INFORMATION TO USERS

This was produced from a copy of a document sent to us for microfilming. While the most advanced technological means to photograph and reproduce this document have been used, the quality is heavily dependent upon the quality of the material submitted.

The following explanation of techniques is provided to help you understand markings or notations which may appear on this reproduction.

1. The sign or "target" for pages apparently lacking from the document photographed is "Missing Page(s)". If it was possible to obtain the missing page(s) or section, they are spliced into the film along with adjacent pages. This may have necessitated cutting through an image and duplicating adjacent pages to assure you of complete continuity.

2. When an image on the film is obliterated with a round black mark it is an indication that the film inspector noticed either blurred copy because of movement during exposure, or duplicate copy. Unless we meant to delete copyrighted materials that should not have been filmed, you will find a good image of the page in the adjacent frame. If copyrighted materials were deleted you will find a target note listing the pages in the adjacent frame.

3. When a map, drawing or chart, etc., is part of the material being photographed the photographer has followed a definite method in "sectioning" the material. It is customary to begin filming at the upper left hand corner of a large sheet and to continue from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps. If necessary, sectioning is continued again—beginning below the first row and continuing on until complete.

4. For any illustrations that cannot be reproduced satisfactorily by xerography, photographic prints can be purchased at additional cost and tipped into your xerographic copy. Requests can be made to our Dissertations Customer Services Department.

5. Some pages in any document may have indistinct print. In all cases we have filmed the best available copy.

University
Microfilms
International

300 N. ZEEB RD., ANN ARBOR, MI 48106

Downloaded from SHAREOK. Persistent Handle URL: https://hdl.handle.net/11244/4977

8215911

LeSure, Lessie Lois Fowler

WILLA A. STRONG: AN HISTORICAL STUDY OF BLACK EDUCATION IN SOUTHEASTERN OKLAHOMA

The University of Oklahoma ED.D. 1982

University Microfilms International 300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106

Copyright 1982

by

LeSure, Lessie Lois Fowler

All Rights Reserved

THE UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA

GRADUATE COLLEGE

WILLA A. STRONG: AN HISTORICAL STUDY OF BLACK EDUCATION IN SOUTHEASTERN OKLAHOMA

A DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

BY

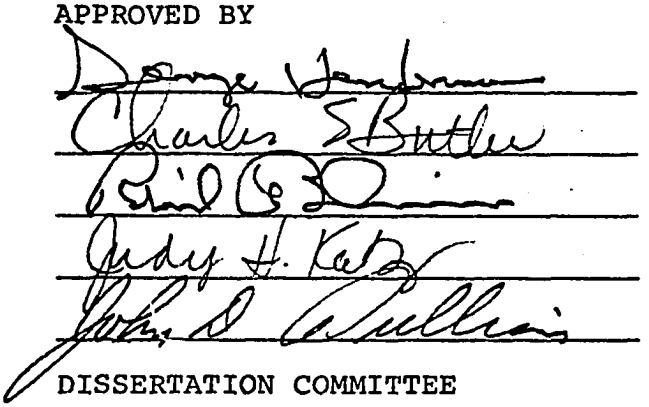
LESSIE LOIS FOWLER LeSURE

Norman, Oklahoma

1982

WILLA A. STRONG: AN HISTORICAL
STUDY OF BLACK EDUCATION IN
SOUTHEASTERN OKLAHOMA

APPROVED BY



DISSERTATION COMMITTEE

TITLE: WILLA A. STRONG: AN HISTORICAL STUDY OF BLACK EDUCATION IN SOUTHEASTERN OKLAHOMA

BY: Lessie Lois Fowler LeSure

MAJOR PROFESSOR: George Henderson, Ph. D.

This study delineates the history, the background and unique problems of Willa A. Strong, a Black female school administrator-educator during the separate school era. Particular attention is given to the techniques and strategies used by this administrator to: 1) activate and maintain a relevant and meaningful curriculum, 2) promote a positive, humanistic and productive learning environment and 3) maintain an exemplary educational institution.

Primary sources include interviews with individuals who knew Miss Strong as well as school records and reports. While much of the data was destroyed during the transition from separate schools to desegregated schools, the researcher was able to report the climate characterizing Black education during Willa Strong's tenure as a teacher and as a principal. Secondary sources include literature focusing on Blacks in Oklahoma and other areas.

This study questions the notion that all-Black schools were inadequate, poorly managed, lacking in educational standards and in general inferior. When viewed within the legal and social restraints of separate but equal education the roles and functions of Black educators merit closer attention.

DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to:

Clara Estell Fowler, who instilled in me a quest for me to love learning,

Paralee Fowler, who encouraged me, supported me, shaped my life and gave me the opportunity to develop,

Oran Fowler, who taught me boldness and the courage to speak out,

Joe Vonder Pleasant, who as a legend in his own time, taught me persevance and the will to work in order to achieve,

Darryl Bernard and Karlos Antonio LeSure whom I trust will take pride in their heritage, be further inspired to fulfill their greatest desires and <u>pass it on</u>!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The writer gratefully acknowledges the assistance of Ruth J. Strong and Thelma Lawson Anderson for the use of documents, personal papers, unlimited interviews and cooperation; Wade Watts for making available information, various L'Ouverture alumni for interviews, and to the countless others who provided words of encouragement.

Sincere gratitude is expressed to members of the doctoral committee; Dr. George Henderson, who patiently guided, directed, and encouraged this study; Dr. Robert Bibens, Dr. John Pulliam, Dr. Charles Butler and Dr. Judith Katz.

The writer also wishes to acknowledge the understanding, empathy and tolerance of her sons, Darryl and Karlos LeSure; her coharts: Dr. Mary C. Moon, Dr. Worth J. Hadley, Janis Mitchell, Nedella Foster and Raymond Mitchell for their continual inspiration, the Holy Temple Baptist Church family for their moral and spiritual support and the patience and perservance of Jeanne Redd, who labored through the typing of this manuscript.

Finally, thank God for the courage to endeavor this task.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT . . . . . i.

Chapter

I. INTRODUCTION 1

Brief Historical Overview 4
Problems of Black Women 21
Statement of The Problem 28
Methodology 29
Limitation of The Study 29
Sources of Data 29

II. THE BLACK COMMUNITY OF McALESTER, OKLAHOMA 30

Early Arrivals 30
The Strong's Arrival 32
The Early Education of Willa A. Strong 39
The Secondary Education of Willa A. Strong 43

III. WILLA A. STRONG: EDUCATOR, ADMINISTRATOR AND COMMUNITY LEADER 53

Early Career 53
Administrative Career 55
The End of Separate Schools 77
The End of L'Ouverture 94

IV. CAREERS OF BLACK WOMEN IN OKLAHOMA 104

Traditional Careers 104
Non-Traditional Careers 106

CONCLUSION 112

SOURCES CONSULTED 116

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The notion that a separate school system for Black students was inferior and inadequate to schools for White students led to a national effort to abolish dual public educational facilities. For example, in 1967 the United States Commission on Civil Rights concluded: "Negro children suffer serious harm when their education takes place in public schools which are racially segregated whatever the source of such segregation may be."[1] In 1968 Meyer Weinberg revealed that "a school is segregated when the community comes to view the school in its nature to be inferior and unsuitable for privileged children."[2] In addition to violating the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment, related studies and court proceedings have demonstrated "segregation of white and colored children in public schools has detrimental effect upon colored children."[3] In fact, the Commission on Civil Rights reported in 1968 that "segregation by law was found to create feelings of inferiority among students which ultimately

---

[1] Report of the United States Commission on Civil Rights to the President of the United States, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1967), p. 163.

[2] Meyer Weinberg, Desegregation Research: An Appraisal, (Bloomington, Indiana: Phi Delta Kappa, 1968), p. 2.

[3] David Fellman, ed., The Supreme Court and Education, Classics In Education, (Richmond, Virginia: William Byrd Press, Inc.), p. 79.

affects their motivation and their ability to learn."[4] Prior to the 1968 report, a 1947 Committee on Civil Rights Study recommended "the elimination of segregation based on race, color or creed."[5] Providing a rationale for this recommendation, the committee explained:

> The separate but equal doctrine has failed in three important respects. First, it is inconsistent with the fundamental equalitarianism of the American way of life in that it marks groups with the brand of inferior status. Secondly, where it has been followed the results have been separate and unequal facilities for minority people. Finally, it has kept people apart despite incontrovertible evidence that an environment favorable to civil rights is fostered whenever groups are permitted to live and work together. There is no adequate defense for segregated schools.[6]

Willa A. Strong, a Black female educator during and after the separate school systems in Oklahoma, is relatively unknown outside the state. Despite a paucity of empirical data, it is clear that some separate schools did offer Blacks quality educational and developmental social experiences.[7] Scant historical attention is paid to Black educators in Oklahoma who devoted persistent efforts toward developing, strengthening and promoting positive educational experiences for Black youth in a separate school system. As a result, the majority of research tends to paint

---

[4]Racial Isolation in the Public Schools: A Report to the United States Commission on Civil Rights to the President of the United States, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1968), p. 91.

[5]President's Committee on Civil Rights, "To Secure These Rights," (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1947), p. 63.

[6]Ibid.

[7]See Faustine Childress Jones, A Traditional Model of Educational Excellence: Dunbar High School of Little Rock, Arkansas, (Washington, D.C.: Harvard University Press, 1981), and G. Weber, "Inner City Children Can Be Taught To Read: Four Successful Schools," (Washington, D.C.: Council For Basic Education, 1971).

a dismal picture of Black separate schools.

In 1929, Willa A. Strong began her profession as an educator in the public school system of Oklahoma. Earlier legislative actions clearly outlined a "separate but equal" system of education in Oklahoma.[8] In fact; subsequent actions of the Territorial and State Legislatures combined to hinder progessive measures for Black schools.[9] The legal limitations imposed on Black Schools served as a stimulus for Willa A. Strong. In spite of the system, she was determined to prod Black students to excel in academics, maintain high moral standards, set high career and life goals, and to think of themselves as worthy and capable individuals.

Prior to the Brown decision, the reflective educational values, efforts and ideals transferred by Strong and other Black educators were impressive and valued by Black youths. The fact that a large number of Blacks who receive their public school education in Oklahoma separate schools currently are successfully employed in various high status careers, reflects favorably on the efforts of Black educators. However, the closing of Black schools and the loss of valuable documents have made indepth studies of Black schools and educators difficult. Even so, histories of public school education in Oklahoma are incomplete if the education of Blacks in separate schools is omitted. It is within this context that this study of Willa A. Strong, a Black female educator (1929-1968), is pursued.

---

[8]Frank A. Balyeat, "Segregation in the Public Schools of Oklahoma Territory," Chronicles of Oklahoma, Spring, 1961, p. 181.

[9]Ibid.

Brief Historical Overview

The arrival and history of Blacks in Oklahoma territories is documented as early as 1541.[10] Prior to the Civil War, the Five Civilized Tribes arrived in Indian Territory with their Black slaves. Products of their environment, these southern Indian tribes had observed the practice of slavery in Mississippi, Alabama and Georgia. However, the treatment of slaves by southern tribes was less brutal and harsh than that of the southern Whites. In most instances, slaves were treated kindly and with less distinction paid to their color. Eventually, the Indians freed the slaves.[11]

Historically, Indians were concerned with the education of their young. Because there were children of Black freedmen, each tribe assumed the responsibility of educating their children too.[12] As a result, the tribes operated separate schools for the children of Black freedmen. Litton documents thirty-four neighborhood schools for the education of Negro children of freedmen in the Choctaw Nation by 1885.[13] The freedmen in this nation had the advantage of citizenship which afforded greater

---

[10]See Arthur L. Tolson, The Black Oklahomans: A History, 1541-1972, (New Orleans: Edwards Printing Press), 1972. Tolson documents earlier Black arrivals who accompanied Spanish and French explorers and Christopher Columbus.

[11]Gaston Litton, History of Oklahoma at The Golden Anniversary of Statehood, Vol. I, (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Co.), 1957, p. 183. The Choctaw, Chickasaw, Cherokee, Creek and Seminole Tribes are identified as the Five Civilized Tribes who were forced to make the westward movement to Oklahoma.

[12]Ibid., Vol. II, p. 247.

[13]Ibid. The Choctaw Nation granted citizenship to their freedmen in 1883.

educational opportunities through financial support. Initially, freedmen in the Chicksaw Nation were denied citizenship. Consequently, their children were without educational opportunities. Later in 1882, the Federal Government allocated money specifically for the establishment of schools for Blacks. In a similiar manner, the Creek Nation provided two boarding schools for Black children.[14] The Cherokees opened the Colored High School at Tahlequah around 1889. The administration of the school was regarded as superior.[15] In this same year, the Oklahoma Territory was open for settlement. The question of education arose.

Like the Indians, the Whites who settled in the territory were mostly southerners who strongly opposed mixed schools. Although not required by law, separate schools were provided in counties with large Black populations. For instance, Mr. Fee, a white educator was interested in the education of children in Kingfisher. Fee discovered that according to the law the number of White children was insufficient to build the school. Since the law did not prohibit mixed schools, he decided to build a school to house both White and Black students. The institution operated as a mixed school for a short time. Later, Fee made a distinction by separating the races, placing Blacks in one room and Whites in another. Dissatisfied with this arrangement, several Blacks asked for their own

---

[14] Ibid.

[15] Lewis, "Negro Education in Oklahoma," July 7, 1939, unpublished manuscript, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. The Author's first name was omitted from the document.

high school.[16]

The issue of education received much attention prior to and immediately following statehood. In fact, regulations and laws with respect to education in Oklahoma were defined during the legislative sessions of 1890, 1897 and 1901.[17] For example, prior to the approval of the Organic Act of 1890, "subscription or tuition schools were taught for very short terms in most towns and in a majority of rural areas."[18] Separate schools for the races became one of the primary concerns during the First Legislature in 1890 and it is reported that a compromise bill was the best that could be enacted during that session.[19] The School Bill which was enacted into law in December, 1890, included a county option plan whereby each county would vote to determine whether separate or mixed schools would operate in their respective counties.[20] There were no provisions for an institution of higher learning for Blacks in Oklahoma. However, in 1898 the Association of Negro Teachers (OANT) in the Oklahoma Territory joined in the case of Cynthia Ware, a Black student who sought admission to the land grant Normal School in Edmond, Oklahoma. Cynthia's

---

[16]Ibid. This was the beginning of separate high schools for Blacks. See also Balyeat, "Segregation in the Public Schools of Oklahoma."

[17]See Oklahoma Session Laws, 1890, 1897 and 1901.

[18]Frank A. Balyeat, "Segregation in the Public Schools of Oklahoma Territory," Chronicles of Oklahoma, Spring, 1961, p. 181.

[19]Ibid.

[20]Ibid. See also Ollie E. Hatcher, "The Development of Legal Controls in Racial Segregation in the Public Schools of Oklahoma 1865-1952," (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Oklahoma, 1954, p. 63.

application was denied even though the federal intent of land grant colleges specified that:

> No money shall be paid under this act to a State or Territory for the support and maintenance of a college where a distinction of race and color is made in the admission of students, but the establishment and maintenance of such colleges separated for White and colored students shall be held to be in compliance with the provisions of the act if the funds received in such State or Territory be equitably divided here in after set forth.[21]

In 1896, the Territorial Legislature passed a bill which provided for the establishment of a Black land grant college at Langston, Oklahoma: The Colored Agricultural and Normal University.

By 1897 there were several cases in the State of Oklahoma alleging that Black children were not receiving any education in smaller communities. This condition existed because of the small number of Black children and the lack of tax money for the support of separate Black schools.[22] In an effort to meet the needs of such students the school laws mandated:

> Whenever there shall be as many as eight colored children in any one district in the Territory of Oklahoma, there shall be a district formed for the education of colored children in the same manner and upon the same applications as other districts are formed, and they shall hold their annual meetings and other elections and elect their own school officers in the same manner as other elections are held.[23]

Within the framework of separate but equal facilities, Black educators of Oklahoma banded together in order to heighten the educational

---

[21] Oklahoma Constitution, Article XIII, Section 3.

[22] For a detailed discussion, see Balyeat, "Segregation in the Public Schools of Oklahoma Territory."

[23] Oklahoma Session Laws, 1897 and 1901.

opportunities for Black students and teachers respectively. One organization, OANT, held meetings annually from 1893-1956. Specifically, OANT held annual conventions for teachers and periodic professional workshops by counties and districts.[24]

As the 1900's evolved, a separate school system for Oklahome remained an issue during the legislative sessions. According to Balyeat, the law of 1901 continued the prohibition of Black and Whites attending the same school and forbade anyone teaching pupils of the opposite races.[25] Furthermore, a change in the financing plan required the county superintendent to provide the county commissioners with data about the scholastics of both races in each district, with all pertinent facts about the educational situation in each district, and with recommendations for improvement.[26] Based on these provisions, separate schools were erected and financed from funds raised on all taxable property in the county, thus providing finances for local districts to maintain separate schools. According to Hatcher, the Act of March 4, 1901, clarified the disposition of the territory for educating a small number of Black children in any district. For example, separate schools were to be maintained for the minority group if more than ten pupils were enumerated in a district. If ten or less constituted the total number they were to be transferred to schools of their own color

---

[24]Evelyn Richardson Strong, "The History of the Oklahoma Association of Negro Teachers: A Study in Social Change," unpublished dissertation, University of Oklahoma, 1964), p. 6.

[25]Balyeat, "Segregation in the Public Schools of Oklahoma Territory," pp. 186-187.

[26]Ibid.

in any adjoining district.[27]

By 1902 heavy Black populations were concentrated in Logan County (2,133) and Noble County (1,127). Kingfisher and Lincoln counties reported less than 1,000 with all other counties reporting less than 500; the lowest being Kiowa County with four.[28] At the same time, one publisher reported anti-Black riots in the Oklahoma Territory: "mob law reigned in Shawnee .. .. The colored population of the city suffered the brutal assaults of a crowd of Whites of the lower class who, when daylight comes hide away."[29] In addition, it was reported in 1903 that Blacks living in Indian lands were unwanted.[30] A racial dispute also occurred in Holdenville in 1904.[31]

Between 1905-1907, just prior to and immediately following statehood, many social and political changes were taking place in the Oklahoma and Indian Territories. For example, there were efforts to combine the territories into a state. This was finally made possible by the Enabling Act of 1906, the formation of a Constitution for the Territories, and the admittance of the Territories to the Union as a state in 1907.[32]

---

[27]Hatcher, "The Development of Legal Controls in Racial Segregation in the Public Schools of Oklahoma, 1865-1952," p. 20. See also Edward E. Dale and Morris L. Wardell, A History of Oklahoma, (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1948), p. 472.

[28]Edward E. Dale and Morris L. Wardell, A History of Oklahoma, p. 472.

[29]Oklahoma Guide, June 23, 1902.

[30]Ibid., p. 68.

[31]Ibid.

[32]Writer's Program of the Works Project Administration, Oklahoma: A Guide To The Sooner State, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1942), p. 71.

Concurrently, "a number of all-Black towns were founded in the Indian Territory, including Lincoln City, Langston City, Liberty, Ferguson and Wellston Colony."[33] All-Black towns were also founded in the Indian Territory. They included "two unnamed Seminole Nation Black towns, Tullahassee, North Fork Colored, Arkansas Colored, Canadian Colored, Gibson Station, Wybark, Marshalltown, Overton, Lincoln, (later renamed Clearview), Rentiesville, Red Bird, Boley, Taft, Bailey, Tatums, Wild Cat or Grayson, Foreman, Chase, Summit, Lewisville, Vernon, Bookertee and Lima."[34] During the same period, several Black women in the Territories were employing cooperative efforts to make a contribution toward the solution of vital problems which faced the pioneer Negro citizen in Oklahoma. Such women as Mary Church Terrell, Elsi Johnson McDonald at the national level and Judith C. Horton and Harriett Price Jacobson at the local level were organizers of the Chapters of the Federation of Colored Women's Clubs in Guthrie and Oklahoma City.[35] For instance, the Excelsior Club (1906), established the first Negro library in the State of Oklahoma in Guthrie.[36]

Blacks also were politically involved with the two national parties, Democrats and Republicans. A few Blacks were elected as "delegates to

---

[33]Tolson, The Black Oklahomans, p. 94.

[34]Ibid. Chapter Nine of Tolson's work provides a detailed account and discussion of the development of all-Black towns in Oklahoma. See also Kaye M. Teall, Black History in Oklahoma; A Resource Book, (Oklahoma City: Oklahoma City Public Schools, 1972).

[35]Willa A. Strong, "The Origin, Development, and Current Status of the Oklahoma Federation of Colored Women's Clubs," (unpublished dissertation, University of Oklahoma, 1957), p. 51.

[36]Ibid., pp. 51-54.

Council Conventions and other offices ... John Capers as Councilman and O. H. Bradley, a member of the School Board. Both men were residents of Guthrie, Oklahoma."[37] At the time of statehood (1907), Blacks tended to support the Republican Party and proclaimed the support of the Republican gubernational candidate, Frank Franz. However, on November 16, 1907, Charles N. Haskell, a Democrat was elected and installed as the first governor.[38] Prior to Governor Haskell's election, the Territorial Legislature passed the first Jim Crow Law, which was protested by the Negro Protective League (representing both Oklahoma and Indian Territories) because of its unequal and unfair treatment of Blacks.[39]

The constitutional law required that separate coaches and separate waiting rooms be provided by all public carriers.[40] Furthermore, the law obligated all public transportation companies to provide separate coaches, waiting rooms and compartments equal in all points of comfort and conveniences for Whites and Blacks.[41] The Democratic Party approved the law, which was condemned by the Republican Party.[42] Blacks were extremely

---

[37]Tolson, The Black Oklahomans, pp. 115, 119, 123.

[38]Writer's Program of the Works Project Administration, Oklahoma: A Guide To The Sooner State, p. 30.

[39]Kaye M. Teall, Black History in Oklahoma: A Resource Book, p. 172. Teall reports that in 1830, a White comedian put black make-up on his face and hands and did a routine based on a Black character he called 'Jim Crow' and the name began to be used as a synonym for Negro.

[40]Victor E. Harlow, Oklahoma: Its Origins and Development, (Oklahoma City: Harlow Publishing Co., 1934), p. 315.

