his policies. And he knew that; I mean, I'm not telling tales behind his back. He was an "old school" administrator. He was not one of the modern, management-oriented, people--involvement, personnel-handling types. He was real "old school"; he had grown up in the "old school." He was in many ways a loner. He was the kind who made his decisions in private and made them tough, and if he suffered for them, he suffered in private.

My impression, as I started to say, is that there are many people who are otherwise critics of him for some reason, who have spoken admiringly of his skill at leading this institution through a difficult time, a necessary time, an agonizingly slow time, and yet possess some kind and skill and wisdom and compassion. Certainly, I am one of those who shares that view, and I have talked to enough people who, I think, were not 100 percent approving of a lot of Dr. Matthews' policies who do feel that one of his great contributions was making this transition possible and making it with a great deal of wisdom and far-sightedness.

Comrie: Seeing what has happened, it seems to have a remarkably peaceful transition, as I see it. Thank you very much.