[41]Gaston Litton, History of Oklahoma at the Golden Anniversary of Statehood, Vol. I, (New York: Lewis Publishing Co., Inc., 1957), p. 519.

[42]Victor E. Harlow, Oklahoma: Its Origins and Development, p. 315.

dissatisfied with the law and "protested the Jim Crow Law as unjust and an imposition upon them."[43] Legislative Bills in succeeding sessions included laws against intermarriage between Blacks and Whites in 1908 and denial of Black suffrage in 1910.[44] In fact, the Grandfather Clause mandated:

> No person shall be registered as an elector of this state, or be allowed to vote in any election held herein, unless he be able to read and write any section of the Constitution of the State of Oklahoma; but no person who was, on January 1, 1866 or at any time prior thereto entitled to vote under any form of government, or who at that time resided in some foreign nation and no lineal descendent of such person shall be denied the right to register and vote because of his inability to so read and write sections of such Constitution.[45]

To this mandate and other Jim Crow Laws, Blacks protested at both the state and national levels. Nevertheless, the Oklahoma Supreme Court ruled that the clause was not in conflict with the federal constitution and that the right or privilege to regulate its exercise is still left or retained with several states.[46] Ultimately, the 1910 Grandfather Clause became law in Oklahoma.

During the same year, the Democratic Party initiated an overnight action to move the capital from Guthrie to Oklahoma City.[47] Jim Noble, a Black man, sometimes called Oklahoma's Negro Governor, played a prominent

---

[43]Gaston Litton, History of Oklahoma at the Golden Anniversary of Statehood, Vol. I, p. 519.

[44]Tolson, The Black Oklahomans, p. 147.

[45]Oklahoma Session Laws, 1910.

[46]Tolson, The Black Oklahomans, p. 159.

[47]Litton, History of Oklahoma at The Golden Anniversary of Statehood, Vol. I, pp. 526-527.

role in the removal of the State Seal from Guthrie.[48] According to Tolson, "as Jim carried the seal, he wondered if the historians would write his name in the books and teach the coming generations about his love for his state and about the service he rendered."[49] In any case, the efforts of Jim Noble enabled the Democrats to achieve an astonishing political victory over the Republican rivals.[50]

Also in 1910, Black women were continuing their efforts to organize federated clubs in various towns. Representatives from these various clubs met "at Avery Chapel African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma for the purpose of forming a state organization. On April 16. 1910, the Oklahoma Federation of Colored Women's Clubs were formed, in spite of protests by several Negro men."[51] Prior to the organization of the State unit, eight clubs were functioning in Guthrie, Oklahoma City, Muskogee, El Reno, and Hennessey. As mentioned earlier Judith G. Horton of Guthrie, Harriet Price Jacobson of Oklahoma City, and Frances Harper of Muskogee were among the first organizers of the state

---

[48]Tolson, The Black Oklahomans, p. 154. A detailed account of Jim Noble's removal of the State Seal, and that Jim was referred to as the "Negro Messenger" for the State is provided. Tolson recalls being told the story of Jim Noble while studying Oklahoma History in high school. An Oklahoma City native, Evelyn LaRue Pittman, wrote a drama depicting the Jim Noble story in February, 1980. Among Oklahoman's who knew Jim Noble personally were: Antoine Fuhr, Real Estate Broker, Muskogee, Oklahoma; Ruby M. Hall, Retired Educator, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma; Joe Younger, Retired Politician, Oklahoma City and George Sparks, Retired Insurance Broker, Oklahoma.

[49]Ibid., p. 165.

[50]Ibid.

[51]Strong, "The Origin, Development, and Current Status of the Oklahoma Federation of Colored Women's Clubs," p. 60.

organization.[52]

By 1911 Oklahoma had elected Lee Cruce as its second governor. Much criticism was cast on him by other politicians because of his high ideals of personal behavior, his lack of sympathy with partisan political methods and his opposition to capital punishment.[53] Cruce tried to bring about a greater uniformity in the State's higher education program by calling for a centralized board of education.[54]

By 1913 laws clearly outlined separate schools for Black and White students. While separate schools were available in many communities, the economic conditions of Black families required assistance from the children. Since children could earn money as harvesters, the entire family worked as day laborers to earn money. The peak harvest period occurred during the fall of the year and, many Black children were forced to forego education for income.[55] In the same year, the Oklahoma State Legislature addressed the issue of finance for separate schools. The law stated that the excise boards of counties where separate schools were maintained could levy a tax of one mill on all taxable property for separate schools so long as the total levy for county purposes was within the limits set by the Constitution.[56]

---

[52]Ibid., p. 59.

[53]Harlow, Oklahoma: Its Origin and Development, p. 322.

[54]Litton, History of Oklahoma at the Golden Anniversary of Statehood, Vol. I, p. 535.

[55]Gene Aldrich, Black Heritage of Oklahoma, (Edmond, Oklahoma: Thompson Book and Supply, 1973), p. 28.

[56]Ibid., p. 37. See also Arthur L. Tolson, The Black Oklahomans A History: 1541-1972; Jimmie Lewis Franklin, The Blacks in Oklahoma.

In 1915 the United States Supreme Court declared the Oklahoma Grandfather Clause unconstitutional.[57] However, this decision did not prevent politicians from attempting to devise other methods to eliminate the voting rights of Blacks. In 1916, attempts were made to pass a literacy test. With the support of Governor Robert L. Williams, legislators drafted an Amendment stating:

> No one could vote unless he could read and write a section of the Constitution; but anyone who could vote prior to January 1, 1886, or his lineal descendent could vote whether he could read and write or not.[58]

The Second Grandfather Clause, as it was referred to by Blacks, was defeated. Franklin attributes the defeat to the concern of some Whites about the constitutionality of the Clause and the possibility that the Clause would disinfranchise some Whites also.[59] Blacks protested the Clause in state courts and the news media.[60] For example, Druscilla Dunjee Houston, sister of Roscoe Dunjee, editor of the Black Dispatch, wrote: "We want the right to vote."[61]

Despite these efforts, the educational situation for Blacks remained the same in the early twenties. Black and White children continued

---

[57]Writer's Program of the Works Project Administration, Oklahoma: A Guide To The Sooner State, p. 31.

[58]Harlow, Oklahoma: Its Origin and Development, p. 317.

[59]Franklin, The Blacks in Oklahoma, p. 24.

[60]See Harlow, Oklahoma: Its Origins and Developments, p. 317. One such case tried in "Tulsa County held the law constitutional and valid," while another in Kingfisher County was "held unconstitutional and election officials were heavily fined and imprisoned for one year." See also, Tolson, The Black Oklahomans, pp. 165-166.

[61]The Black Dispatch, October 18, 1918.

to attend separate schools under the law that supposedly provided for impartial facilities for both races.[62] There were documented reports of inequities between the two systems. According to Blachly and Oatman, the schools for Blacks were not equal in equipment or teaching staff to the schools for Whites.[63] In most instances, the superintendents used financing to justify the unequal conditions of separate schools.

By 1921, the law provided that "the county may levy in addition to its levy for current expenses, not more than two mills for the support of common schools."[64] Moreover, the same organizational system and financial support through ad valorem taxes had not changed since territorial days.[65] In this same year, a race riot occurred in Tulsa, Oklahoma. The two day riot (May 31 - June 1, 1921) "did much to put Oklahoma in the same category as any state in the deep South."[66] The New York Times described the riot as "one of the most disastrous race wars ever visited upon an American city.[67]

---

[62]Frederick F. Blachly and Mariam E. Oatman, Government of Oklahoma, (Oklahoma City: Harlow Publishing Co., 1924), p. 501.

[63]Ibid.

[64]Ibid.

[65]Edward Everett Dale and Morris L. Wardell, History of Oklahoma, pp. 469-471. "The Act of December 25, 1890 which created the public school system, provided for township schools; later the law was changed in 1893 to provide for district schools. The Act of 1890 provided for one high school in each township and one in each city with a population of more than five hundred. The county superintendent had supervision over all common schools and those in towns of less than 2,500. City superintendents had supervision over all common schools whose population was 2,500 or more. Section 16 and 26 in each township had been reserved for common schools.

[66]Tolson, The Black Oklahomans, p. 167.

[67]New York Times, June 1, 1921.

Several investigations were conducted to determine the cause of the race riot. Aldrich stated that "the basic cause was the enmity developed over the years of racial discrimination and the lack of strong law enforcement in the City (Tulsa)."[68] In any case, the Black response and reactions to the riot varied. Cyril V. Briggs, leader of the African Blood Brotherhood, said that "the Negro had long since lost faith in the justice of the White man toward the Negro."[69] Durscilla Dunjee Houston wrote: "No better thing could have happened for the Negro race than the brutal race riot in Tulsa. The sufferers of Tulsa are but our martyrs, that shall bring us to a quicker and brighter dawn."[70]

From January 9 to November 19, 1913, John Calloway Walton served as Oklahoma's fifth governor.[71] During Walton's tenure the Ku Klux Klan returned to Oklahoma. The Klan became known for professing to stand for civil and social progress and announcing itself the champion of "white supremacy." The Klan also opposed the Catholic Church, Jews and Negroes, while advocating law

---

[68]Aldrich, Black Heritage of Oklahoma, pp. 85-87. "A young Negro, Dick Rowland, was accused of attempting to attack a seventeen-year old White elevator operator. She screamed and Rowland fled ... Rumors of Whites threatening to lynch the young Negro spread through the Black section of the city and a group of armed Blacks arrived in front of the courthouse to protect the young man. A crowd of armed Whites confronted the Negroes. Shortly, firing broke out." Later, the homes of Blacks were set on fire. The Whites prevented firemen from dispelling the flames. Consequently, the total Black section burned.

[69]Ibid.

[70]The Black Dispatch, June 17, 1921.

[71]Litton, History of Oklahoma at the Golden Anniversary of Statehood, Vol. I, p. 557.

enforcement and Americanism.[72] Eventually, Governor Walton was impeached from office in November, 1923. Subsequent to his impeachment, Walton "asserted that most of the hostility toward him was due to the Ku Klux Klan, which Walton attempted to enact legislation against."[73]

Because of the social atmosphere in Oklahoma, Blacks were dissatisfied with separate but equal treatment in schools and some Blacks even tested the laws. In 1923, Jacob J. Jones, Sr., an attorney in Muskogee initiated a suit in the interest of his son, Jacob Jr., to test the constitutionality of the separate school law. The distribution of school funds was the primary concern. Jones felt that "his son and all other colored children in like situations were being discriminated against because of the failure of said board of education to provide equal education facilities and advantages as are enjoyed by White children of said district of school age."[74] By 1925, Blacks living in Lima, Oklahoma, Seminole County, questioned the Oklahoma Statutes, concerning the designation of separate schools. The Black school in Lima governed by a Black school board was by state law the District School.[75] The "county superintendent had approached several men in the district and said unless two of the members of the board

---

[72]Ibid., pp. 553-535. Similiar methods used by the Klan (lynchings, cross-burnings, etc.), were used by the Knights of Liberty during territorial days; thus the Klan ideology during the twenties was not considered new. Litton reports that the "Klan virus reached its crucial stage of infection about 1923 or 1924 and therefore began its gradual and certain decline." See also Tolson, The Black Oklahomans, pp. 168-170.

[73]Ibid.

[74]The Black Dispatch, May 3, 1923.

[75]The Black Dispatch, September 24, 1925.

resigned, allowing him to appoint Negroes who he decided on the board, he would immediately declare the Negro school the 'Separate School' and designate the White school as the 'District School'"[76] The Blacks did not cooperate with the superintendent's plan, and the Black school was designated as the Separate School.

The Oklahoma Congress of Negro Parents and Teachers (OCNPT) was a positive force during these troubled times. It functioned on a state and regional basis with six districts and fourteen standing committees responsible for addressing the educational needs of the Black community.[77] Like OANT, the OCNPT was primarily concerned with educational improvement and progress. Other organizations were formed to address broader issues of racial discrimination and equal rights, including the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (N.A.A.C.P.) and the Urban League.[78]

During this same period, Blacks also utilized various churches throughout the state to seek social justice. These churches provided both religious and social outlets.

> The Black church in the State of Oklahoma did more than preach about hell and heaven. It was far more active in social affairs than in many other states. It did preach

---

[76] The Black Dispatch, November 12, 1925.

[77] Litton, History of Oklahoma at the Golden Anniversary of Statehood, Vol., pp. 228-289.

[78] Aldrich, Black Heritage of Oklahoma, pp. 88-89. Predecessors to these organizations were: The Colored Immigration Society whose purpose was to provide information about lands in the newly open territory (Oklahoma). The Colored Immigration Bureau provided information about new homes in the territory. Others were, the Equal Rights Association of Kingfisher County, The Negro Press Association, the Negro Protective League, the Blaine County Colored Protective League and the Suffrage League. See also Tolson, The Black Oklahomans.

> a rather conservative theology. Long before the 1900's there had been clergy men who believed that the church not only had a direct responsibility to care for the poor and the sick, but to fight social injustice and racial hatred in the world. They maintained that the church had an obligation to work for democracy and justice within society. In the opinion of many Black churchmen the church had to serve as a vehicle of hope for the Black community.[79]

Despite these efforts, incidences of racial conflict continued in Oklahoma. In 1926 Blacks in Gans, Oklahoma, were ordered to leave by night riders.[80] In the same year, W.E.B. DuBois, noted civil rights activitist, spoke to Black educators at the annual meeting of the OANT. In his speech, DuBois told the educators: "The trouble with the Negro boy and girl today develops out of a well-defined belief that the Negro has never accomplished anything and never will."[81]

In 1927 Henry S. Johnston became governor of the state. During his administration the Ku Klux Klan's power began to decline.[82] Johnston was criticized for one incident in particular: The pardoning of two Klansmen found guilty of flogging Blacks. Furthermore, Johnston did not contest the Highway Commission's appointment of several well known Klansmen to important

---

[79]Franklin, The Blacks in Oklahoma, pp. 44-45. Franklin reports 26,000 Black church members at the time of statehood and 80,000 by 1940.

[80]Teall, Black History in Oklahoma, p. 208.

[81]The Black Dispatch, February 18, 1926. Black historians, sociologists, educators and others have discussed the opposing educational views of W.E.B. DuBois and Booker T. Washington, founder of Tuskegee Institute. Washington advocated and stressed vocational training for Blacks while DuBois advocated intellectual development as a means for Blacks to gain success in society. See John Hope Franklin, From Slavery to Freedom, Third Edition, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1967), p. 382.

[82]Tolson, The Black Oklahoman, p. 171.

positions. He was eventually impeached for incompetency.[83]

By 1929, several separate Black high schools had received accreditation by the state. There were sixteen schools with fifteen or more units; five with seven to ten units and none with less than six units.[84]

A clearly defined system of segregation kept Blacks and Whites distinctly separate. As noted earlier, Blacks suffered because of these laws, especially in the areas of education, housing, employment, and public accommodations. In spite of the turbulent times, limited financial resources and racial discrimination, Black leaders (including educators) fought to abate these conditions. Their major efforts focused on the courts. Since territorial times, Black individuals and organizations protested inequality and injustice through courts of law. In addition, Black newspapers published articles decrying racial injustice and inequality. Even though most Black leaders temporarily accepted the practice of racial segregation, they never accepted the principles of segregation. This attitude of temporary acceptance enabled Black teachers to teach in segregated schools, while at the same time seeking top quality education for their students.

Problems of Black Women

Black women throughout the Southwest were experiencing additional hardships. One Black woman stated:

> Only colored women of the South know the extreme in suffering and humiliation. We know how many insults we have borne silently, for we have hidden many of them from our men because we did not want them to die needlessly in

---

[83] Harlow, Oklahoma: Its Origins and Development, pp. 361-364.

[84] Sixteenth Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, State Department of Education of Oklahoma, July 1, 1934.

our defense...[85]

Another description of the dilemma of Black women is described by Lindsey: "The Black woman has been set apart consistently from her White counterparts, in such a way that Black women were considered a subgroup within the Black community."[86] She continues by describing White women as being the token high achievers among women in American society; primarily because they had titles, but not the power, while Black women had neither.[87]

During the early 1900's Black women in Oklahoma were subject to emotional abuse and physical violence. In 1911 Laura Nelson, a Black Okemah woman, was arrested and accused of murdering a White sheriff. She was accused of hiding stolen goods in her home. Mrs. Nelson and her son were taken from the jail, dragged six miles to the Canadian River, and hanged from a bridge. Before the hanging, she was raped by members of the mob.[88] Three years later, another incident occurred in Wagner County. The brother of a seventeen year old Black teenager killed one of the two men who had assaulted his sister, Marie Scott. A mob forcibly entered the Scott home, found Marie alone and began to assault her. Her screams for help attracted her brother's attention and he came to her rescue. While struggling to protect his sister, the youth was killed by one of the White men. The next day a mob came to search for the other brother who had

---

[85]"A Woman's View of the 1919 Riots," The Crisis, Vol. 19, November, 1919.

[86]Kay Lindsey, "The Black Woman as a Woman," in The Black Woman: An Anthology, Toni Cade, ed., (New Jersey: The New American Library, Inc.), 1970, p. 86.

[87]Ibid., p. 88.

[88]The Crisis, July, 1911.

escaped. Not to be outdone, the mob lynched Marie instead.[89]

Because of dire economic conditions, Black women were compelled to work on menial jobs to supplement the family income. Helen Brown described the employment conditions in the 1920's.

> Black women have always had to work hard. For a long time the only work we could get was in the White woman's kitchen. Some of them treated you nice, especially when you were alone with them. Whenever there were guests, they let you and the guests know you were the servant, do your job and not get friendly with the guests.[90]

Black women in Oklahoma in the work force were demeaned by their White employers — male and female. For example, when a White woman drove to the Black community to pick up her maid, the maid was instructed to sit in the back seat of the car. She was further instructed to only enter the back door of the house.[91] Situations such as these placed additional burdens on Black women. One writer said: "Black women have historically carried the burden of Jim Crow and Jane Crow ... these have often carried disproportionate burdens in the Black family as they strove to keep its integrity intact against the constant onslaught of indignities. Not only have they stood shoulder to shoulder with Negro men in every phase of the battle, but they have also continued to stand when their men were destroyed by it."[92] Nevertheless, Black women in city areas continued working for fifty cents a day to supplement the family income. A few Black women worked for the more

---

[89] The Crisis, June, 1914.

[90] Interview with Helen Brown, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, January 27, 1980.

[91] Ibid.

[92] Pauli Murray, "Jim Crow and Jane Crow," in Black Women in White America: A Documentary History, Gerda Lerna, ed., (New York: Vintage Books, 1972, pp. 592-593.

wealthy White families and earned as much as $5.00 per week. Other Black women who lived in the rural areas either worked in the fields with their husbands or tended the family garden in order to raise vegetables for subsistence. Black wives as a group had a long history of working because few Black husbands were able to acquire jobs paying enough salary to support their families.[93]

While Black women were working in White homes and in the fields with their husbands, many of them were dissatisfied. Paralee Pleasant lamented:

> We were not happy working for small salaries and being humiliated at the same time. I was determined to get an education or some kind of training that would prepare me to do another type of work. Sometimes I wonder how we made it. I do know that families did stick together. Our daddy died right after we came to Oklahoma. This left my mother with eight children to rear alone. My mother worked for a White family in another town thirty-two miles from home. My older sisters and brothers were instructed by my mother to take care of the family, send the young ones to school and take care of crops. I was one of the younger ones who went to school. But I had certain things to do also, like take care of my nephews and nieces so that my sisters could work and help their families. Most Black families worked together just like we did.[94]

By 1930 Black mothers were concerned that their children could not go very far in school. In most instances, few Black children attended school beyond the fifth grade. Ten years later Black families were completing an average of 6.1 years of school.[95]

---

[93]Interview with Helen Brown, January 27, 1980.

[94]Interview with Paralee Pleasant, Atoka, Oklahoma, December 8, 1980.

[95]LaFrances Rodgers-Rose, "The Black Woman: A Historical Overview," in The Black Woman, LaFrances Rodgers-Rose, ed., (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, Inc., 1980), p. 23-32.

In spite of the gains in years of schooling, the bulk of Black women remained employed as agricultural workers, servants, and launderers usually in their own homes.[96] During this same period in Oklahoma a few Black women were hired as maids in hospitals, hotels and other industrial establishments. A former hospital maid said: "The work was extremely hard. Some days we cleaned twenty to thirty rooms. All rooms had to be inspected and approved by the White head housekeeper before you could leave for the day. We couldn't talk to any of the patients, just do our jobs."[97]

Black women were acutely aware of the injustices levied upon them and their families. Many of their women made appeals for improved conditions for all Blacks not just themselves. One Black woman attributed the loss of her unborn child to poor economic conditions. In a letter to President Franklin Delano Roosevelt she said:

> We are citizens just as much or more than the majority of this country ... We are just as intelligent as they. This is supposed to be a free country regardless of color, creed or race but still we are slaves. Won't you help us? ... My husband is young, intelligent and very depressed. ... We want to live, not merely exist from day to day, but to live as you or any human being desires to do so. We want our unborn children to have an equal chance as the Whites. We don't want them to suffer as we are doing now because of race prejudices ... We want to own just a comfortable home by the time he reaches his early thirties. Is that asking too much? But how can we do that when the $26 he makes every two weeks don't hardly last the two weeks it should? ... We don't have the sufficient amount of food or clothes to keep us warm.[98]

In 1943 a Black Oklahoma teacher questioned the differences in salaries

---

[96]Ibid., p. 23.

[97]Interview with Paralee Pleasant, December 8, 1980.

[98]Mrs. Henry Widdington, "We Want To Live, Not Merely Exist," in Black Women in White America, pp. 300-301.

between White and Black teachers.[99] Through the assistance of the NAACP, Emma Lee Freeman filed legal proceedings in the United States Court of the Western District of Oklahoma against the Oklahoma City Board of Education. Freeman, a certified teacher, sought equal pay for doing the same job comparable to White teachers.[100]

By 1950, multiple chapters of the Oklahoma Federation of Colored Women's Clubs were active in the state. These clubs were concerned with improving the overall conditions of Blacks. The various clubs sought equality in women suffrage education, occupations, child welfare, and rural life conditions.[101] Eighty-one clubs with a membership of 1,159 where functional in Oklahoma.[102] During this same period, more Black women than Black men were going to college. Even so, Black women still did not do as well as their White female counterpart. Dorothy Height, President of the Council of Negro Women, concluded: "Sex and race combined to discourage Black women

---

[99]The Black Dispatch, March 13, 1943.

[100]Ibid., April 19, 1947.

[101]"The Beginnings of the National Club Movement," address by Josephine St. Piere Ruffin to the first National Conference of Colored Women, 1895.

[102]Strong, "The Origin Development and Current Status of the Oklahoma Federation of Colored Women's Clubs," p. 62. Mrs. Josephine St. Piere Ruffin is credited with the founding of the club movement among Black women. Through the support of the Woman's Era Club, Ruffin called the first national conference of Black Women in 1895. The conference resulted in the birth of the National Federation of Afro-American Women with Mrs. Booker T. Washington as first president. In 1896, the Colored Women's League and the Federation of Afro-American Women merged to form The National Association of Colored Women. According to Strong, women leaders of the club movement were women with outstanding leadership ability, superior education, personal integrity and an iron clad will to succeed. Ibid., pp. 40-60.

from pursuing higher degrees."[103] In addition,

> There is a lack of opportunity for Negro Women at the economic bottom and at the top. Too few Negro women push ahead of the B.A. degree and diversify their academic training beyond teaching. Among those who do, too few are in top policymaking positions in any phase of American life.[104]

By the mid-sixties, Black women were beginning to enter less traditional occupations such as law, politics and medicine. Entrance into these fields created another dilemma for Black women, placing them in closer competition with Black men desirous of such occupations. In the meantime, Black men were aggressively and subconsciously acting out some of the attitudes and beliefs about women held by White men. For example, men were supposed to be aggressive, women passive; woman's place is in the home. LaFrances Rodgers-Rose took issue with one myth about Black women imposed on them by White Society: "Black women must stand behind Black men, Black women must step back and let the Black man lead — Black women have always led their men."[105] To further compound the problem, Black men and Black women internalized and acted out other false definitions of themselves. For example, "Black women are too independent, Black women are evil, Black women argue too much, Black men are too possessive, Black men's feelings are too easily hurt, Black men are weak and Black women don't

---

[103]Dorothy I. Height, "Speech delivered at the National Council of Negro Women," November, 1963.

[104]Jeanne L. Noble, The Negro Woman's College Education, (New York: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1956), p. 18.

[105]LaFrances Rodgers-Rose, "Dialectics of Black Male-Female Relationships," in The Black Woman, La Frances Rodgers-Rose, ed., (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1980), p. 252.

don't appreciate good treatment."[106] This phenomenon created a negative inter-play between Black men and Black women, which ultimately caused a brief retardation in seeking equality for Blacks. Recently, the Black woman has taken bold and decisive steps to further the cause of racial justice and equality in Oklahoma. Two of them are, Clara M. Luper, who led the sit-in demonstrations in Oklahoma City; Hannah Diggs Atkins, the first Black woman to enter the State Legislative arena[107] and many others.

In 1929 Willa A. Strong began her tenure as a Black female educator in the State of Oklahoma. She began her career under segregated educational laws and she worked in unequal facilities and challenged preconceived notions relationg to women, especially Black women who chose non-traditional careers.

Statement Of The Problem

The problem for this study is: What did Willa A. Strong contribute to the quality of Black education for junior and senior high school students in McAlester, Oklahoma, from 1929-1968? Specifically, this study explores the following question: What educational philosophy did Willa A. Strong implement to produce quality education for Black students? A secondary question is: What were the problems of Black women entering non-traditional careers?

---

[106] Ibid., p. 253. In recent years, some Black social scientists have questioned research and studies on Blacks conducted by White social scientists. Black researchers have categorized the research as being biased and misperceived. See The Black Woman, La Frances Rodgers-Rose, ed., (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1980).

[107] See Gene Aldrich, Black Heritage of Oklahoma, (Edmond, Oklahoma: Thompson Book and Supply, 1973): Kaye Teall, Black History in Oklahoma: A Resource Book (Oklahoma City: Oklahoma City Public Schools, 1971) and Jimmie Lewis Franklin, The Blacks in Oklahoma, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980).

Methodology

The historical method is employed in order to gather the information essential to an objective analysis. Personal papers of Willa A. Strong have been reviewed in depth, as well as other official documents. Furthermore, family members, close associates, former students, staff members working under her leadership and community leaders have been interviewed.

Limitation Of The Study

As separate schools were eradicated, valuable reference materials, projected plans, and records were lost. Thus, this study does not have as back-up materials some of the documents relevant to Willa Strong. Also, a formal history of McAlester was not available for study and many city and county records were destroyed by fires in the early 1900's.

It is important to note here that the writer's interest in this subject is an outgrowth of participation in separate school systems from preschool through her undergraduate college education. Thus, one limitation of this study — as with most historical studies — is the bias of the researcher. However, all efforts have been made to minimize the subjectivity that tends to creep into value laden studies of this kind.

Sources Of Data

The majority of data used in this study can be categorized as primary. Such sources include personal papers, published articles, speeches, letters, school programs, year books, news articles and interviews with relatives and close associates. Books and unpublished masters and doctoral works are used as secondary sources.

CHAPTER II

THE BLACK COMMUNITY OF McALESTER, OKLAHOMA

Early Arrivals

The now paved street formerly known as Eleventh Street, that runs north and south and intersects with Carl Albert Parkway, was renamed Strong Boulevard, on August 12, 1975.[1] On a hill three blocks south and four blocks east, is the former Toussaint L'Ouverture High School, where Willa A. Strong served as principal for twenty-nine years.[2] Two blocks south of L'Ouverture School is the house where Willa lived, worked after hours on matters pertaining to L'Ouverture, and prepared materials for her various community projects.

Developed from a pioneering spirit with a trading post as its first major industry, McAlester was used as hunting grounds by Osage Indians and later alloted for the movement of the Choctaw Indian Tribe from Mississippi to Oklahoma.[3] James Jackson (J.J.) McAlester is acknowledged as having founded the town around 1866.[4] McAlester came to the site in search of coal. He had been given a pocket book compiled by geologist Captain Oliver Weldon,

---

[1]Resolution No. 75-15, McAlester City Council, McAlester, Oklahoma, July 18, 1975.

[2]Personnel Records, State Department of Education, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

[3]McAlester Comprehensive Plan, Oklahoma Project No. P-63, (Tulsa: Planning Associates, Inc., March 1967), p. 4.

[4]"This Is Oklahoma," The Sunday Oklahoman, October 20, 1963.

which listed coal deposits at an unidentified crossroads. McAlester pursued the leads in the Indian Territory.[5] Around this same time, Blacks were relocating in Oklahoma and Indian Territories. As early as 1844, Blacks were infiltrating the territories based on the following rationale:

> There was never a more favorable time than now for you to secure good homes in a land where you will be free and your rights respected. Oklahoma is now open for settlement. The soil is rich, the climate favorable, water abundant and there is plency of timber. Make a new start. Give yourselves and children new chances in a new land, where you will be able to think and vote as you please. By settling there you will help open up new avenues of industry, your boys and girls will learn trades and thus, be able to do business as other people. Five hundred of the best colored citizens of Topeka have gone there within the last month.[6]

Other reports also listed Oklahoma as an ideal place for Blacks to relocate.

The St. Louis Globe Democrat wrote:

> One hundred and fifty Negroes who had been camping at the Wharf here for a week past have at last succeeded in raising the necessary funds to charter two cars to the Iron Mountain Trail for Little Rock, for which place they left this afternoon. They will stay there until they accumulate enough money to go to Oklahoma.[7]

The Norman (Okla.) Transcript wrote:

> Colonies of colored people from Topeka, Kansas and also from points in the State of Georgia, are settling in the vicinity of Kingfisher, Oklahoma, at a rapid rate and

---

[5]Paul Nesbitt, "J.J. McAlester," Chronicles of Oklahoma, June 11, 1933, p. 759.

[6]"The Emigration Scheme of a Kansas Colored Politician," Washington Bee, July 1889. The Fred S. Barde Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. W.L. Eagleson, a Black politician of Topeka, Kansas, organizer of an emigrant company, circulated information about relocating in Oklahoma to Blacks in the South. Later, S.H. Scott, an attorney led a party of Blacks to Guthrie, Oklahoma area. See Arthur L. Tolson, The Black Oklahomans.

[7]St. Louis Globe Democrat, March 11, 1980.

> judging from present indications the colored brother is destined to play an important role in the future of Oklahoma. The exodus Negroes from Topeka, Kansas are building themselves up a town near Kingfisher, Oklahoma, I.T. and calling it Lincoln. The leaders are the same that led the exodus to Kansas within the memory of man.[8]

The Strong's Arrival

Before the Strongs arrived, several Black families had relocated in McAlester. Pearl Whittaker Wickham, and her parents, Scott and Ellen Whittaker, were among the Black families to arrive before the Strongs. Wickham's family came in anticipation of better opportunities. Pearl recalled: "A friend of my father had relocated in Oklahoma before we came," primarily because of the possibility of less racial discrimination and sent word for his friends to join him.[9]

There was a general unrest in the Whittaker's former home of Calvert, Texas, according to a territorial newspaper account of a lynching: "Motive not known; no arrest made."[10] This and other incidents caused the Whittakers to load their cattle in a rented freight car, place the children in a passenger car and head for McAlester. The family settled in the area now referred to as Third Ward, where they met other friends of the Baptist faith. This same area was also referred to as Baptist Hollow as printed in a newspaper: "Dr. Williams of Baptist Hollow is sick with a fever."[11]

---

[8] Norman Transcript, November 9, 1889.

[9] Interview with, Pearl Whittaker Wickham, McAlester, Oklahoma, December 19, 1977. See also, Arthur L. Tolson, The Black Oklahomans; Jimmie Lewis Franklin, The Blacks in Oklahoma.

[10] The Daily Capitol, South McAlester Indian Territory, April 9, 1977.

[11] Ibid.

Other families also migrated to McAlester, among them were the Henry Boxley family. Helen Boxley, his daughter, gave this account of the family arrival: "My father came from Texas to McAlester with his family in a wagon pulled by a donkey named Rock. My mother's family had already migrated to McAlester from Alderson, Oklahoma. By the time my father's family arrived, the Black community was growing."[12] Although Blacks were migrating to Oklahoma in seemingly large numbers, these moves were not without incident. Blacks were being warned to leave town, and riots spread across the territories. The Cherokee Messenger wrote: "One Negro and one White man wounded in an effort of a number of Whites to run Negroes out of Claremore. The White man was fatally wounded."[13]

In the midst of this social environment, William Strong, his wife Ruby, and their three-year-old son, Romaner Jack, moved from Waco, Texas, to Oklahoma in 1903.[14] Strong was promted to move from Waco by the reports of bigger and better opportunities in Oklahoma, good farm lands and his curosity about the freight trains labelled "COAL FROM McALESTER," he had seen pass through Waco. Although curious about McAlester, Strong first considered settling in Muskogee. Somehow the social atmosphere in Muskogee

---

[12]Interview with Helen J. Boxley, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, January 2, 1977.

[13]Arthur L. Tolson, The Black Oklahomans, pp. 65-66. In the 1800's Edwin P. McCabe had the idea to make Oklahoma a Black state. He was elected State Auditor in Kansas; later moving to Guthrie, Oklahoma and established the town of Langston, Oklahoma. Through his newspaper, the Langston Herald, McCabe promoted his town and dispatched his paper through agents, to lure Black settlers. Jimmie Lewis Franklin, The Blacks in Oklahoma, p. 6. See Also, Kaye M. Teall, Black History in Oklahoma: A Resource Book, (Oklahoma City, Oklahoma City Public Schools, 1972), p. 19.

[14]Interview with Ruth J. Strong, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, October 14, 1977.

did not appeal to him and Strong traveled 65 miles south and settled in McAlester. Even though the town was not free of racial discrimination, he thought McAlester to be a better place for his family.[15]

By this time several legal proceedings had already taken place which legimatized separatism for the Blacks in Oklahoma and Indian Territories. The Plessy vs. Fergurson case (1896) made it clear that separate but equal public facilities was the rule rather than the exception. The Oklahoma Session Laws of 1897 and 1901 clearly defined separate schools for the races.[16] Furthermore, Blacks in the Territory were faced with the growing White support for Jim Crow Laws. Several such bills were presented during the 1901 legislative session, but were not passed.[17] A separate Coach Bill was introduced in the Territorial House in 1903, which imposed a heavy penalty for its violation.[18] The bill requested Oklahoma railroads to house Whites and Negroes in separate coaches and assess heavy fines ($500 to $1000 for each offense) for railroad companies and their conductors ($25 to $100) who ignored the law.[19] Even though the bill was not adopted, a Black newspaper reported:

A Negro who persisted in occupying a seat with a White man

---

[15]Ibid.

[16]See Oklahoma Session Laws, 1897 and 1901. See also Balyeat, "Segregation in the Public Schools of Oklahoma Territory" and Hatcher, "The Development of Legal Controls in Racial Segregation in the Public Schools of Oklahoma."

[17]Arthur L. Tolson, The Black Oklahomans, p. 182.

[18]Ibid., p. 128.

[19]Ibid.

> On a coach on the north bound Katy train yesterday, got smashed in the mouth by the White man is minus a few teeth and some hide. Officer Joe Depew, who was present, made a quick assessment of $10.00 each for the espisode and the parties continued on their journey, but not in the same seat.[20]

On June 30, 1906, three days after Willa's birth Governor Frank Frantz reaffirmed the law pertaining to separate schools:

> In all counties separate schools for White and colored children are hereby established and such schools shall be permanently maintained, and the board of county commissioners shall annually levy a tax on all taxable property in their respective counties to maintain said separate schools.[21]

Although the schools were segregated the Strongs' encouraged their children to pursue an education. According to Ruth:

> My mother stressed education and religious training. For both she and my dad had to forfeit much of their education to help support their families. My mother was a woman of great ambition, high ideals and faith. She taught us this way. She taught us to believe in ourselves.[22]

By this time, the Strong family included four children: Romaner Jack, Milton, Eddie and Willa. Strong continued to work on common labor jobs to support his family and maintain the home he bought at 901 East Cherokee.[23]

A number of Blacks in McAlester belonged to the same

---

[20] Muskogee Cemiter, June 2, 1904.

[21] Oklahoma Session Laws of 1901.

[22] Interview with Ruth J. Strong, October 7, 1978.

[23] Ibid.

church as the Strongs, the Africian Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church.[24] Some of these families came from Tennessee, Alabama, Kentucky, and North Carolina. Many of them were coal miners who had been dismissed from work because of the unionization of the mine workers in their areas. Black mine workers in the South were denied membership in the union, and a miner could not work there unless he was a union member. Although the idea of unions had been introduced in the McAlester area earlier,[25] the Black miners were able to find employment without union membership and earn a better salary than most of the other men.[26] Thelma South Shaw described the employment conditions: "Most Black men worked as cooks, janitors, ditch-diggers and

---

[24]Interview with Pearl Wickham, McAlester, Oklahoma, December 18, 1977. As mentioned earlier the Black church played a significant role in the Black community. This viable socio-religious institution felt an obligation to care for the needy, assist newcomers to the state, fight social injustices, develop endurance and tolerance and inspiration among its people, and hope for a brighter future. See Franklin, The Blacks in Oklahoma, and Geneva Smitherman, Talkin and Testifyin: The Language of Black America, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1977).

[25]Two coal miners from Illinois appeared in McAlester, in 1882 and they formed a local Assembly of the Knights of Labor at Midway. The membership was formed among men working in the nearby pits in the Krebs field. These organizers whose names were Dill Carroll and Frank Murphy, found that their work moved slowly at first against opposition and mistrust. See Gaston Little, History of Oklahoma at Golden Anniversary of Statehood, Vol. II, (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Co., 1957), pp. 92-93.

[26]Interview with Pearl Whittaker Wickham, December 18, 1977. The early coal miners who settled in the area were immigrants from England, Wales and Ireland. There were some Negroes in the Oklahoma coal fields. Many were descendants of the former slaves of Choctaw and Chickasaw families. Denied political and civil rights in the Indian Nations, these people lived in poverty for many years. Many of these Negroes were employed in the mines at the time of the great strike between 1898 and 1902, when about five hundred Negroes were brought from Alabama to the mines in Oklahoma to act as strike breakers. Gaston Little, History of Oklahoma at the Golden Anniversary of Statehood, Vol. II, (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Co., 1957), pp. 164-165.

some picked cotton. The women who worked were maids and some even lived in servant quarters. Somehow Black families managed on those meager salaries. The coal miners and their families lived a little better than most because the miners earned better salaries.[27]

As the idea of statehood and a state constitution continued to gain support Blacks continued their fight against racial discrimination. The Black leaders insisted that the new state constitution contain no provisions that would legalize racial discrimination.[28] The dislike of Blacks towards racism was made known through formal organizations, such as the Inter-Territorial Negro Protective League which was organized in August, 1905.[29] The League adopted a resolution in response to the proposed Enabling Act, which if adopted would have an impact on the lives of Blacks:[30]

> Resolved, that we pledge ourselves to the support of every delegate or representative upon a platform maintaining and enforcing a constitution embodying all those principles which stand for every man of the right to vote on account of his race, color or previous condition of servitude, and we oppose any property or education test for voting, and we favor provisions which will secure to every man equal civil and political rights within the spirit and meaning of the Constitution of the United States.
>
> Resolved, that the name of this organization shall be the Negro Protective League of the State of Oklahoma, and that

---

[27]Interview with Thelma South Shaw, McAlester, Oklahoma, October 7, 1977.

[28]Arthur L. Tolson, The Black Oklahomans, p. 135.

[29]Ibid., pp. 131-135.

[30]Ibid. Blacks wanted to assist in electing candidates who would support their struggle against segregation and discrimination in the new state. Politically most of them turned to Republicans. The Democratic Party became closely identified with the effort to segregate. To avoid Negro domination, Whites showed support for the Democratic Party. The appeal was clearly racist. Jimmie Lewis Franklin, The Blacks in Oklahoma, p. 15.

> the object of the organization shall be the promotion of the intellectual, financial and political interest of the Negroes of the State of Oklahoma.[31]

Further discontent with the proposition occurred at a Republican Convention held at Atoka, Oklahoma, where 160 Blacks walked out after the adoption of the separate school and coach resolutions. Even further, W.C. McAstiller of South McAlester, Chairman of the Afro-American Sufferage League of Indian Territory, issued a call to tone up the fight for his people against discrimination in the matter of separate cars and schools for Blacks.[32] The convention was to meet in Carbon, with special sessions at Krebs, Duck, Alderson, Dun, Wilburton, and four wards of McAlester.[33]

Several years had passed since Strong and his family settled in McAlester. The other Strong children welcomed an addition to the family, their youngest sister Ruth, and the racially tense atmosphere did not discourage the family. Ruth said: "my mother often told us that there was a lot of discrimination against Negroes when they first came to McAlester, but my dad wanted to stay regardless. We just kept praying that God would make things better.[34]

Many changes took place in the twin territories before Willa began her formal education in 1912. As noted earlier, the Oklahoma and Indian Territories merged to become the forty-sixth state of the union and Charles N. Haskell was sworn in as Governor of the new state. Reactions to statehood were mixed. Many Indian tribes felt "sadness and the people of the

---

[31]Muskogee Cemiter, September 13, 1906.

[32]Tolson, The Black Oklahomans, p. 136.

[33]Ibid. These towns were within a seven mile radius of McAlester.

[34]Interview with Ruth J. Strong, January 11, 1977.

Five Civilized Tribes were sorrowful over the final breakups of their tribal government."[35] Blacks also were disturbed and the racial climate was still tense. Two months after statehood, Governor Haskell sent the State Militia to quell a race riot in Okmulgee. In 1901 racial discrimination was protested by blacks in Bartlesville.[36]

The Early Education of Willa A. Strong

In 1912, when Willa entered the first grade, separate schools were available throughout Pittsburg County for the 5,183 White males, 5,233 White females, 482 Black males, and 483 Black females.[37] The churches and Curry Hall were used as schools for Black children.[38] In the second grade, she moved to the Second Ward Colored school, a four room brick structure located at 14th and Chickasaw Streets.[39] Walter Seward described other Black schools: "At the time, a Black student who lived west of Main Street went to the Third Ward Colored School, if you lived in North McAlester, you went to the Fourth Ward Colored School, if you lived in old town or North McAlester, you went to the Fourth Ward Colored School, if you lived east of

---

[35]See Gaston Little, A History of Oklahoma, Vol. I, Angie Debo, Oklahoma, Edward Everett Dale and Morris L. Wardell, History of Oklahoma, and Jimmie Lewis Franklin, Blacks in Oklahoma.

[36]Tolson, The Black Oklahomans, p. 163.

[37]Annual Report of the Superintendent of Public Instructions, State Department of Education of Oklahoma, 1912. McAlester is the county seat of Pittsburg, County.

[38]The Eagle Yearbook, (McAlester: L'Ouverture High School, 1952), p. 1.

[39]Interview with Thelma Lawson Anderson, McAlester, Oklahoma, February 10, 1977.

South main, you went to the Second Ward Colored School."[40] At the same time, Druscilla Dunjee Houston operated a tuition supported seminary for girls in Curry Hall.[41] Pearl Whittaker Wickham, a former student remembers the seminary: "We were taught the basic subjects, reading, writing, mathematics. We were also taught sewing, music and domestic arts."[42] Pearl also remembers that "most of the students that attended the seminary lived in the McAlester area but there were students from as far away as Atoka."[43] These students (Atoka) attended school in McAlester because there was not a Black high school in Atoka due to the sparse Black population.[44]

During this same period, the McAlester Board of Education appointed a special committee of all Black members to work out a plan for

---

[40]Interview with Walter E. Seward, Jr., Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, October 18, 1977. The present City of McAlester was previously divided into two distinctly different towns. North McAlester "Old Town" and South McAlester "New Town". Although J.J. McAlester is credited with founding the city of McAlester, his coal discovery occurred near what was known as North McAlester. Edwin Chaddick is credited with founding what was known as South McAlester. Chaddwick's discovery was also associated with the discovery of coal. North and South McAlester remained apart with separate governments until Congress granted permission for the two territorial towns to merge in 1906. According to oral history, Blacks were not welcomed in North McAlester area. Consequently, the majority of early Black migrants settled in the South McAlester area which includes First, Second and Third Wards. See Paul Nesbitt, "J.J. McAlester," Chronicles of Oklahoma, June 11, 1933, p. 759; "This is Oklahoma," The Sunday Oklahoman, October 20, 1963 and J.F. Holden, "The B.I.T.," Chronicles of Oklahoma, March 11, 1933, p. 638.

[41]L'Ouverture Alumni Second Reunion Handbook, (McAlester: L'Ouverture Alumni Association, 1978), p. 6.

[42]Interview with Pearl Whittaker Wickham, McAlester, Oklahoma, September 9, 1977.

[43]Ibid.

[44]See F.D. Moon, "Organization and Administration of Accredited Secondary Schools for Negroes in Oklahoma," (Masters Thesis, University of Chicago, 1938), p. 13.

a new school building.[45] Members of the committee were: Reverend J.F. Morris, Mr. Edward McDaniel and Reverend William LeGrone.[46] The committee had a special interest in improving the conditions of education for Blacks in McAlester, especially in terms of facilities. One of the committee members, Reverend LeGrone, owned the land at 14th and Chickasaw Streets, and sold it to the Board of Education. A one-story brick building was erected on this property in 1908.[47] By the time Willa completed grade school, the school had been officially renamed Toussiant L'Ouverture High School by one of the teachers, Sadie L. Davis.[48] This was done to honor Toussiant L'Ouverture, a Black Haitian General.[49] She also chose the Flying Eagle as the school's emblem.[59]

Willa was one of a class of twelve students: five boys and seven girls. Classes were small but the students were taught the basic subjects of reading, arithmetic, grammar, penmanship, history, and art.

---

[45] The L'Ouverture Heritage: 1907-1968, (McAlester: L'Ouverture High School, 1968), p. 1. Interview with Thelma Lawson Anderson, McAlester, Oklahoma, February 10, 1977.

[46] Ibid.

[47] The Eagle Yearbook, (McAlester: L'Ouverture High School, 1966), p. 1. Also, interview with Thelma Lawson Anderson, March 14, 1978.

[48] L'Ouverture Alumni Second Reunion Handbook, (McAlester: L'Ouverture Alumni Association, 1978), p. 2.

[49] Toussiant L'Ouverture at one time ruled the Island of Haiti and foiled the plan of Napoleon to gain foothold and land the foundation for its independence. International Library of Negro Life and History: Negro Americans in the Civil War from Slavery to Citizenship, New York: Carter G. Woodson, Negro Makers of History, (Washington, D.C., The Associated Publishers, 1928), pp. 83-86.

[50] L'Ouverture Alumni Second Reunion Handbook, (McAlester: L'Ouverture Alumni Association, 1978), p. 5.

Ruth said: "Some classes had three to five members and there were a lot of combined classes and study, for instance, third and fourth grade arithmetic."[51]

Willa was well liked by her classmates. A close friend and classmate had this to say about her: "Everybody liked her, she was a quiet type of person but she was friendly. She never gave the teachers a problem and she was a good student. I remember when we graduated from elementary school we compared grades and both of us had eighteen A's."[52] It is debatable whether the grades received by Blacks were comparable to those received by Whites. This condition was based on the fact that "the state devised a plan which produced fewer dollars for Black schools than for White ones. There was a noticeable difference in the outlay of funds for Black schools which resulted in poor facilities hardly adequate for producing well qualified students.[53] For example, the Building and Grounds Committee of the McAlester Board of Education decided "not to place water, lights and gas in the colored schools where there was none until a later date."[54] One of the teachers at the Third Ward Colored School said:

> No desks were provided, the children knelt on their knees and wrote in the seats of chairs. We finally received desks from the Civilian Conservation Core (C.C.C.) and a stove was donated. We could then cook meals for the children. Several parents helped to cook the food and the childrn used a one pound coffee can and a spoon to eat their food. White and Indian children couldn't go to school with Blacks because of the law but they often

---

[51]Interview with Ruth J. Strong, February 2, 1978.

[52]Interview with Thelma Lawson Anderson, April 9, 1977.

[53]Jimmie Lewis Franklin, The Blacks In Oklahoma, p. 17.

[54]Proceedings of the August 4th Monthly Meeting, McAlester Board of Education, (McAlester, Oklahoma, n. p. 1924).

came to eat and play with the children.[55]

These conditions did not seem to stop Willa and other Blacks from pursuing an education. In fact, Principal J.F. Pettus initiated high standards of scholarship, citizenship and character,[56] the same standards emphasized by parents. In Ruth's words: "Our parents constantly talked to us about the importance of education and going to school. We had no choice, we had to go to school, to church and live respectful lives. My parents also stressed religion. Every Sunday you would see us on our way to Wards Chapel A.M.E. Church. There was just no question about it. When our parents spoke, we obeyed."[57]

In 1910, L'Ouverture first graduation class consisted of three women:[58] Lucy A. Hammer, Hazel McDaniel and Parolee Thompson.[59] The class

---

[55]Interview with Pearl Whittaker Wickham, December 18, 1977.

[56]The L'Ouverture Heritage: 1907-1968, p. 1.

[57]Interview with Ruth J. Strong, January 9, 1977. Wards Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church was then located at 625 East Cherokee Street. There were also other churches in the Black community: East Star Baptist Church, 920 East Grand Boulevard; Mount Triumph Baptist Church, 410 East Wyondotte Street and the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church (C.M.E.) 1300 East Cherokee Street. See McAlester City Directory, Vol. II, (St. Paul: R.L. Polk and Co., 1914-1915), p. 16.

[58]L'Ouverture Alumni Second Reunion Handbook, (McAlester: L'Ouverture Alumni Association, 1978), p. 7.

[59]Ibid.

and economic conditions for Blacks in Oklahoma had undergone little improvement. For example, separate schools and separate public accommodations for Blacks and Whites were still mandated by law. As Black organizations were actively seeking improved conditions for their people, Willa and other Blacks continued to attend separate schools. A report of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction noted the difference in separate schools: "I believe that the legislature has earnestly endeavored to meet this situation; but it remains a solemn fact that schools for Negroes are not as good in many districts as they are for Whites.[60]

Several philanthropic organizations noted the disparity between Black and White schools in the South. The Julius Rosenwald and Anna T. Jeanes funds were foremost among the philanthropic organizations in making contributions for the improvement of education for southern Blacks. In a 1920 report the State Superintendent of Public Instruction pointed out the reason Black schools received little supervision from his office:

> The supervision of the separate schools is entirely inadequate. In counties having both races the schools for Whites are so numerous that the county superintendent cannot give them a close supervision.[61]

But this was not a problem unique to Oklahoma. The "Cooperative Education Association of Virginia had become keenly interested in the improvement of education among Blacks in the South.[62] Hampton Institute used the extension method of school improvement. Black teachers went out from Hampton

---

[60] Eighth Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, State Department of Education of Oklahoma, 1920.

[61] Ibid.

[62] Lance G.E. Jones, The Jeanes Teachers in the United States 1908-1933, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1937), pp. 12-18.

to help small rural scoools. The work was supported by monies from Anna T. Jeanes, a Quaker. The idea soon spread to others" including Oklahomans who received assistance.[63]

Subjects taught at L'Ouverture included history, general mathematics, English, music, geometry, algebra, latin, psychology and home economics.[64] At the same time, the program at L'Ouverture was expanded to include athletics, mainly football and basketball. O.D. Odon was the first football coach[65] and Matilda Lawson and Sadie L. Davis coached girls' basketball.[66] Both teams played games on outdoor facilities. A former player said:

> The football team played in whatever they could find; tennis shoes, old pants and old shirts. The girls brought our own uniforms. We wore black below the knee bloomers made out of satin what cost about 25 cents a yard. Whatever we got, we had to buy it ourselves and whenever we traveled, we had to pay our own way.[67]

Lewis Braxton, Sr., was the captain of the first football team. He was instrumental in initiating a trip to the Cotton Bowl in Dallas, Texas for the team.[68] Braxton and others raised the money to finance the trip to Dallas. The same was true in terms of other equipment needed at the school. Thelma Lawson Anderson helped to raise money to buy a sewing

---

[63]See Biennial Reports of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction.

[64]Interview with Ruth J. Strong, November 11, 1977.

[65]L'Ouverture Alumni Second Reunion Handbook, p. 6.

[66]Interview with Thelma Lawson Anderson, March 14, 1978.

[67]Ibid.

[68]L'Ouverture Heritage, 1907-1968, (McAlester: L'Ouverture Alumni Association), p. 8.

machine for the homemaking class: "We sold food and whatever we could get our hands on to make money. I often cooked pies myself during my home-make period to sell during lunch." Thelma continued: "We did this because we knew the Board would not give us the money and our parents didn't have it to give to us. It was a job for our parents to keep us clothed and fed."[69] Willa was among this group of students and supported their efforts. However, Thelma was more outspoken than Willa, who was less inclined to speak out against injustices. Although Thelma was criticized for speaking out and Willa was not, this did not alter their friendship.

There were few Black businesses in McAlester: two cafes, a hotel and two barber shops. The social establishments were for adults only. Because of these limitations, Black youths held parties in their homes, and attended shows performed by traveling ministrels. These ministrels were held at the Busby Theatre or at the Convention Hall in downtown McAlester. When there were events at the Busby Theatre, Blacks were admitted through the north door only. Likewise, Blacks were permitted to use only the upper floor of the Convention Hall.[70]

These conditions did not discourage Blacks who maintained the belief that there would be better opportunities in the future. Black parents with this orientation insisted that their children go to school. Bessie Mitchell reminisced: "I lived with my sister in McAlester so I could go to high school. In the evenings, I worked for White families to help pay for my school expenses. My mother let me do this so that I could get an education. I worked so that I would not

---

[69]Interview with Thelma Lawson Anderson, September 15, 1979.

[70]Ibid.

have to ask my mother for money. She had my sisters and brothers to take care of.[71]

At the age of fourteen, Willa saw the need for some type of recreation or physical fitness activities for the community. There was a vacant lot that was not being used across the street from her home at 1501 East Wyandotte. The lot was full of weeds and other debris. After Willa talked to her friends and got their support, the group of them removed the weeds and debris so that it could be used. Willa also organized the Physical Culture Club which met on the lot on weekends and daily during the summer. The club would hike three miles east of Willa's home to Kerbs, Oklahoma and one and one-half miles south to Nutonia Heights.[72] Willa participated regularly in the club's activities and spent most of her other time reading books. Her sister Ruth said: "She always had her head in a book, she loved to read."[73]

Prior to the time Willa graduated from high school, her father had become a mechanic at McAlester's Garage and her mother had begun working as a maid.[74] The increase in income made conditions better for the family and Willa did not have to work. The same was not true for her friend,

---

[71]Interview with Bessie Mitchell, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, May 12, 1978.

[72]Interview with Ruth J. Strong, March 10, 1978. Nutonia Heights later became McAlester's exclusive all White neighborhood referred to as Country Club. The area is approximately six blocks south of L'Ouverture School. Many Black parents were employed as domestic workers in the homes of McAlester's city fathers. For example, F.G. Pauterbaugh and others.

[73]Ibid.

[74]Ibid.

Thelma, who worked as a cook to earn money to buy books and other school supplies.[75]

Meanwhile, L'Ouverture had undergone several changes in administration. Pettus resigned in the spring of 1913 to teach in an institute at Langston University. J.H. Roberts was hired as principal, and he remained there until he received a job in St. Louis, Missouri. Thelma described Roberts as an administrator: "He was a little antique in his thinking, he was not innovative and he did not seek improvements for L'Ouverture, he just provided maintenance care."[76]

Black leaders in the McAlester community were not oblivious to the environmental and economic conditions affecting education. Reverend M.M. Williams, Pastor of East Star Baptist Church; M.D. Lawson and Reverend J. Taylor, Pastor of Mount Triumph Baptist Church, made several unsuccessful attempts to get the roads leading to L'Ouverture School repaired.[77] Under the leadership of Effie Chilton, Mary S. Smith, Ruby Strong, Ella Porter and others, the L'Ouverture unit of the Negro Parent Teacher Association raised funds to help the school.[78] The Association bought chalk, materials for homemake class, books for children when families could not afford them, provided funds to support the athletic program.[79]

---

[75]Interview with Thelma Lawson Anderson, September 14, 1979.

[76]Ibid.

[77]Ibid., September 19, 1979.

[78]L'Ouverture Second Reunion Handbook, p. 6.

[79]Interview with Thelma Lawson Anderson, September 19, 1979.

The economic picture for Blacks in McAlester at this time was bleak. Most of the adults were still working on manual labor jobs with very little pay. The idea that education was a way out of the kitchen and away from that type of menial, unskilled work was in the minds of many Blacks in McAlester. Education was the foremost topic in Willa's conversations. Thelma Anderson recalled: "The two of us set our goal to go to college and finish before we graduated from high school."[80] There were a few Black professional role models who had established themselves in McAlester: Dr. Gray, a druggist, operated a drugstore, which was more of a social center than a business; Dr. E.W. South, a graduate of Meharry College who had a private practice; and Dr. Littlejohn practiced dentistry.[81]

Willa, Thelma, John Batson, Ena Busby, Raymond Carter, Marie Jackson, Jimmie Jones, Arsie Lenora, Arthur Motley, Sallie Robinson, Freddie Royster, and Cecil Smith graduated from L'Ouverture in 1924. During the graduation exercise which included a Baccalaureate sermon and Commencement exercise, the graduates were challenged by Reverend Frank Motley, who encouraged them to get a higher education and to do something other than manual labor. He concluded his presentation with the prediction: "there would be a better day for the person that was prepared for the better day."[82] Willa was the class valedictorian and her friend Thelma was salutorian. The PTA held a reception for graduating seniors

---

[80]Ibid.

[81]Ibid., October 10, 1979.

[82]Ibid.

to demonstrate community pride in their accomplishments.[83]

Although most Black parents were not financially able to send their children to college, Willa's parents were. Blacks desiring a higher education in Oklahoma were compelled by law to attend Langston University, which "offered normal courses to prepare teachers for the schools attended by Black children and provide training in agricultural, mechanic and industrial arts."[84] However, Willa made the decision not to attend Langston University. Instead, she decided to enroll in the University of Kansas, which was less affected by the strict color ban that confined Blacks to all-Black colleges.[85] Blacks could attend classes at the University of Kansas but they were prohibited from living in campus dormitories.[86] Willa rented rooms from Black families in Lawrence and walked to the campus for classes.

By 1924 Willa's younger sister Ruth was a high school student at L'Ouverture. She said: "Teachers were still encouraging us to prepare ourselves for the future by getting a high school education and going to college."[87] Willa's mother had become active in the PTA. She saw the need for a telephone at the school and she led the

---

[83]Ibid.

[84]Edward Everett Dale and Morris L. Wardell, History of Oklahoma (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1948), p. 484.

[85]Alan Pifer, The Higher Education of Blacks in the United States: Reprint of the Alfred and Winefied Hoernie Memorial Lecture for 1973, (New York: Carnegie Corporation, 1973), p. 20.

[86]Interview with Ruth J. Strong, April 14, 1977.

[87]Ibid.

drive to raise funds for a telephone which was installed in 1925.[88] At the same time, Black community leaders once again tried to improve road conditions around the Black school.

While Willa was at the University of Kansas, E.E. Weaver became L'Ouverture's fourth principal.[89] Weaver, former president of a vocational college in Kansas, expanded the extra curricular activities and generally modernized the facilities. His experiences as a college president, helped him to know the kind of academic preparation a high school graduate should have. Furthermore, he enforced strict discipline and insisted on high academic achievement.[90] Weaver was described as a man of courage who was not afraid to ask for what he wanted nor to implement new educational ideas and changes. The idea of each class presenting a play was initiated during his leadership. He thought this kind of activity would give the students an opportunity to get training in drama and at the same time raise money for the school.[91]

By the spring of 1929, L'Ouverture had graduated one hundred twenty seven students in sixteen classes.[92] The Thirteenth Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction listed 53, 155 Negro students enrolled in separate schools with 450 students

---

[88] Ibid., March 8, 1978.

[89] L'Ouverture Alumni Second Reunion Handbook, p. 5.

[90] Interview with Thelma Lawson Anderson, June 20, 1978.

[91] Ibid.

[92] L'Ouverture Alumni Second Reunion Handbook, p. 43.

enrolled in the twelfth grade in 1928-1929.[93] L'Ouverture's graduates were part of these statistics. As noted earlier, only a very small number of Black graduates were able to attend college. Most of those who did not attend college worked at meager jobs.[94]

Willa graduated from the University of Kansas in 1929 with a Bachelor of Arts degree in History and Social Studies.[95] The irony of her situation is seen when she boarded a train, sat in a racially segregated coach and rode home to McAlester. By this time Willa had made the decision to apply for a teaching job at L'Ouverture. In reality, she had few choices for according to state law she was required to teach in a separate school: "Teaching in an institution that received students of both races, subjected one to a fine of $10.00 to $50.00 a day.[96]

---

[93] Thirteenth Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, 1929-1930, pp. 76-77.

[94] Interview with Thelma Lawson Anderson, McAlester, Oklahoma, September 19, 1979.

[95] Interview with Ruth J. Strong, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, June 6, 1978.

[96] Oklahoma Session Laws of 1908.

CHAPTER III

WILLA A. STRONG: EDUCATOR ADMINISTRATOR AND COMMUNITY LEADER

> Let me see in each uninformed youth our human hope of good and truth and let me make him want to be the perfect person that I see.[1]

Early Career

Willa made application to teach at L'Ouverture in the summer of 1929.[2] At that time, teaching was one of the few professional jobs available to Blacks.[3] Principal E.E. Weaver, for reasons unknown to my respondents, preferred not to hire McAlester natives to teach in his school. "When he could, he avoided hiring them."[4] Weaver's preference did not seem to apply to Willa, whom he hired as a sixth grade teacher for the 1929-30 school year.[5] The other teachers were natives of other Oklahoma towns and from out of the state. The new faculty included Kentuckians William and Marie Elliott, who previously taught in Muskogee; Millie T. Moore from

---

[1]Willa A. Strong, "Current Challenges in Child Development," speech delivered to Parent Teacher Association, in the personal files of Ruth J. Strong, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

[2]Interview with Ruth J. Strong, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, September 20, 1978. See also, Personnel Files, Oklahoma State Department of Education, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

[3]Interview with Thelma Lawson Anderson, September 19, 1978.

[4]Interview with Ruth J. Strong, September 12, 1978.

[5]Interview with Thelma Lawson Anderson, April 14, 1977.

Virginia; T.H. Moore, whose wife Birdie was a Muskogee native; and Thelma Lawson Anderson, a McAlester native.[6]

A gymnasium was constructed at L'Ouverture with the assistance of the Works Project Administration (WPA), which "had built at least twenty-three new Negro school buildings, repaired seventy-two and constructed additions to ten others between 1935-1940.[7] This facility added a new dimension to the school's athletic program: indoor sports complemented outdoor activities. In order to broaden school activities, Weaver made frequent requests to the McAlester Board of Education for travel funds. On one occasion, he asked the "Board for money for the L'Ouverture Choir to travel to Muskogee to make an appearance at the State Teachers (OANT) Meeting. The request was approved and the Board allotted twenty ($20.00) dollars for expenses."[8]

Because jobs were scarce, separate schools had little difficulty hiring Black teachers who were required by law to teach in Black schools. Segregation laws prohibited Blacks from attending schools with Whites. In addition, teaching across color lines was prohibited by law.[9] These laws forced many Black Oklahoma teachers to seek employment in other towns and states. Thelma Anderson said: "It was very common for teachers to

---

[6]Ibid.

[7]Eighteenth Biennial Report of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, Fifteenth Biennial Report of the State Board of Education, State Department of Education, 1940.

[8]Minutes of the Meeting of the McAlester Board of Education, McAlester, Oklahoma, February 7, 1938.

[9]Frank A. Balyeat, "Segregation in the Public Schools of Oklahoma Territory," Chronicles of Oklahoma, Spring, 1961, pp. 186-187.

teach at a school in one town and live in another. I didn't get hired at L'Ouverture when I first applied but I was able to get a job teaching in Kansas."[10] It is interesting to note that Willa and other Black teachers who graduated from out-of-state colleges qualified to teach in Oklahoma. Teachers who had done work in other states and met the Oklahoma requirements were issued a one year teaching certificate.[11] Renewal of the certification included a resident requirement which was waived if the teacher graduated from an accredited college.

Willa was pleased about getting a job at L'Ouverture. She saw it as an opportunity to improve her own economic condition and influence the lives of Black youth as well as to allow her to provide financial assistance to her sister Ruth, then a student at the all Black Wiley College in Marshall, Texas.[12]

Administrative Career

During the spring of 1939, Weaver resigned as principal at L'Ouverture and recommended to the Board of Education that Willa replace him. Ruth tells the story:

> My sister had worked close with Mr. Weaver on several things. He observed her and noticed her ability to organize and get a job done. Because of these things, he told her that he would recommend her to the Board to be the next principal of L'Ouverture.[13]

Weaver's recommendation was approved by the Board and Superintendent

---

[10]Interview with Thelma Lawson Anderson, September 19, 1978.

[11]Thirteenth Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, July, 1928.

[12]Interview with Ruth J. Strong, December 3, 1978.

[13]Ibid.

Kirkland, who was described as "an open-minded man not afraid to associate with Blacks. He attended school activities, such as proms and annual picnics."[14] In the fall of 1939, Willa began her tenure as principal of L'Ouverture.

Willa was a pioneer among her peers. She was one of the few female high school principals in the Southwest. Her appointment was especially unique in Black schools where Ambrose Calliver observed:

> The principal of the Negro high school is charged with an unusual trust. In many places the need and problems of the White school consume the major portion of the superintendent's time: Consequently, he relies largely on the recommendations and opinions of the Negro principal in matters affecting the Negro schools, sometimes without subjecting those recommendations and opinions to critical and personal inquiry. All these conditions tend to surround the Negro principal with considerable power and authority and place upon him a heavy responsibility.[15]

As principal, Willa faced three challenges: 1) learning the role of principal of a Black separate school, 2) overcoming the sexism of Black male educators, and 3) being an effective teaching principal. Most Black principals doubled as classroom teachers. Calliver stated that the typical principal of

---

[14] Ibid.

[15] Ambrose Calliver, Secondary Education for Negroes, United States Bureau of Education, Bulletin No. 17, 1932 in F.D. Moon, "Organization and Administration of Accredited Secondary Schools for Negroes in Oklahoma," p. 31.

Ambrose Calliver, a Black served as the principal Negro officer in the office of Education for more than thirty years. He served as Senior Specialist in Education for Blacks from 1930-1946; Specialist for Higher Education from 1946-1950; Assistant to the Commissioner from 1950-1962 and Chief of the Adult Education Section in the Bureau of Adult, Vocational and Library Program from 1955-1962. See Preliminary Inventory of the Records of the Office of Education, (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Services, General Services Administration), p. 13.

a Black high school served as a teaching principal rather than a supervisory and administrative officer.[16] One of Willa's students described her teaching style: "Miss Strong was strict, you had to earn your grades and you had to be prepared for classes. This meant you had to study."[17]

Willa admired the contributions of early Black women pioneers such as Harriet Tubman, underground railroad worker and secret service agent during the Civil War; Sojourner Truth, an abolitionist and renown orator; and Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, lecturer and poetess.[18] Mary McLeod Bethune was her favorite role model, primarily because of her interest in making educational conditions better for Black people.[19] It is not inconsequential that Willa had Black female role models. Dumas wrote: "From the time they set foot in the new world, Black females have struggled courageously to contribute toward a better quality of life in Black committees and in society at large."[20] She sadily concluded that "many Black women with outstanding leadership abilities held their skills in abeyance lest they might undermine the security and

---

[16]F.D. Moon, "Organization and Administration of Accredited Secondary Schools for Negroes in Oklahoma," p. 31.

[17]Interview with Julia Seward Anderson, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, March 7, 1977.

[18]Sadie Iola Daniel, Women Builders, (Washington: The Associated Publishers, Inc., 1931, p. 14.

[19]Interview with Ruth J. Strong, September 17, 1977.

[20]Retaugh Graves Dumas, "Dilemmas of Black Females In Leadership," in LaFrances Rodgers-Rose, ed., The Black Woman, (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1980), p. 203.

threaten the masculinity of the Black man."[21] This was not the case with Villa, she elected not to hide her talents.

Although, efforts were being made at the national level to improve education for Blacks, the educational picture in Oklahoma was bleak. For example, the number of Blacks in the United States receiving an education in 1940 was very low. In Oklahoma less than twenty-five percent of the adult Blacks had completed the eighth grade; less than fifteen percent had completed the eleventh grade, and only five percent had completed the twelfth grade.[22] There were five hundred schools maintained for Blacks.[23] Of these schools, fifty-three were controlled by Black school district officers and 448 separate schools were controlled by White county officials where Blacks were in a minority.[24] L'Ouverture was one of the Black schools accredited by the State of Oklahoma. There were Black schools in thirty-three counties.[25] The overall conditions of these schools remained separate and unequal. Calliver described the disparity:

> The difference in secondary school facilities between the White and colored races are in most factors noticeable and in particially every instance of major importance in favor of the Whites. This is true whether the colored schools of the Southern States are compared with the White schools

---

[21] Ibid.

[22] Summary and General Recommendations to the "Interim" and Education Committee of the Legislative Council, State Department of Education, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, November 17, 1948.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Eighteenth Biennial Report of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, (Oklahoma City: State Department of Education, p. 79.

[25] Rosenwald School Day Program, Memorial Edition, prepared by E.A. Duke, State Agent for Negro Schools, State Department of Public Instruction, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, March 4, 1932, p. 23.

of the same states or with the White schools at large.[26]

By spring of 1940, three hundred sixteen students had graduated from L'Ouverture.[27] Two of these classes graduated under Willa's leadership. One alumni described Willa's administrative style: "She was firm but democratic and she told us about working hard to get an education. She respected the students and we respected her. When she spoke everybody straightened up."[28] In 1942 Willa wrote about L'Ouverture's accomplishments:

> Through the cooperative planning of the administration, faculty and student body, an expanded activity program both curricular and extra-curricular, with definite educational value has been achieved.
>
> The student council has been a definite force in initiating better student-faculty relations and more student participation in school activities. The motivation of student participation in the purchase of defense stamps, victory book drive, infantile paralysis funds, and other civic movements has been largely the work of the student council. Student clubs, both general and departmental, have made dynamic contributions to the school program. The School Annual staff has directed numerous activities with definite educational value among students. The A Capella Choir and choral groups have made splendid contributions to the community through the aesthetic value of its public program under school and community auspices. These choral groups have promoted better race relations in the community and made friendly contacts with neighboring schools.
>
> The school's educational leadership in the community has been vitalized through its extensive sponsorship of adult educational programs. The Defense Training classes in Auto-mechanics, Welding, Electricity, and Carpentry;

---

[26]Ambrose Calliver, "Status of Negro Education," in The Black American and Education, p. 166.

[27]L'Ouverture Second Reunion Handbook, (McAlester: L'Ouverture Alumni Association, 1978), pp. 43-44.

[28]Interview with Larcell Fowler, Lehigh, Oklahoma, November 25, 1978.

> classes in Home Nursing, First Aid, Nutrition and the school's outstanding contributions to all community movements toward civic improvement have unified educational agencies in the community and the development of community appreciation of the school's objective.[35]

The first yearbook was published at L'Ouverture in 1943. Thelma Lawson Anderson, who had worked on the newspaper and yearbook staff while a student at Lincoln University in Missouri, coordinated the yearbook. She vividly remembered the proj[illegible]ials we had on hand and raised money to pay f[illegible] book to students and the [illegible]l but it did give the s[illegible]

Duri[illegible]t drum and bugle c[illegible]a student at [illegible] learned th[illegible]nted to organiz[illegible]hat the training wo[illegible] approved Shaw[illegible]. provide the funds. How[illegible]eachers to raise the necessary [illegible]ized during this same period. Kerm[illegible]d members, said:

> Several of us felt that L'Ouverture should have a band.

---

[35]"Activities of The Schools," The Journal of the Oklahoma Association of Negro Teachers, May 1942, p. 5.

[36]Interview with Thelma Lawson Anderson, April 15, 1977.

[37]Interview with Thelma South Shaw, McAlester, Oklahoma, May 12, 1979.

[38]Ibid.

> classes in Home Nursing, First Aid, Nutrition and the school's outstanding contributions to all community movements toward civic improvement have unified educational agencies in the community and the development of community appreciation of the school's objective.[35]

The first yearbook was published at L'Ouverture in 1943. Thelma Lawson Anderson, who had worked on the newspaper and yearbook staff while a student at Lincoln University in Missouri, coordinated the yearbook. She vividly remembered the project: "We used the materials we had on hand and raised money to pay for other materials. Then we sold the book to students and the community. The book was not very professional but it did give the students a sense of pride in their school."[36]

During this same time, Thelma South Shaw organized the first drum and bugle corps. She had become interested in marching units while a student at Langston University. As a physical education major, she learned the discipline and training involved in marching units and wanted to organize one. Looking back on the experience she said, "I knew that the training would improve the social graces for girls."[37] When Willa approved Shaw's request, she knew that the school budget could not provide the funds. However, Willa allowed her with the help of other teachers to raise the necessary funds.[38] The L'Ouverture Band was organized during this same period. Kermit Tilford, one of the first band members, said:

Several of us felt that L'Ouverture should have a band.

---

[35]"Activities of The Schools," The Journal of the Oklahoma Association of Negro Teachers, May 1942, p. 5.

[36]Interview with Thelma Lawson Anderson, April 15, 1977.

[37]Interview with Thelma South Shaw, McAlester, Oklahoma, May 12, 1979.

[38]Ibid.

> We were excited about the idea and we talked to Miss Strong about it. I think we were motivated or at least I was, by one of our teachers Kermit Anderson. He would play his trumpet and we would listen with awe. I suppose I heard him play a little more than the others because I was the team mascot.[39]

Because a full-time music teacher was not provided for in the school budget, Willa appealed to the PTA for assistance. Funds were raised to buy a few instruments and to hire M. (King) Edwards of Tulsa as the first band director.[40] For two years, Edwards, a former military bandsman, drove to McAlester and worked with the band. He did not receive a salary for his services but the PTA helped with his expenses.[41] Members of the band included Della Williams, Roy Boxley, Wendell Ward, Barbara Smith, Fred Williams, and Eugene Williams.[42]

L'Ouverture was not unique. Black separate schools were continiously struggling for survival. In a 1946-47 sampling of seven Oklahoma counties, more than 15 percent of the Black schools operated less than 160 calendar days per year, while only five percent of the White schools fell within this category.[43] Black schools in other states were experiencing similiar problems. A report stated:

> Schools for colored children are inferior to those for Whites. Most of them were built before the first World War. Negro schools are too few in number and are short

---

[39]Interview with Kermit Tilford, Sapulpa, Oklahoma, May 9, 1978.

[40]Ibid.

[41]Ibid.

[42]L'Ouverture First Reunion Handbook, (McAlester: L'Ouverture Alumni Association, 1975), p. 6.

[43]Summary and General Recommendations to the Interium and Education Committee of the Legislative Council, November, 1948.

> of teachers. The teaching load is 12 to 13 percent higher --- and supposed to be equal.[44]

In 1948, Governor Roy J. Turner reaffirmed the segregated schools law at a February legislative meeting:

> RESOLVED that we recommend to the Board of Regents that we favor the maintenance of our separate school laws in both our common schools and our institutions of higher learning and recommend to said Board that they take such steps as necessary to institute and maintain separate schools of higher learning for Negroes and functions and facilities substantially equal to those afforded White students.[45]

Also in 1948, Blacks in Oklahoma were applying for admission to White universities. This situation prompted the formation of a special committee of deans from the Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College and the University of Oklahoma, which recommended that qualified Black applicants be admitted to Oklahoma Argicultural and Mechanical College and to the University of Oklahoma to pursue graduate work.[46] George W. McLaurin, a Black man, applied for admission to the University of Oklahoma in June, 1948.[47] He was admitted with the stipulation "that he sit at a designated desk in an ante-room adjoining the classroom, apart from other students, at another designated desk in the library, and that he eat in the school cafeteria at a special time."[48] Later, Ada Lois Sipuel Fisher was admitted

---

[44]Kenesaw Landis, Segregation in Washington: A Report of the Nation's Capitol, (Chicago: 1948), p. 75-76.

[45]The Daily Oklahoman, February 6, 1948.

[46]Aldrich, Black Heritage of Oklahoma, p. 40.

[47]Ibid.

[48]McLaurin v. Oklahoma State Regents of Higher Education, 339 U. S. 637 (1950) in Tolson, The Black Oklahomans, p. 174.

to the University of Oklahoma Law School.[49] These cases were initiated and supported by local and state chapters of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), "who sponsored the litigation, hoping thereby to undermine racial discrimination in Oklahoma as well as throughout the United States."[50]

By 1950 Willa had served as L'Ouverture's principal for more than ten years. "She loved L'Ouverture and wanted to make it a highly recognized school."[51] Furthermore, Ruth Strong stated that Willa had the support of the superintendent and the community. Of course everybody did not like her for one reason or another, but she didn't let that stop her. She kept working for L'Ouverture. My mother would worry about her health because she worked so hard. She prayed a lot too."[52] During this period, Willa made application for the school's membership in the North Central Association of Secondary Schools and Colleges. Membership was granted in 1950.[53]

Between 1951 and 1953 Willa had become active in several religious, civic and community organizations, including the Oklahoma Federation of Colored Women's Clubs. Influenced by her mother, a charter member of the Madama DePriest Club, Willa became a member of the latter organization. Federated clubs were nationally known for their emphasis in five areas:

---

[49]Aldrich, Black Heritage of Oklahoma, p. 47.

[50]Tolson, The Black Oklahomans, p. 174.

[51]Interview with Ruth J. Strong, November 11, 1977.

[52]Ibid.

[53]The Eagle Yearbook (McAlester: L'Ouverture High School, 1966), p. 1.

(1) civil rights, (2) community development, (3) prevention of juvenile delinquency, (4) youth education, and (5) adult education. Affiliation with these clubs provided Willa with an opportunity to seek community support for L'Ouverture students. But her motives were more than economic. For example, she encouraged her female students to become members of the Junior Federated Clubs, where they got a chance to develop their organization skills.[54]

L'Ouverture junior high and high school girls also joined the junior units of the Friendly Friends Club, the Ada Lois Sipuel Fisher Club, and the Madama DePriest Club.[55] In keeping with its motto, simplicity, sincerity and service, the Madama DePriest Club "purchased shrubs for the L'Ouverture campus, gave a Christmas shower to a deserving senior, and gave $100.00 to the salutatorian of the class of 1953 and $10.00 to the high school scholarship fund."[56] L'Ouverture's girls were winners in various state club competitions: "Christine Coleman won first place in instrumental music competition. Barbara stigall won first

---

[54]See Willa A. Strong, 'The Origin and Development and Current Status of the Oklahoma Federation of Colored Women's Clubs."

[55]Journal of the Southern Region of the Oklahoma Federation of Colored Women's Clubs, pp. 7-9.

[56]Ibid., p. 9.

As a regional project each region provided aid to an outstanding girl graduate of high schools within the region. The Southern region gave a college chest to the outstanding girl of each high school where federated clubs functioned. Strong, 'The Origin, Development and Current Status of the Oklahoma Federation of Colored Women's Clubs," pp. 12, 13, and 157. L'Ouverture winners were: Ruby Seward and Althea Boxley, 1950; LaRonnia Dodson and Barbara Tilford, 1951; and Ardella Williams and Myra Boxley, 1952, p. 12.

place in oratory and received the Southern Region College Chest Award."[57] These activities were congruent with Willa's goal to develop student leaders.[58] Female leaders were provided scholarship loans in an effort to improve Black womanhood.[59]

Because of separate school systems, Black and White professionals maintained separate professional organizations.[60] By 1951 Willa had become an active member of the Oklahoma Association of Negro Teachers. Both Willa and her staff attended OANT county and district workshops and they subscribed to the professional journal published by the OANT.[61] All of the respondents noted that the OANT enriched the educational lives of Black students through the development of state-wide interscholastic activities. These activities were held annually and Black students travelled to a central site for state and regional meetings.[62] Willa served as a vice-president of OANT. In a 1951 message, she challenged the membership:

> ...Jesus the master teacher of all times, coming into an age reeking with the evils of social and economic justice, dared to lay the foundations of a new social order - a world of brotherhood. Every generation of his followers have the undeniable responsibility of continuing this

---

[57]Ibid.

[58]Strong, "The Origin, Development and Current Status of the Oklahoma Federation of Colored Women's Club," p. 143.

[59]Ibid., p. 149.

[60]See Evelyn Richardson Strong, "The History of the Oklahoma Association of Negro Teachers.

[61]Ibid., p. t.

[62]Ibid.

> structure with every tool at their command. Teachers cannot escape their responsibility. Teachers are guardians of the nations treasury. They hold the keys to the Kingdom of a better world, the world's youth. Dare we spend our days and our years with youth and not awaken the dreams, direct the visions, stir the ideals, increase the courage, and speed the development of a new leadership which can and will build the new social order Christ deemed and for which the great souls of every age have lived and died.[63]

Willa gave special attention to the physical environment of her students. The two-story brick structure of L'Ouverture housed grades 1-12 and had become overcrowded for the staff of 15 teachers and 375 students.[64] Willa convinced Superintendent S. Arch Thompson and the Board of Education to support a bond issue for the construction of a new L'Ouverture building with 16 classrooms, a large auditorium and lunchroom and auxiliary facilities for grades 1-12.[65] The issue passed and the ceremonies for the new building were held Sunday, April 27, 1952. Classes began in the new structure in May, 1952. The class of 1952 "had the honor of being the first graduating class in the new L'Ouverture School Building and chose as its motto: 'Not at The Top But Climbing.'"[66]

Between 1952-54 Willa apprised Superintendent Thompson of the need to expand L'Ouverture's curriculum to include elective courses in typing and shorthand. Lloyd Porter, Industrial Arts teacher also requested a new thrust in vocational education. Thompson took the request to the Board.

---

[63]"The Program," Forty-Third Annual Session of the Oklahoma Association of Negro Teachers, 1951.

[64]The Eagle Yearbook, 1953.

[65]A Look at Your Schools, (McAlester: McAlester Public Schools, 1958, p. 28.

[66]The Eagle, 1953, pp. 1-3.

In 1954 the Board passed a recommendation to send Porter to school at Stillwater, even to the extent of paying part of his expenses if necessary.[67] Willa fought hard to get the typing program because several of the girls aspired to become secretaries. By this time the curriculum included typing, geometry, algebra, science, chemistry, homemaking, music, vocational agriculture, and drivers education.[68]

Extra curricular activities included chorus, student councils, Y-Teen, Hi-Y, speech club, Junior Patrol, bicycle club, craft club, reading club, operations club (audio-visual) band, drum and bugle corps, majorettes and athletics. The various competitive contests included Band Queen, Homecoming Queen, and Miss L'Ouverture. There also were active units of the National and State Honor Societies. The inclusion of these activities was intended to provide for both individual and group growth of L'Ouverture students. One grateful student said: "We did a lot of things and had a lot of experiences to be a small high school. Most of the things we did were done at the larger high schools such as Douglass in Oklahoma City and Booker T. Washington in Tulsa."[69] During this same period, Willa expressed her values for L'Ouverture students:

> We like to think that L'Ouverture guides her students into these values: Love of God, Love of humanity, loyalty to the democratic ideal, personal integrity, eagerness for knowledge, the will to work, the ambition to succeed and the goal of service.[70]

---

[67]Minutes of the meeting of the McAlester Board of Education, McAlester, Oklahoma, May 10, 1954.

[68]The Eagle Yearbook, 1953, pp. 11-13.

[69]Interview with Joraldean Hayes Richardson, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, February 10, 1978.

[70]The Eagle Yearbook, 1953, p. 3.

One student recalls, "Miss Strong inspired us to achieve. At any assembly she would say young people - be somebody, set your goals high."[71] Furthermore, at the beginning of each assembly the students and staff would sing "Lift Every Voice and Sing," have an opening prayer, and recite the L'Ouverture Creed:

> We, the students of the L'Ouverture High School believe in the principles of American Democracy which translated in terms of our lives include, the right of every child to have the respect of fellow students and teachers; to full opportunity for intellectual, physical, spiritual, and social development; and the responsibility to make a worthwhile contribution to the school.
>
> To realize these goals, we pledge ourselves to build such a tradition of character and achievement as will transmit this school to following generations greater, better, and more beautiful than it was transmitted to us.[72]

Julia Seward Anderson expressed the reaction of students who tried to live up to the standards of the creed: "L'Ouverture students believed they could be anything they wanted to be because of the encouragement given us at school and at home. We were always reminded to study hard and prepare ourselves to live in a different world with many more opportunities. The creed was a reminder to us and it was posted throughout the school.

---

[71]Interview with Julia Seward Anderson, May 11, 1978.

Lift Every Voice and Sing is acknowledged as the Negro National Anthem. The music and lyrics were composed by two brothers: James Weldon and J. Rosmund Johnson. Regardless of the size, the majority of Black schools either opened or closed school and community activities with the Anthem. Black students were taught to acknowledge the Anthem as a symbol or race pride, and a reminder of the struggles of forefathers. The same recognition was given to the Negro National Anthem as was given to the Star-Spangled Banner.

[72]The Eagle Yearbook, 1953, p. 5.

[73]Interview with Julia Seward Anderson, March 11, 1978.

By 1953-54 Willa's efforts were clearly recognized with the Black community. She had active memberships in educational, religion and civic organizations. One alumni said: "Miss Strong was one of the main leaders in the community, a good church worker, a woman of high moral character. Everybody looked up to her." Consequently, The Little Dixie Visitor, owned, operated and published weekly by a Black family, included a L'Ouverture news column. The editor, Walter E. 'Major Seward, Sr., made mention of Willa: 'Willa A. Strong is at her best as overseer at L'Ouverture."[74] Seward continued: "It is impossible to convince Willa A. Strong that American History is not essential to American education."[75]

She never sought self-glory but freely gave honor and tribute to others.[76] During the fourteen years Willa had served as principal, she challenged her students academically, morally and socially. On one occasion she said: 'Every youth should aim to be the best of whatever he is, whether you are the pine at the top of the hill, the little shrub in the valley, the captain or the crew, be the best of whatever you are. Aspire![77]

---

[74]Interview with Walter E. Seward, Jr., Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, April 15, 1977.

[75]"L'Ouverture News," The Little Dixie Visitor, McAlester, Oklahoma, May 7, 1953, p. 3. It is interesting to note that Walter E. 'Major" Seward, Sr., saw the need for a weekly newspaper in McAlester. Although the Black Dispatch was circulated in McAlester, Seward felt that a more informative and current newspaper for McAlester could best be developed by a McAlester resident. Through the printing press he had acquired, Seward and his family produced The Little Dixie Visitor. Furthermore, the opportunity for students to sell the newspaper provided some income for students in a segregated society.

[76]Interview with Ruth J. Strong, November 19, 1977.

[77]'Momentos of Willa A. Strong, in the personal files of Ruth J. Strong, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

Willa's leadership was noted by Ira D. Hall, state agent for Negro schools during the fifties. It was Hall's responsibility to "visit the separate schools once each year unless there was a problem, and report his finding to the State Department of Education."[78] He described Willa thusly:

> Miss Strong was one individual who took a lot of her time to help her race. She also had something that most of her peers didn't have. She was determined about her educational goals. She did not change or alter her goals nor her basic philosophy because of pressure. She fought regardless of the consequences. People respected and honored her.[79]

Repeatedly, Willa reminded L'Ouverture students to "prepare yourselves academically and socially, for in order to get a decent job you must be better and far greater than your White competitors."[80] To further encourage Black students to aspire and achieve, various awards were presented annually. For instance, by popular vote of the student body, the Good Citizenship and Ideal Girl Recipients were selected.[81] Willa and her family presented the M.L. Strong Memorial Award to the graduating boy showing outstanding ability in mechanics.[82] The Bobby Jo Jones Memorial School Spirit Club was presented annually to the class showing the most

---

[78]Interview with Ira D. Hall, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, October 10, 1980.

[79]Ibid.

[80]Interview with Jessee B. Thompson, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, March 22, 1978.

[81]The Eagle, 1953, p. 33

[82]Ibid., p. 30.

spirit and participation in school community activities.[83] In addition, the staff presented a war bond to the valedictorian of each graduating class.[84] These awards were valued by the student body and served as a stimulus for creating and maintaining the type of learning stmosphere and achieving the learning expectations set by Willa, the staff, and students. Faustine Childress Jones described the educational atmosphere and expectations during this time period:

> There never was a choice between learning, and not learning. To fail to learn what was being taught in school was unacceptable to teachers, family, peers and the community. The choice was how much one would learn, and what subjects would be mastered. Learning and achieving were expected from students, while active, involved teaching was expected from the faculity. Thus, the school climate was positive and supportive of academic achievement. Reinforcement came from the friendly competition of peers, a situation which set a faster pace for learning and stimulated students to learn from and with each other, and to keep up with or out distance one another.[85]

Gwendolyn Fleming Miller, an alumni, expressed the general attitude of the students: "We were cautioned by Miss Strong, our teachers and parents, not to feel jealous about anyone getting an honor. We were encouraged to support them. Being normal kids, there was a feeling of rivalry among classes. Everybody thought their class was the best."[86]

Willa was known as an individual who fostered innovative ideas. She was a highly respected educator and one who frequently spoke of the

---

[83] Ibid.

[84] Ibid., p. 33.

[85] Jones, A Traditional Model of Educational Excellence, pp. 2-3.

[86] Interview with Gwendolyn Fleming Miller, San Jose, California, July 8, 1978.

need for better educational opportunities for Blacks.[87] Willa and other Black educators realized that Blacks in the United States used education as the chief means to seek equal opportunity, and that schooling was perceived as an important and necessary preparation for equal access to employment.[88] To further illustrate the importance of educational preparation, Willa frequently invited L'Ouverture alumni who had achieved occupational success to serve as commencement, baccalaureate and assembly speakers. In short, she exposed her students to Black role models. For example, in 1939 Rev. Wesley V. Maxie (class of 1936) was the first L'Ouverture graduate to deliver a baccalaureate sermon, and he was the first L'Ouverture graduate to deliver a commencement address. William H. Hale, President of Langston University, delivered the commencement address to the class of 1952.[89]

The determination and will to achieve which characterized L'Ouverture graduates is apparent in class histories of the 1953 yearbook: "We have established the foundation that will prepare us for our life's work. We feel that we are ready to meet the standards that make for a rich and full life. We point to L'Ouverture with pride and pledge to her our respect, our loyalty and our undying love."[90] The 1953 freshman class wrote: "Many in the class have taken advantage of the opportunities offered. Wilma Jones, President, was honored when the song she wrote was adopted as the

---

[87]Interview with Rubye Hibler Hall, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, October, 2, 1980.

[88]Jones, A Traditional Model of Educational Excellence, p. 1.

[89]The Eagle Yearbook, 1953, pp. 6-8.

[90]"Senior Class History," The Eagle Yearbook, p. 14.

school hymn."[91]

The Student Council was another viable organization at L'Ouverture. As in past years, Willa continued to utilize the council, composed of elected representatives from each grade,[92] to meet and plan with the faculty.[93] Joel Porter Wrenn, former council member, said: "The student Council had a lot of power. The principal and teachers listened to us. We weren't just there we were involved."[94] This was illustrated in the following incident. Joan Burch, a council member, believed that a color other than black should be used to denote demerits given to students for misbehaving. She felt that the color black had been over used to denote wrong behavior or punishment. She suggested using the color green instead. The other council members and the faculty agreed.[95]

In 1954 Willa earned a masters degree from the University of Chicago.[96] Because Langston University did not offer graduate degrees and Blacks could not attend White colleges, she had to attend an out-of state university.[97] Oklahoma set aside funds "for the purpose of paying

---

[91]Ibid., "Freshman Class History," p. 22.

[92]Interview with Joel Porter Wrenn, Kansas City, Missouri, July 10, 1978.

[93]Journal of the Southern Region, p. 13.

[94]Interview with Joel Porter Wrenn, July 10, 1978.

[95]Ibid.

[96]The Eagle Yearbook, 1953, p. 2.

[97]Interview with Ruth J. Strong, August 14, 1978. See also, Oklahoma Session Laws, 1901-1954.

the tuition and mileage to certain Negro students attending institutions of higher learning outside the state."[98] Willa attended classes during the summer months.[99] To do this, she had to sacrifice "being away from her family, budget money for a place to live, but somehow she managed."[100]

Willa insisted that L'Ouverture students be "taught their heritage so that they would know who they were, and would appreciate the contribution of people like themselves to this nation and to the world."[101] Jeraldean Hayes Richardson recalled that each year "there was a long observance during national Negro History Week, the second week in February and the school presented a radio broadcast."[102] Willa was given fifteen minutes radio time by KNED for a live broadcast. The purposes of the broadcast were: "To expose the McAlester community to the achievements of Blacks, and provide L'Ouverture students the experience of a live radio broadcast."[103] One script read:

> We tell a heritage of a great people, a heritage which enriches American and world culture. The Negro Heritage speaks: Paint me blue for to America I have been loyal and true. The Negro Heritage says paint me red for America my blood has been shed. The Negro Heritage says paint me white for my love has transformed the night of oppression into light. The Negro Heritage is a tapestry

---

[98] Eighteenth Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, 1940, p. 129.

[99] Interview with Ruth J. Strong, August 14, 1978.

[100] Ibid.

[101] Jones, A Traditional Model of Educational Excellence, p. 3.

[102] Interview with Jeraldean Hayes Richardson, July 20, 1978.

[103] Willa A. Strong, "Radio Script of Negro History Week Broadcast," in the personal files of Ruth J. Strong, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

> of all creeds and colors. It is the brotherhood of man, the fatherhood of God. The Negro Heritage seeks a place in the sun that all mankind may share its contribution. The Negro Heritage speaks: Place me in school books for children to read, display me in libraries for adults to view, feature me in concerts, dramas and news. America needs me and the world needs me too.[104]

Gwendolyn Fleming Miller, a participant said: "Miss Strong coached and encouraged each speaker. She made sure that each word was enunciated clearly. She required us to do our own research so that we could learn the history. I remember speaking with Dr. Charles Drew Who developed blood plasma."[105] In addition, Willa encouraged the study of Black History in the classes she taught. According to Miller: "Two research papers were necessary to pass Miss Strong's classes. One of them had to cover Black History."[106] These observances and study activities were in keeping with the national trend set by the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, who in 1926 declared a week long observance stressing the contribution of Blacks.[107] The study of Black History filled a void often found in history tests of the 1950's. One writer explained:

> Take history as it is commonly taught in our schools. It is taught from a textbook that completely ignores the Negro or mentions him only in condescending or derogatory terms. That is a bad sort of history to teach to White youth; when it is taught to Negro youth is is absolutely pernicious. The fact is, there is hardly an important page of American History that can be fully and truthfully

---

[104] Ibid.

[105] Interview with Gwendolyn Fleming Miller, August 12, 1978.

[106] Ibid.

[107] Moon, "Frederick Douglas Moon: A Study of Black Education in Oklahoma," p. 138.

written without reference to the Negro as a contributing factor.[108]

During the 47 years of its existence, L'Ouverture had earned statewide recognition as a viable institution among the 97 Black High Schools.[109] According to Ira D. Hall, "Miss Strong was the 'queen' among Black female principals. I think she had the highest level of inter and intra respect of anybody I've ever known. She had a high level of interest in both educational and social issues."[110] Moreover, national pedagogical trends seemed to permeate the atmosphere at L'Ouverture in terms of developmental goals for students. For instance, Willa and her staff agreed that:

1. Purposeful learning follows a developmental sequence.
2. Motivation is essential to purposeful learning.
3. Direct experience is needed to acquire concepts.
4. Practice is necessary in acquiring skills.
5. Meaningful learning is retained.[111]

Furthermore, former teachers, students and community leaders characterized L'Ouverture as an institution of excellence. this same group agreed that L'Ouverture exemplified the following characteristics of an effective school:

1. Strong leadership

---

[108]James W. Johnson, Negro Americans, What Now. (New York: AMS Press, 1971) pp. 44-45.

[109]Interview with Ira D. Hall, October 2, 1980.

[110]Ibid.

[111]Herbert J. Klausmeir, Teaching In The Secondary School (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1958), p. 66. Also, Interview with former teachers, Thelma Lawson Anderson and Thelma South Shaw.

2. High teacher expectations

3. Good atmosphere

4. Strong emphasis on reading

5. Careful evaluation of pupil progress.[112]

These principles and attitudes were in keeping with the OANT educational raison d'etre. The organization had three major objectives:

1) More effective schools,

2) Higher-level citizenship for the Negro people,

and

3) Deeper interests in education throughout the state.[113]

In fact, the OANT programs broadened the educational base of Black teachers, administrators and students.[114] For those who participated, OANT represented a long-time investment of the professional, human, and material resources of Black educators in Oklahoma.[115]

The End of Separate Schools

As Black educators continued to seek improved conditions for Black students, the issue of "separate but equal" education was receiving national focus. In the Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas case, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that separate but equal education is

---

[112]George Weber, "Inner City Children Can Be Taught to Read: Four Successful Schools, Occasional Paper No. 18 (Washington, D.C.: Council for Basic Education, 1971) in Jones, A Traditional Model of Educational Excellence, p. 3. Also interview with Thelma Lawson Anderson, July, 1978.

[113]Strong, "Historical Development of the Oklahoma Association of Black Teachers: A Study In Social Change," p. 4.

[114]Ibid., p. 6.

[115]Ibid., pp. 6-7.

unconstitutional and in the field of public education, the doctrine of "separate but equal" has no place within this degree, separate educational facilities were labeled inherently unequal.[116]

The reactions to this decision were mixed. "Some state officials urged school boards to act responsibily, and admitted openly that Brown was here to stay."[117] The Oklahoma Legislature made an attempt to improve the separate school situation by abolishing the system of separate levies for Black and White schools through the passage of a constitutional amendment, commonly called the Better Schools Amendment.[118] However, the McAlester School Board responded thusly:

> Dr. Thompson read a letter from Dr. Oliver Hodge, State Superintendent of Public Instruction, suggesting that all schools in Oklahoma operate in 1954-55 as in the past school year so far as segregation was concerned. The new Supreme Court ruling on segregation was discussed and it was agreed that the suggestion made by Dr. Hodge was the best procedure to follow until further ruling by the U.S. Supreme Court.[119]

Black Community leaders were "pleased about the Supreme Court's decision to end separate but equal education but there was concern about losing L'Ouverture."[120] In response to the concern, Reverend J.L. Hawkins, Wade Watts, Reverend M.M. Williams, and M.D. Lawson held a strategy meeting with

---

[116]Brown v. The Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas, May 17, 1954.

[117]Franklin, The Blacks in Oklahoma, p. 54.

[118]Ibkd.

[119]Minutes of the Meeting of the McAlester Board of Education, June 14, 1954.

[120]Interview with Wade Watts, McAlester, Oklahoma, March 15, 1978.

Willa. While Willa was in favor of equal education, she feared that the end of L'Ouverture might mean the end of "solid education for Black children in McAlester. She was afraid that the White school (McAlester High School) might not have a genuine interest in educating Blacks.[121] Consequently, the group made a decision to "try and keep the doors of L'Ouverture open as long as possible in the interest of Black children."[122]

Meanwhile, desegregation opponents were speaking out in favor of school segregation throughout the state. Rather than argue against the decision, Oklahoma officials requested time to work out the financial details.[123] School desegregation opponents spoke negatively against Oklahoma's Better School Amendment. For instance, Representative Guy Horton of Altus strongly believed that the elimination of the separate school levy for Negro schools would hasten desegregation. Horton further stated that "this (replacement levy) will be the most classic tragedy for the Negro race. The Negro race made its progress because of the inspired leadership of Negro teachers."[124]

In 1955 the U.S. Supreme Court issued its "with deliberate speed" mandate. McAlester schools responded in this manner:

---

[121] Ibid.

[122] Ibid.

[123] Alan Saxe, "Protest and Reform: The Desegregation of Oklahoma City" (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Oklahoma, 1969), p. 127.

[124] Interview with Representative Guy Horton, Altus, Oklahoma, February 4, 1963 and Southern School News, Vol. I, No. 7, March 3, 1955, p. 16, in Saxe, "Protest and Reform: The Desegregation of Oklahoma City," p. 72.

> The question of desegregation in McAlester Schools was studied and discussed at length. It was tentatively decided to work out the details to start a plan of creating an eighth ward in the area of the L'Ouverture School to be served by that school as the seven other wards of the city which are served by the seven elementary schools, and to make it optional for Negro students living in the seven other wards of the city to attend the school of the ward in which they live or to return to L'Ouverture School, and to make it optional for White students living in the newly created L'Ouverture ward to go to L'Ouverture School or to the school which they had previously attended.[125]

Although this information was made available to the Black community, most parents preferred to keep their children at L'Ouverture. Twenty-four students graduated in L'Ouverture's Class of 1955. But neither Willa nor the Black parents could prevent the inevitable. The "separate but equal" doctrine had been eradicated in the courts of law. The combining of two school systems required economic, sociological and psychological adjustments mainly by Blacks. During the next four years (1956-1960), several school districts in the state were desegregated and this resulted in the loss of jobs for Black teachers.[126] Black teachers at L'Ouverture were not immediately faced with the crisis. However, Willa's perception led her to discuss with her staff the need for additional educational preparation. According to Thelma: "Most of us started working on our Masters Degrees. We taught all day and attended night classes at East Central in Ada."[127] At the same time, Willa was enrolled in the doctoral program at the

---

[125]Minutes of the Meeting of the McAlester Board of Education, July 11, 1955.

[126]See for example, Strong, "Historical Development of the Oklahoma Association of Negro Teachers: A Study In Social Change," Moon, Frederick Douglass Moon: A Study of Black Education in Oklahoma and Saxe, "Protest and Reform: The Desegregation of Oklahoma City."

[127]Interview with Thelma Lawson Anderson, March 17, 1978.

University of Oklahoma. She went to classes on Saturdays most of the time." Between her work at school, her community work and her classes at the University of Oklahoma, she stayed busy all the time. My mother and I worried because she didn't get any rest. She was determined to get as much education as she could, even if it meant a lot of sacrifice."[128]

By 1956 Willa had become known and recognized throughout the state for her leadership and organizational skills which resulted in her election to the presidency of the OANT.[129] This was a critical period for the OANT. The organization's continued survival was questioned because "127 Negro teachers, out of a total of 1,536 had lost their jobs and only five Negro teachers had been employed in integrated schools."[130] Willa spoke to question of the OANT's continued existence:

> As to the OANT, don't sell it short in this crucial period. Its history is a glorious heritage worthy of preservation and acclaim. Its program of action is a ladder on whose rounds Negro teachers have made tremendous strides. It is now a firm foundation on which the Negro teacher may erect a stable structure or personal integration.
>
> The individual teacher is the most significant factor in the quest for professional integration. What each teacher does in his or her peculiar situation is important. Democracy cherishes the worth of every individual. .. The Negro teacher is not expendable in Democracy's forward march ... The arms of democratic education will best be served by the full utilization of the nation's resources in teaching personnel.[131]

---

[128]Interview with Ruth Strong, March 4, 1978.

[129]See Strong, "Historical Development of the Association of Negro Teachers."

[130]Ibid., p. 196.

[131]Ibid., pp. 196-197.

Willa continued on to preside at the final general meetings of the OANT in October 26-27, 1956. Prior to the final meeting, the OANT Executive Committee voted to retain the organization, changing the name to the Oklahoma Association of Teachers. As president, Willa presented the final progress report and outlined a possible merger with the Oklahoma Education Association (OEA). The report recommended "a meeting with the Oklahoma Education Association for the purpose of outlining objectives, program and history of the OANT, with consideration given to the mergering of the two organizations, a meeting with Governor Gary and other state officials to cite the problems of Negro teachers, the presentation of data on the displacement of Negro teachers and continued counsel with lawyers concerning displaced Negro teachers."[132] Reflecting on this situation, Willa wrote:

> Great gains in human rights have always been long and hard fought battles. Steps forward have been made and perhaps in the most effective and enduring way: The least publicized victories are often the most fruitful. Teacher morale has been strengthened. Employment opportunities have been broadened both within and without school systems. Every teacher must bear in mind, 'The race is not given to the swiftest, but to those who endure to the end.[133]

This was a period of uncertainty for most Black educators. They were familiar with segregation, they could only speculate about desegregation. Joe S. Johnson wrote:

> Yes integregation is upon us and with it comes a challenge which will expose us to a competition we have never known . .. There will be no more top positions labeled 'Negro.' Our children won't be on the debating teams, in the chorus, hold offices, play on the athletic teams, represent their school just for the asking. To be recognized, we must work ... a little harder and a little longer ... Let us pray that this inevitable transition will not be so hectic

---

[132] Ibid., p. 221.

[133] Ibid., p. 222.

> that we find ourselves confused and wondering aimlessly in the wilderness of hopelessness and frustration. Be vigilant that we lose not our identity as a capable and ingenious race nor lose a single phase of our cultural heritage.[134]

Always a realist, Willa prodded L'Ouverture students to prepare themselves for an integrated society. Ruth said: "My sister had a deep interest in young people. She knew that they would need to know how to speak, read, write, and think intelligently. She still encouraged them to go on to college, and if they could afford it, get a masters degree before they stopped."[135] Charles C. Thomas, echoed this perception: "During assemblies and in classes, Miss Strong would stress being prepared for the future in terms of education. She was one of the strongest Black women I knew, I think she served as a model for young Blacks and I think she had visions of the future in terms of getting a job and the need to be better educated than the Whites. This way no one could say you didn't have the qualifications."[136]

By 1957, five hundred forty Black students in 43 classes had graduated from L'Ouverture.[137] Many of those students became college graduates. Willa was instrumental in getting financial assistance for many of them. Barbara L. Stigall wrote:

I am very happy to write of some of the many benefits of

---

[134]Joe S. Johnson, "The Challenge," in the Journal Organ of the Oklahoma Association of Negro Teachers), July, 1955, p. 1, in West, The Black American and American Education, p. 197.

[135]Interview with Ruth J. Strong, May 5, 1978.

[136]Interview with Charles C. Thomas, New York, New York, July 20, 1978.

[137]L'Ouverture Second Reunion Handbook, pp. 42-46.

> the Scholarship Loan Fund. Quite frankly I don't see how I could have managed financially without it.
>
> In my opinion there is so much more represented here apart from the monetary values. It is a symbol of the faith in us. And we in turn feel that not only must we return the money but that we must strive to achieve that kind of finer womanhood for which all of you stand.
>
> It was my high school principal who introduced me to the Oklahoma Federation of Colored Women's Clubs. At that time, it seemed impossible for me to attend an institution of higher learning. But thanks to your moral and financial support, I plan to graduate in May and be of service to God and my community. I hope that other young people will take advantage of this opportunity which you afforded me.[138]

Desegregation did not occur in a trouble free environment. Oklahoma experienced racial disturbances. Anti-desegregation groups were formed with the expressed purpose of fighting school desegregation.[139] McAlester was identified as one of the first places where such an organization was formed. According to Wade Watts:

> We (NAACP) had heard about such a group and it didn't surprise me. One of the first things I was told about McAlester was that it was part of "Little Dixie." The Whites here were known for their prejudices and ideas about Black folk.[140]

---

[138]Letter from Barbara L. Stigall to Willa A. Strong, McAlester, Oklahoma, March 4, 1957 in Strong, 'The Origin Development and Current Status of the Oklahoma Federation of Colored Women's Clubs," p. 150.

Amid busy schedule, Willa completed the requirements for a Doctorate Degree in Education at the University of Oklahoma in 1957. This achievement earned Willa the distinction of being the only Black female with a terminal degree residing in McAlester. In later years, many of her students earned Doctorate Degrees. For instance, Clarence Allan Porter, Charles Columbus Thomas, Michael Tilford, and others.

[139]Southern School News, Vol. II, No. 12, June, 1956, p. 12, in Saxe, 'Protect and Reform: The Desegregation of Oklahoma," p. 110.

[140]Ibid.

Furthermore, the superintendent of the Grant District in Choctaw County, commented: 'Our school borad will not integrate until forced to do so. Lots of racial prejudice here."[141] Grant is also a part of Little Dixie. By September 2, 1958, "seven thousand Negro children started to school in mixed classes ... as Oklahoma Public Schools began their fourth year under gradual integration."[142] However, in McAlester "and in other places, even though the schools had full desegregation policies, the Negro pupils had shown little desire to leave their uniracial schools to attend classes with the Whites ..."[143] This was the situation in McAlester; Black students continued to attend L'Ouverture and White students attended classes at McAlester High School. According to Watts:

> The school board in McAlester was not concerned about desegregating the schools. They were more concerned about keeping them separate. The climate was just as stiff and segregated during school desegregation as it was when I came to McAlester in the early fifties.[144]

Meanwhile, the OANT had a greater concern about the dismissal of Black teachers from various school districts in the state. The Executive Secretary responded:

Oklahoma has succeeded quite well in pupil integration.

---

[141]Interview with Wade Watts, March 15, 1978.

"Little Dixie" is the term used to refer to counties in the extreme southeastern section of the state. According to Brian LeFlower, Oklahoma Historical Society, the areas were occupied by southern Whites who brought with them, southern idologies and treatment toward Negroes.

[142]"Official Survey of State Board of Education," 1955-56.

[143]The Daily Oklahoman, September 3, 1958.

[144]The Daily Oklahoman, November 19, 1961.

> The black mark, so far against Oklahoma is what it has done to its qualified Negro teachers. Approximately 350 Negro teachers have been discharged the first two years of desegregation.
>
> The policy is developing in Oklahoma that Negro teachers are used only in cases where there is an all-Negro faculty. It is somewhat hopeful to know that we now have approximately 20 Negro teachers in Oklahoma who are successfully serving in integrated faculties. The score is entirely too low.[145]

The loss of jobs still had not affected Black teachers in McAlester. Nor had the events changed Willa. She continued to stress her concerns about the education of Black youth.

For a number of years, Willa had served as Sunday School Superintendant at Wards Chapel A.M.E. Church.[146] Since some of the L'Ouverture students were members of the church, she was able to emphasize her educational ideals and moral concerns to both parents and students. She had the support of the Black clergy. They respected her for her intellect, high morals, Biblical knowledge, and leadership ability. They even consulted her on many community matters.[147] Willa exemplified her Christian beliefs as she wrote: "The Christian possesses the power to become the answer to the world's problems. The power of a God possessed soul is

---

[145]"Policy and Status of Teacher Integration in Certain Border States and Cities," Booklet by F.D. Moon, in Saxe, "Protest and Reform: The Desegregation of Oklahoma City, p. 109. See also Moon, "Frederick Douglass Moon: A Study of Black Education in Oklahoma," and Strong, "The Historical Development of the Oklahoma Association of Negro Teachers: A Study in Social Change." As stated earlier, Strong notes that the OANT voted to merge with the Oklahoma Education Association in 1955. Certain committees were retained: The Executive Committee, the Committee on Integration, the Committee on the History of the Association, and the office of the Executive Secretary, p. 11.

[146]Interview with Jessee B. Thompson, May 24, 1977.

[147]Interview with Kermit Tilford, September 9, 1977.

greater than atomic energy and the sole solution of our times."[148]

Blending religion with education, she further wrote:

> The perfect pattern for child development is eternally inscribed in Luke 2:52: And Jesus increased in widsom and statute, and in favor with God and Man. This climate of growth is found in only an environment: A family bound by ties of love, labor and Christian ideals.[149]

Accordingly, Willa began and ended her day with a prayer. If she had not been a religious person, she may not have been able to stand up under the pressure of her job and her community responsibilities. Through religion, she learned to accept the hardships. She always tried to keep God first, just as she had been taught by her mother. Anytime she had a decision to make, she prayed about it. Willa's religious beliefs were further evident in other writings.

> Be not afraid to pray -- to pray is right. Pray, if thou canst, with hope, but ever pray, though hope be weak, or sick with long delay; Pray in darkness, if there be no light, far is the time, remote from human sight, when war and discord on earth shall cease, avails the blessed time to expedite.[150]

Willa worked closely with the local chapter of the NAACP. According to Wade Watts, "The chapter did not receive much publicity and appreciation for its efforts. The chapter did try to stay on top of situations of discrimination and unequal treatment toward Blacks." Watts continued: "Our chapter president Reverend J.L. Hawkins was straightforward and very serious about fighting segregation. In our dealings with the Whites, he advised us not to smile very much, or they (Whites) will

---

[148]Speech by Willa Strong, in the personal files of Ruth J. Strong, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

[149]Ibid. "Christian, Kitten or Tiger" speech delivered at Wards Chapel AME Church.

[150]Federated Women, Federated of Colored Women's Clubs, 1953, p. 1.

not take you seriously. If you keep a stern face, you'll leave no doubt."[151] Willa was involved in the efforts to improve the social climate in McAlester. Watts continued: 'Being an educator, Miss Strong was not very often in the forefront but she would work out the plan of organization for attacking the problems. Everybody respected her judgment."[152]

The social employment patterns for Blacks did not change significantly between 1961-63. There was still rampant discrimination even though there were isolated cases of job improvements. Watts described the situation: 'There was only one Black mail carrier, a handfull of Black employees at the Naval Ammunition Depot, one or two working for the city, one at the Public Service (Electric) Company, a good number of coal miners, but none of these agencies employed Blacks in proportion to the Black population."[153] This was one of the conditions the NAACP wanted to improve. In addition, the denial of equal access to public facilities was a concern. In fact, Watts, Leo Tompson, a Black businessman, Lloyd Porter (a L'Ouverture teacher), Willa, and other members of the NAACP worked out a test plan for public facilities. Thompson donated the finances and Watts selected teenagers who would attempt to gain entry to public businesses. The teenagers went in pairs to the Oklahoma Theatre, the Chieftain Drive-In, the Isle of Capri, and other places but they were denied admission. The

---

[152]Interview with Wade Watts, March 15, 1978.

[153]Ibid.

[154]Ibid. Since 1907, the majority of Blacks in McAlester other than the professionals (teachers, physicians, businessmen), were employed on unskilled jobs. Thomas Boxley was the first Black Mail Carrier; Elmer R. Fleming, was the first Black hired by the Public Service Company; Samuel Hayes, John Davis, Cottrell Johnson, Layfayette Tilford and others were employed at the Naval Ammunition Depot.

denials prompted Watts to ask for a reason. The businessmen responded: "If we admit Blacks it will cause us to lose business from the Whites."[154] Watts countered: "We do not intend to hurt your business but we are tired of being humilated by being served in separate facilities or at outdoor windows."[155] Afterwards, Willa and others advised Watts to request a meeting with Mayor Owens and City Manager Fry. At that meeting Willa stated the Black community's position: "There is no need to prolong this issue it needs to be straightened out now."[156] Owens and Fry agreed to work on improving conditions for Blacks. However, conditions did not change immediately.

In 1963 L'Ouverture still existed as a separate educational institution in the Black community. Willa was somewhat content with this arrangement because "she felt that Black teachers knew their own children and would be more interested in them."[157] She had observed that separate schools were never equal, and she disagreed with the Supreme Court that the education provided for Black children had been consistently inferior.[158] But she noted that school districts that carried out the federal directive to desegregate did so by closing the Black schools, leaving many Black professionals without jobs. Furthermore, most of the staff in White schools did not want

---

[154]Ibid.

[155]Ibid.

[156]Ibid.

[157]Interview with Ruth J. Strong, May 10, 1977.

[158]Ibid.

desegregation, especially in McAlester.[159] On the other hand, (as school districts in surrounding areas carried out the court order), Willa could sense the gradual demise of the all-Black school.[160]

Using the desegregation delay as an advantage Willa spoke to Black students about their future in a changing society.[161] As the keynote speaker at Southeastern State University's 1964 Black Heritage Program, she told the Black students:

> The Black Heritage holds for the Black man the road to fulfillment; to the White man the door to freedom from the blight of racism; to American Democracy, the goal of national unity.
>
> Leaders of tomorrow in the world of work need the frame of reference of the Negro's role in history. The Negro's advancement has been hindered by segregation and discrimination.
>
> God has endowed with a diversity of talents, one of life's task is to find one aptitude. There are three A's associated with choosing a vocation: Aptitude, Aspiration and Awareness. Aspiration and Aptitude without the will to achieve remains dormant ... ASPIRE![162]

In the fall of 1965, L'Ouverture opened its doors for another school term. But the tide was turning. Mrs. Edna Rhone, a Black woman enrolled her sons in the previously all White

---

[159]Interview with Wade Watts, March 15, 1978.

[160]See Moon, "Frederick Douglass Moon: A Study of Black Education in Oklahoma," pp. 367-368. See also Teall, Black History in Oklahoma: A Resource Book.

[161]Interview with Ruth J. Strong, May 10, 1977.

[162]Willa Strong, "The Quest For Self," speech delivered at Southeastern State College, February, 1964, in the personal files of Ruth J. Strong, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

elementary school in the fourth ward section of the city.[163] Even so, Willa continued to administrate McAlester's all-Black high school. Seizing every available opportunity, she spoke about the ideas and concepts of school desegregation. Trying to impress upon Black parents their responsibility, she challenged the PTA to shape its program to meet the needs of youth in a changing society. She continued:

> The PTA is morally obligated to join the fight for fair employment, equality of educational opportunity, open housing, that all people may have a firm economic base for granting a child his inalienable right for security. The PTA has an immediate and urgent role to exert pressure for the placing of Negro history in the curriculum of the public schools of every community. Our children may achieve desegregation but they will never be integrated into public schools where textbooks omit their racial heritage. The pioneer Negro educational leaders and teachers who founded the Negro Congress of Parents and Teachers made a contribution to Oklahoma which should be recorded and publicized. The story of the Oklahoma PTA is incomplete without the story of Negro organization. Will future generations of Negro youth rise up and call us blessed if we set with folded hands and permit every Dunbar, Attucks, Bunche, Woodson, Douglas and L'Ouverture school to fade from the educational picture? Will the tapestry of the educational scene in a few years picture only Emersons, Eisenhowers, Horace Manns, Will Rogers and Longfellows, as names of public schools?"[164]

In the fall of 1966, L'Ouverture again opened its doors for another school year with a staff of nineteen teachers, three teacher aides and one substitute teacher.[165] The curriculum included science, mathematics, industrial arts, English, homemaking, business education courses, social

---

[163] Interview with Thelma Lawson Anderson, September 25, 1979.

[164] Willa A. Strong, "The Challege of the PTA," speech delivered to L'Ouverture PTA, August, 1965, in the personal files of Ruth J. Strong, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

[165] L'Ouverture '66 Yearbook, (Kansas City: Inter-Collegiate Press, 1966), pp. 1-4.

studies, physical and educational and vocational agriculture. There were 399 students enrolled in grades 1-12. In her message to students and faculty Willa said:

> I believe in child development as the ultimate goal of the educational program. I believe that continuous growth from the cradle to the grave is the American way of education.
>
> I believe that an adequate educational program involves growth in mind, body, human relations, and spirit.
>
> I believe that the total school program: Staff, plant, curriculum, and school community resources, should foster the growth of each child toward his God-given potential.
>
> I believe that motivation, the key to growth, is a responsibility of the school to its students...[166]

L'Ouverture students were still achieveing state and national honors. For instance, Cecelia Lee was selected and participated in Girls State; Phyllis House attended Cheerleader School at the University of Oklahoma; Walter Mosley won the Optimist Speech award, was a Merit Scholar finalist, and was selected Mr. Teenager of McAlester; and Cecil lee attended a national camp for Christian Athletes in Estes Park, Colorado.[167]

Several social and economic changes had taken place in the McAlester community. For instance, Willa, J.K. Granger, R.W. Jackson, M. V. Lawson, and P. Wickham were members of the McAlester Bi-Racial Committee, whose task was to work toward improved community relationships.[168] Ruth Jones, L'Ouverture PTA president, served as a member of the McAlester PTA

---

[166] Ibid.

[167] Ibid.

[168] Ibid.

Council.[169] Kaye C. Jones was employed by the City Water Department and Gloria Townsend was employed at the Social Security Office. L'Ouverture students Walter Mosley and Donald Jesse were employed as carriers in local supermarkets.[170]

By 1967 approximately 800 students had become L'Ouverture Alumni.[171] Many of them had achieved in various fields. For instance, Lewis Braxton, Jr., Thomas P. Giddings, and Claude M. Thomas were serving in the Armed Forces; Kermit Tilford, LaRonnie Dodson Green, Gerald Tilford, Loretta Scott Reed, Maggie McCurdy, Juanita Brown Charles and Lillian Johnson Elliott were teachers; Daisy Brown Sanford, Elmer C. Jackson and Edna Johnson Porter were in health sciences fields.[172] It is apparent that the phrase often used by Willa — be somebody — had inspired L'Ouverture students through the years. According to Gwendolyn Fleming Miller: "I went to an integrated junior college and I found that I was ahead of most of my classmates. This was especially true in mathematics and English. Mrs. Elliott had drilled grammer rules in our heads and Mrs. Anderson insisted that you learn math concepts.[173] Kermit Tilford stated: "Chemistry was easy for me in college because of the training I received in high school. Our equipment was limited but Mr. Anderson carried us over and above what we had in our textbooks.[174] Moreover, Willa was described as

---

[169]Ibid.

[170]Ibid.

[171]L'Ouverture Alumni Second Reunion Handbook, pp. 42-28.

[172]Ibid.

[173]Interview with Gwendolyn Fleming Miller, June 16, 1978.

[174]Interview with Kermit Tilford, May 28, 1977.

"the best when it came to teaching and knowing Black History."[175] But she was more than this, Willa was "a sensitive and compassionate person who could relate to hard times. She was always willing to help her students and people in the community."[176] On the other hand, a teacher said: "She was too good. People just used her, she was very sympathetic. She let students eat hot lunches free and borrow money from her. Her phone rang all hours of the night and there was usually a person on the other end with a problem. I know of times when she would get people out of jail and she even paid utilities bills for younger teachers who were having financial difficulties."[177] If these were faults, this was Willa's way of serving humanity and she didn't brag about what she did, she just did it.

The End of L'Ouverture

In 1967 the Superintendent of School reported that officials of the U.S. Office of Education ordered that L'Ouverture High School be closed by the fall of 1968 and that "zone lines move in closer to L'Ouverture to force more integration of students out in the other schools for the next term."[178] Having knowledge of the Board's intention and the directive from the office of Civil Rights, Willa contacted Wade Watts to devise a strategy for encouraging White students to attend L'Ouverture. Watts explained: "The Board set up a redistricting plan which would include

---

[175]Interview with Walter E. Seward, Jr., May 17, 1977.

[176]Interview with Jessee B. Thompson, May 24, 1977.

[177]Interview with Thelma Lawson Anderson, May 15, 1977.

[178]Minutes of the Meeting of the McAlester Board of Education, June 12, 1967.

White students south of L'Ouverture. We knew this plan wouldn't really work without some encouragement."[179] In an effort to save L'Ouverture, Willa suggested that Watts, Robert Jackson, Ruth Strong and others go from door to door asking White parents to send their children to L'Ouverture. If successful, this effort would allow L'Ouverture to remain open. Willa further advised the group to point out the superior academic program and other achievements of L'Ouverture students. The plan had modest success.

On the first day of school in September 1967, seventeen White students showed up for school at L'Ouverture. However, the next day only three returned. Meanwhile, it was rumored that Superintendent Thompson had contacted the White parents asking them not to send their children to the "nigger" school and the parents abided by his request.[180] This disturbed Willa. She believed that the White parents did not recognize L'Ouverture as an educational institution of worth. It seemed unfair and unjust to her that the Black school always had to be closed in order to desegregate.

In spite of the mandate from the U.S. Office for Civil Rights, a group of Black parents appeared before the McAlester Board of Education in a last effort to save L'Ouverture.[181] It seemed apparent that the high school would close. Consequently, the parents pleaded with the Board to keep the elementary school portion of the school. In response to their

---

[179]Interview with Wade Watts, March 15, 1978.

[180]Ibid.

[181]Minutes of the Meeting of the McAlester Board of Education, December 11, 1967.

request the Board "stressed the great need for the school district to use the school facilities at the L'Ouverture site and that they planned to maintain an elementary school there." On April 14, 1968, Superintendent Thompson discussed desegregation plans with the Board in an executive session. He stated that the Office of Civil Rights did not approve of the present desegregation plan and required further desegregation of the McAlester Public Schools by the fall of 1969. Three options were offered:

1. Change the boundary lines so that L'Ouverture School would lose its identity as a Negro school or,
2. Pair L'Ouverture School grades 1-6 with one or two other elementary schools of the system or,
3. Close the L'Ouverture School and transfer the pupils and teachers to other schools for the system without regard to race.[182]

After a lengthy discussion, the Board choose the third alternative, which closed the L'Ouverture High School at the end of the 1967-68 school year. The decision did not affect students below the high school level.

The Black community's response to the Board decision was mixed. The era of L'Ouverture graduates ended. Most students had aspired to complete their high school education at L'Ouverture; and all students were concerned about the treatment they would get at McAlester High School. Their concerns centered on whether or not they could be accpeted by their White classmates. Some of the seniors were pleased that L'Ouverture was not closed before they graduated.[183] Parents were concerned too. According to Watts: "I was concerned that my children would get a good education and that they would have teachers who were concerned about preparing Black

---

[182]Minutes of the Meeting of the McAlester Board of Education, April 14, 1968.

[183]Interview with Jessee B. Thompson, June 3, 1979.

children for the future. I wasn't sure they would get that at McAlester High School."[184]

Despite the efforts of Willa, Watts and other alumni, the high school closed in 1968. Although saddened by the event, Willa, her staff and students felt that the closing warranted a special recognition for L'Ouverture's contribution to education. The Senior Class of 1968 hosted a banquet in honor of the L'Ouverture heritage -- commemorating six decades of graduates (1907-1968).[185] Graduates residing throughout the United States attended the affair. They pledged to keep the memory of L'Ouverture alive. This was a fitting tribute to Willa and her teachers.[186] Under her leadership, L'Ouverture had nurtured and planted the seeds of high educational goals, including the ambition to succeed in life and the maintenance of positive self-worth as means to becoming productive citizens. In 60 years L'Ouverture students had succeeded in spite of the limited facilities and opportunities imposed by a separate school system. Otha Brown wrote this tribute to Willa:

> Ode! to a scholar, teacher and friend
> Whose whole life is dedicated to that end; of aiding her people forever to rise, as high glorious as the distant skies.
>
> Her every prayer surely must be:
> Dear God I pray to thee; Give me courage to fight for what is right,
> That I might be of worth in thy divine sight.
>
> Oh leader, in every task, may you succeed,
> For your true counsel there exists a great need;

---

[184] Interview with Wade Watts, April 4, 1978.

[185] The L'Ouverture Heritage, p. 1.

[186] Interview with Dorothy Fleming, McAlester, Oklahoma, September 30, 1978.

> Thou hast been a pioneer throughout the years,
> To speak words of wisdom for keen, alert ears.
>
> Thou hast built a bridge that others may cross,
> Without having the fear of being lost.
> Yes. A leader of her people in the time of stife;
> God must be pleased with such a glorious life.[187]

Refusing to quit, Willa and other community leaders continued meeting in hopes of finding a way to maintain L'Ouverture as an elementary/ junior high school. Willa drafted a plan to contact as many alumni as possible and ask them to write letters to the Superintendent of City Schools as a call to service for their alma mater:

> Friends of L'Ouverture are exerting every effort available to retain L'Ouverture Elementary School. As you know the high school has been integrated for the 1968-69 school term with McAlester High School. Unless steps are taken immediately within a year, the elementary school will follow. A united effort can prevent this.
>
> Please write a letter to the Superintendent immediately. The model below may be used with any change you give to make a variety of answers.
>
> Did you receive one of our souvenir programs? If you did not drop us a card and we will mail you one. Do not fail to write this letter very soon. This is your last chance to serve your school.[188]

The following sample letter was enclosed with Willa's plea:

> As a graduate (or former student) of L'Ouverture High School, I am intensely interested in the continuance of the L'Ouverture School. It has rendered magnificent service to the youth of the community. Its superior progam should be continued for generations of elementary children in the years to come. There is a need for the school. Its traditions are beloved by generations past and its service, I hope will be valued by many children of the present.

---

[187]"A Leader of Her People," Otha Brown, L'Ouverture Alumni, Norfolk Connecticut, L'Ouverture Alumni Second Reunion Handbook, p. 1.

[188]Letter from Willa A. Strong to L'Ouverture Alumni, June 25, 1968, in the personal files of Ruth J. Strong.

> Please exert the full force of your educational leadership to keep this school in the McAlester School System. Your service to this end is greatly appreciated.[189]

During the 1968-69 school year, Willa continued as principal of the L'Ouverture Elementary/Junior High school. By this time, L'Ouverture High school teachers were given new assignments. For example, James Galloway was assigned to teach music at Pauterbaugh Middle School and Betty Gaffney was assigned to teach homemaking at McAlester High School. The other teachers remained at L'Ouverture: Thelma Lawson Anderson, Thelms South Shaw, K.M. Anderson, Carnie B. Jordan, Edna Madison, Reubelle Jones and others.

By the spring of 1969 many graduates responded to Willa's earlier appeal and directed letters to Superintendent Thompson on behalf of L'Ouverture. The letters, telephone calls and personal contacts could not save the existing L'Ouverture school. The Board of Education announced additional desegregation plans for McAlester City Schools. The plans required transferring the remaining L'Ouverture students to formerly all-White elementary schools nearest to their homes. Specifically, fifty-two Black students would transfer to Will Rogers, 16 to Washington, and 22 to Emerson.[190] The plan further stated:

> This plan of complete integration has been approved by the Civil Rights Authorities as being in compliance with Federal regulations. The McAlester Public Schools have been in the process of progessively integrating its schools under the Civil Rights Act of 1965. There have been approximately 325 Negro children integrated and are

---

[189] Ibid.

[190] Minutes of the Meeting of the McAlester Board of Education, April 14, 1968.

presently attending Pauterbaugh Junior High, Emerson Elementary, Washington Elementary, Will Rogers Elementary, and Edmond Doyle Elementary. The integration of these last 90 elementary children from the L'Ouverture School into Emerson, Washington and Will Rogers Elementary Schools complete the integration plan of the McAlester Public Schools.

Transportation plans were announced:

1. That transportation will be provided to alleviate hardship cases caused by the combining of these student bodies. Present plans are to operate a school bus on East Chicksaw Street and East Wyondotte Street to go to Emerson School.

2. The north wing (elementary section) of the L'Ouverture School building will be used for kindergarten and special education classes.

3. The high school area (west wing) of the L'Ouverture school building will be used under lease - option to the new Vocational-Technical School Board.

4. The teachers who are now teaching in the L'Ouverture School will be assigned to comparable teaching positions in other McAlester Schools.

Members of the Board approved the plan which clearly signaled the end of L'Ouverture's existence as a separate school.

The Board was challenged by members of the Black community. Two months later a group of patrons appeared at a Board meeting in an unsuccessful attempt to reverse the decision. At that point, Watts asked Superintendent Thompson to contact Congressman Carl Albert and request an interview with the Office of Civil Rights in order to keep L'Ouverture as a neighborhood school. Thompson delayed his response to the request long enough to dismantle L'Ouverture's faculty. After this was done, the meeting with the Office for Civil Rights was no longer necessary. The closing of L'Ouverture was fait accompli.

In most instances, teachers were given a choice between previously White schools where there were vacancies or where additional staff were

needed. For instance, Thelma Lawson Anderson chose to teach at Pauterbaugh Middle School because she preferred to continue teaching mathematics.[191] Edna Madison transferred to McAlester Junior High Schools as a member of the Library staff and Thelma South Shaw transferred to Will Rogers Elementary School. Kermit Anderson, who had served as L'Ouverture's head coach for 38 years, chose retirement rather than accept an assistant coach position.

According to Thelma Anderson, the transfer procedure was fairly smooth. While Black teachers were not entirely pleased about the close of L'Ouverture nor the transfers, most of them received acceptable assignments. Many of the teachers were within a few years of retirement and were willing to tolerate the situation until that time. Furthermore, most Black teachers were welcomed into their new schools and they were treated well.[192]

Willa accepted the co-principalship at McAlester Junior High School. As co-principal, she was to function as an assistant principal. What she deplored in other desegregated schools had happened to her. In practice, Willa had little if any administrative or decision making authority. In fact, "she was more of a token than anything else."[193] Nevertheless, she acted as an intervenor and counselor for Black students. By just being there, she gave Black students someone with whom they could relate and who understood their problems. Many Black students refused to talk to White administrators about their problems; instead they would request

---

[191]Interview with Thelma Lawson Anderson, October 24, 1979.

[192]Ibid.

[193]Ibid.

to talk to Willa.[194] Leaders in the Black community felt that Willa's position as co-principal amounted to a demotion. Watts said: "There is no way a woman with her qualifications, experience and education should have been made co-principal. I think it was the Board's way of punishing her for being outspoken and forward in her thinking. She had a better education than all of them. But this is the thing that happened to Blacks in school integration. Our schools were either taken or closed and our educators were placed in lower positions. Most of all our children suffer because nobody understands them."[195]

The process of school desegregation had reached the McAlester Public Schools and created many changes for Blacks and Whites. One of Willa's goals during this period was to assist in making the transition smooth for Black students. She felt that Black teachers could best teach and understand Black students, and she often tutored and assisted Black students after working hours.[196] Other students called on their former L'Ouverture teachers for assistance with academic, social and emotional problems.

Shortly after the beginning of the second semester, Willa became ill and was unable to complete the school term. This left a great void in the school life of Black students; they no longer had Willa to guide them. However, other former L'Ouverture teachers filled the void.

Willa and the L'Ouverture school legacy had ended. Students no longer walked or rode the bus to the school at 14th and Chickasaw Streets.

---

[194]Ibid.

[195]Interview with Wade Watts, March 15, 1979.

[196]Interview with Ruth J. Strong, February 6, 1979.

Even so, the "model of educational excellence" had already been established and practiced at L'Ouverture by Willa and other Black teachers. This was her legacy to the Black citizens of McAlester — and the State of Oklahoma.

CHAPTER V

OTHER BLACK WOMEN

Traditional Careers

During the twenty-nine years of Willa's tenure as a school administrator, 20,057 Blacks taught in the State of Oklahoma.[1] From 1929-1951 Black women comprised the bulk of the teaching force and they were confined to teaching in classrooms.[2] For example, men were assigned as principals in ninety-four of the ninety-seven Black high schools.[3] In fact, opportunities for leadership in education among Black women were extremely limited. This limitation also was apparent in the Black church, which historically served as the major social institution and training ground for Black male leaders. Although women comprised most of the membership, men held the top leadership posts and the inherent power.[4] Active women who were capable of leadership in the church and the broader community were forced to utilize their talents in social programs involving

---

[1]Personnel Files, State Department of Education, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. For purposes of this study, teaching is defined as a traditional career.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Interview with Ira Hall

[4]Rhetaugh Graves Dumas, "Dilemmas of Black Females in Leadership," in The Black Woman, (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1980), pp. 203-204.

women. The dominance of Black males in leadership roles created another hardship for Black women beyond the issue of social discrimination. Black women had to suffer the frustrations and hardships posed by the lack of organization career development support from Black men.[5] Thus, combined forces of these socio-career phenomena limited Oklahoma Black women with leadership potential to the classroom teaching and service oriented programs, e.g., directors of the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), Oklahoma Association of Colored Women's Clubs, and youth directors for churches. Even so, Black women received strong indoctrination toward work primarily out of necessity and, on occasion, out of choice. Eleanor Engram described this situation:

> The structure of race relations in America made the structure of sex roles ill-shpaed to fit the Black experience. The subordination of Black males in the labor market made participation of Black women in the labor market essential for economic survival of Black families. Black women, being in the category of women who work out of necessity, have long combined family and labor market roles. Economic conditions in the Black community and the correlated desires for better living standards have always conflicted with the notions of women belonging in the home and being spared from productive labor.[6]

The national work orientation as well as the necessity for Black women to work is statistically supported. In 1930 38.9% of the Black women were employed outside the home.[7] In Oklahoma, teachers (mostly female) and ministers (mostly male) accounted for two thirds of all Black professionals.[8]

---

[5]Ibid., p. 204

[6]Eleanor Engram, "Role Transition in Early Adulthood: Orientations of Young Black Women," in The Black Woman, p. 176.

[7]Ibid., p. 178.

[8]Strong, "The Origin, Development and Current Status of the Oklahoma Federation of Colored Women's Clubs," p. 34.

Other occupations of Black women were limited to beauticians, waitresses (in Black business only), and domestic workers. Furthermore, Blacks in general were under represented in the fields of dentistry, social work, nursing, engineering, and as librarians, pharmacists, surgeons and veterinarians.[9]

Non-Traditional Careers

Few if any changes occurred in the career options of Black professionals during the decade of the 1940's. Most Black women were still relegated as classroom teachers. However, there were many Black women who were unhappy with the apparent career limitations of teaching. These were women who had a desire to teach school. Dietetics was my interest. I knew there were no opportunities for Black women to become dietetians during my time. So I just forgot about it."[10] During this same period, a few Black women worked in factories because there was a desperate need for semi-skilled laborers. Even so, the Black woman earned a lower wage than the Black man.[11] A small number of Black women were employed as grocery store clerks, pressers in cleaners, and drug store clerks. However, the number of these jobs available to rural Oklahoma Black women were few. Such jobs were limited to the larger cities and even then were restricted to the few Black businesses in the Black community. Furthermore, the wages were extremely low; since Black businesses were supported by Black clientele

---

[9]Ibid.

[10]Interview with Josephine Moore, Fresno, California, March 12, 1981.

[11]Toni Cade, The Black Woman: An Anthology (New York: New American Library, 1970), p. 208.

whose wages were low.[12]

By 1950 Black women still dominated the teaching profession. However, many who began as teachers had aspirations for other careers. Betty G. Hopkins Mason had ambitions to become a journalist. Her ambition was encouraged by one of her high school teachers. However, the curriculum at Bishop College, an all Black college she attended, did not include journalism. Instead, she majored in business education and prepared to teach. Later, she worked in various positions in a bank and ultimately returned to the field of education.[13]

Jeni Dennis Jackson was one of the four Black women admitted to St. Anthony Hospital's School of Nursing in Oklahoma City in 1957. She said, "I guess I never really wanted to teach, I always had the desire to become a nurse."[14] At the same time, Black women were aspiring to become school administrators. The majority of the Black separate schools were managed by Black males. This was especially true in the case of Black separate high schools.[15] This situation did not seem to discourage Black

---

[12]Interview with Wyolene Wilson Brown, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, September 20, 1981 and Laura Bowen Smiley, November 1, 1981.

[13]Interview with Betty G. Hopkins Mason, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, December 3, 1981.

[14]Interview with Jeni Dennis Jackson, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, February 21, 1981. Jackson was inspired to enter nursing after studying about Mary Mahoney, the first Black female to graduate from a school of nursing.

[15]Interview with Ira Hall, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, March 15, 1980. As reported earlier, ninety-four of the ninety-seven Black high schools were managed by Black males. Hall reported Black female principals at Holdenville, McAlester and Chandler, Oklahoma.

females from pursuing certifications for elementary school management. For example, Ruby Collins Fleming was among the first group of Black women in Oklahoma City to serve as a teaching principal of an elementary school. After being displaced in 1958, she was temporarily assigned as an administrative assistant at Moon Junior High School. When the Oklahoma City School Board decided to open the Carter G. Woodson Elementary School in 1959-60, she was given the responsibility of managing the school, but not the title of principal. In the meantime, Mrs. Fleming approached the director of personnel about an appointment as principal of Moon Junior High School. He told her that he did not want a woman at Moon as principal.[16] Later, she accepted the principalship at the Carter G. Woodson Elementary School.

Although career patterns were slowly changing, Black women were given little recognition for their accomplishments in their respective communities and the state. In 1950 three women, N.B. Dillion, L.E. Gandy and Rita Goodwin, were listed among twenty-nine outstanding Blacks in America. According to the crietria for selection if is evident that many Black women were overlooked. For example, Ruby C. Fleming, was among the first group of Black female school administrators in Oklahoma City; Willa A. Strong, one of the three Black female principals of a high school;

---

[16]Interview with Rubye Collins Fleming, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, February 22, 1982.

[17]G. James Fleming and Christian E. Burckel eds., Who's Who In Colored America (Yonkers N.Y.: Christian E. Burckel and Association, 1950) p. 631. The following is stated as a criteria for selection: 1) "those whose level of position would automatically include them, and 2) those whose personal achievement and learning, unique experience or association, public following activity in public interest, or leadership position, make them the kind of persons about whom others may have importtant reason to know more." p. iv. A review of the volume did not clarify whether entries were nominated by others or made applications personality. If the former is true, hundreds of Black females were overlooked.

Johnson, executive director of the Urban League of Oklahoma City, and many others were omitted.[17]

The passage of Brown vs. The Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas, the 1964 Civil Rights Act, and the equal opportunity concept combined to broaden career opportunities for Black women. However, the situation was not entirely pleasant. For example, hundreds of Black teachers lost their jobs as a result of school desegregation — the majority of whom were women.[18] At the same time, Black female college students were selecting careers other than teaching. For many of them, the choice not to teach was based on the treatment given Black teachers during school desegregation. Beverly Porter Hale stated: "My family wanted me to teach but I had other goals. I had an ambition to become a mathematician. When I went to college I majored in Speech Pathology: I wanted to work in a hospital or clinic as a pathologist ... I wanted to do anything but teach."[19] Still others took the "double preparation approach," that is being prepared in more than one field. Julia Seward Anderson set a goal to own and operate her own real estate firm while in college. Rather than risk her entire future on one area, she chose teacher preparation as her type of double preparation.[20]

---

[18]See Evelyn Richardson Strong, "Historical Development of the Oklahoma Association of Negro Teachers: A Study in Social Change," Mary C. Moon, "Frederick Douglas Moon: A Study of Black Education in Oklahoma," Gene Aldrich, Black Heritage of Oklahoma, Jimmie Lewis Franklin, The Blacks In Oklahoma and Kaye M. Teall, Black History In Oklahoma: A Resource Book.

[19]Interview with Beverly Porter Hale, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, January 10, 1982.

[20]Interview with Julia Seward Anderson, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, December 21, 1981.

[21]Interview with LaRuth Maloy Cunningham, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, December 12, 1981.

LaRuth Maloy Cunningham never had a desire to teach. As a college business major, she had the ambition to work in private industry.[21] These and similiar choices were made by Black females during the early 1960's.

During the late 1960's and early 1970's Black females were involved in numerous non-traditional careers.[22] Title IX of the Civil Rights Act and the affirmative action concept mandated the inclusion and/or hiring of females in non-traditional jobs, especially those having leadership and supervisory skills.[23] Many Black women were appointed to positions to meet organizational quotas in school systems and private industry. During this same period, Hannah Diggs Atkins became the first Black female to serve in the Oklahoma House of Representatives. Freddie Williams became the first Black female member of the Oklahoma City Board of Education. These women had a strong commitment to expend their energies where policy and laws were made as a means of preventing further discrimination.

Since statehood (1907) Oklahoma Black women had a zeal for a variety of careers. Organizations such as the Federation of Colored Women's Clubs provided a source of stimulation and encouragement to Black women aspiring for careers. Women of the various clubs combined to improve

---

[22]Thomas Sowell, ed., Essays and Data On American Ethnic Groups, (Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute, 1981), pp. 281-282.

[23]See "Career Patterns of Female and Male Administrators In Oklahoma Secondary Public Schools Including Administrative Assistants To The Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent," Mae Frances Nolan, unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Oklahoma, 1981.

[24]See Strong, "The Origin Development and Current Status of the Oklahoma Federation of Colored Women's Clubs."

the conditions for Blacks by supporting the first Black community library, and a state institution for Black orphans at Taft, Oklahoma.[24] These moves did not occur without problems nor incident. For example, some disgruntled Black men protested the club movement.[25]

In later years, Black women with career aspirations other than teaching continued to be met with adversity. Those aspiring to become accountants, social workers, lawyers and so forth had to leave the state for preparation. Once they received training, job availability was scarce, which forced many of them to transfer their residency to other states. Some of them were not even accepted in other states; their qualifications were questioned, and in most instances, Black women had to prove themselves as capable to White and Black males. For instance, Jeni Dennis Jackson experienced an intense screening process in order to be accepted for nursing school.[26] Frequently it appeared that Black men with weak leadership skills were placed in administrative jobs, while Black women with superior skills were overlooked.[27]

Finally, a small number of Black women are employed as school administrators, supervisors, college instructors and, in a few isolated cases, as school superintendents. Even so, Black women still found co-workers and members of the community questioning their credibility and integrity. Some were given tasks thought to be impossible by their superiors. Once the task is accomplised, acceptance is grudgingly granted.

---

[25]Ibid.

[26]Interview with Jeni Dennis Jackson, February 18, 1981.

[27]Interview with Rubye Collins Fleming, February 22, 1982.

This was the situations of the Black woman in Oklahoma, especially those in non-traditional careers.

Conclusions

An objective analysis of the data used in this study shed much light on the stated problem and questions.

As an educator, Willa A. Strong employed efforts which made a definite impact on the education of Black youth under a system of segregation. Such matters as inequity in financing and facilities served as an impetus rather than an obstacle for Willa. Adverse environmental and employment conditons challenged her to use ingenuity and creativity in order to motivate Black youth to achieve and even exceed their academic potential.

Willa's educational philosophy is summarized in her frequently used phrase: Be somebody. The statement communicated to youth the need to set realistic educational goals in preparation for their future as productive citizens. She also set high levels of aspiration for her students, insisting on high academic achievement, friendly competition, social interaction through extra curricular activities, acceptable behavior, and the development of a positive self-image. She and the student body shared a mutual respect which led to high morale characterized by enthusiastic school spirit and considerable school pride.

As an administrator, Willa sought to bring about solidarity and a high level of professionalism. Relatedly, she encouraged creativity and innovation from the faculty. She was concerned about the problems of her teachers and she tried to help them resolve problems through the democratic process. Furthermore, as a teaching administrator she modeled good teaching by preparing course syllibi with established goals and objectives

Which allowed for individual differences. No substitute for excellence was accepted from gifted students and those less gifted also were expected to achieve up to their potential. Neither economic status nor home environment was perceived by Willa as being an acceptable excuse for not trying to achieve one's potential. In fact, extra efforts were made to insure that these students achieved in spite of their limitations.

Willa and her teachers were active in civic and community affairs. The student body also was encouraged to become active in such affairs. This type of interaction allowed the students to see their teachers in roles outside the classroom. Concurrently, the community respected and supported the school, and the school respected and supported the community. Within this structure, parents supported the school and insisted that students follow the academic and behavioral standards set by the school. Therefore, the school, parents and the community combined as positive forces in the education of Black children.

As a Black female administrator, Willa ranked high among her male dominated peers. She provided additional proof that, depending on the person, females were capable and equally qualified for leadership. This occurred thirty years before the concept of equality for women became a national priority. Her position as principal communicated to Black males and females alike that leadership was not limited to or confined to gender. It was clearly evident that the female Willa was capable of managing the school in all areas. There were few discipline problems with the students that Willa did not resolve in a one-to-one counseling session. Financially, she managed her budget in a way that provided a superior educational program for the students. Furthermore, she was aggressive and did not hesitate to make requests to the superintendent and Board of Education.

The role model and examples set by Willa and others stimulated Black females to pursue careers outside of education. Legislative laws, the will to achieve, and the courage to pursue fields outside of education led Black females to pursue careers in government, medicine, social service, and private industry. Perhaps this kind of stimulation would not have been possible without the concrete evidence of role models.

Since 1975 L'Ouverture graduates have assembled every three years for a national reunion as a tribute to their school. The gathering is a symbol of gratitude and appreciation for the principal, staff and the school. These graduates are a living legend of the humanitarian and educational values promoted through the school. Among them are lawyers, chemists, college professors, managers, superivors, departmental directors, a number of school personnel, and owner-operators of businesses. L'Ouverture alumni are productive citizens who make a significant contribution to society in "spite of the system" through which their education was attained.

Finally, the careers and levels of achievement among L'Ouverture graduates and graduates of other all Black secondary institutions serve to question the belief that these institutions were inferior. In fact, the opposite may have been true. Rather than feel inferior or defeated, the "system" encouraged an attitude of superiority and a stronger will to achieve. While this double-standard of acceptance created an additional burden for some, Black students, developed the qualities of high tolerance, tenacity, resourcefulness and positive self image. The more determined students were willing to undertake almost any task and they became life time learners -- community leaders and productive employees.

Presently, many Black educators, especially those from the

separate school era, are concerned whether Black students in the present system of education are experiencing or being taught the skills to survive the desegregated system. Many are concerned about the discrepancies of students being led to believe and to buy into a system of equality when there is a distinct difference between democratic principles and community practice.

Recommendations

In a pluralistic school system, there is a need for teachers to become aware of traditional learning characteristics of various ethnic groups. The successful techniques used by Black teachers which enabled Black youngsters to achieve success during segregated schools should be studied and incorporated in the teaching process. Elements such as high-expectancy levels, group-learning, interactive and communication processes assist in learning. Equally important is self and community identity. There is an urgent need for additional research which clearly demonstrates and substantiates the positive factors used in all-Black schools. If educators are concerned and committed to equal educational opportunity, this need should be fulfilled immediately.

Additional research and documentation of the significant contributions of Black women is imperative. Although few opportunities to observe Black female role models are available in integrated school systems, these opportunities should not be lost. There is an immediacy for researchers to dig deeper into the "Black experience" which did not end with the Emancipation Proclamation.

SOURCES CONSULTED

Books

Aldrich Gene. Black Heritage of Oklahoma. Edmond, Oklahoma: Thompson Book and Supply Company, 1973.

Anderson, Margaret. The Children of The South. New York: Dell Publishing Company, Inc., A Delta Book, 1967.

Armour, David. On The Equality of Educational Opportunity. New York: Random House, 1972.

Banks, James A. March Toward Freedom: A History of Black Americans. Belmont, California: Ferron Publishers, 1970.

Bergman, Peter M. The Chronological History of The Negro In America. New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1969.

Blachly, Frederick and Oatman Marian E. Government of Oklahoma. Oklahoma City: Harlow Publishing Company, 1924.

Blackwell, James E. The Black Community: Diversity and Unity. New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1975.

Bontemps, Anna. 100 Years of Negro Freedom. New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1961.

Brazziel, William F. Quality Education For All Americans.

Cade, Toni, ed. The Black Woman. New Jersey: The New American Library, Inc., 1970.

Clark, Kenneth B. Dark Ghetto: Dilemmas of Social Power. New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1975.

Dale Edward E. and Wardell, Morris L. A History of Oklahoma. New York: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1968.

Daniel, Sadie Iola. Women Builders. Washington: The Associated Publishers, Inc., 1931.

DeBo, Angie. Oklahoma: Foot-Loose and Fancy Free. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1949.

Fellman, David., ed. The Supreme Court and Education. Richmond Va: William Byrd Press, Inc., 1968.

Franklin, Jimmie Lewis. The Blacks In Oklahoma. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980.

Franklin, John Hope. From Slavery To Freedom: A History of Negro Americans. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1947.

Fleming, G. James and Burckel, Christian E., eds. Who's Who In Colored America. Yonkers: Christian E. Burckel and Associates, 1950.

Harlow, Victor E. Oklahoma: Its Origin and Development. Oklahoma City: Harlow Publishing Co., 1934.

Henderson, George. To Live In Freedom: Human Relations Today and Tomorrow. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971.

Johnson, James Weldon. Negro Americans What Now? New York: AMS Press, 1971.

Jones, Faustine Childress. A Traditional Model of Educational Excellence: Dunbar High School of Little Rock Arkansas. Washington: Harvard University Press, 1981.

Jones, Lance G.E. The Jeanes Teachers In The United States 1908-1933. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, Press, 1937.

Kenesaw, Landis. Segregation In Washington: A Report To The Nations Capital. Chicago, 1948.

King, Martin Luther. Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story. New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1964.

Klausmeir, Herbert J. Teaching In The Secondary School. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1958.

Lerna Gerda, ed. Black Women in White America: A Documentary History. New York: Vintage Books, 1972.

Litton, Gaston. History of Oklahoma at The Golden Anniversary of Statehood Vol. I-II. New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Co., 1957.

Miller, Lamar P. and Gordon, Edmond P. Equality of Educational Opportunity: A Handbook for Research. New York: AMS Press, 1974.

Noble, Jeanne L. The Negro Woman's College Education. New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1956.

Pifer, Alan. The Higher Education of Blacks In The United States. New York: Carnegie Corporation, 1964.

Rose-Rodgers, LaFrances, ed. The Black Woman. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications Inc., 1980.

Scanzoni, John H. The Black Family In Modern Society. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1974.

Selltiz, Clare, Jahoda, M.; Deutsch, M, and Cook, Stuart. Research Methods in Social Relations. New York: Holt Pinehart and Winston, 1951.

Smitherman, Geneva. Talkin and Testifyin: The Language of Black America. Boston: Houghton Mufflin Company, 1977.

Sowell, Thomas, ed. Essays and Data on American Ethnic Groups. Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute, 1980.

Teal, Kaye M. Black History In Oklahoma: A Resource Book. Oklahoma City: Oklahoma City Public Schools, 1971.

Tolson, Arthur L. The Black Oklahomans: A History - 1541-1972. New Orleans: Edwards Printing Press, 1972.

Weber, Christian O. Basic Philosophies of Education. New York: Holt, Rhinehart and Winston, 1960.

Weinberg, Meyer. Desegregation Research: An Appraisal. Bloomington, Indiana: Phi Delta Kappa Commission, 1968.

West Earle H. The Black American and Education. Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Co., 1972.

Woodson, Carter G. Negro Makers of History. Washington, D.C.: The Associated Publishers, 1928.

Wright, Nathan, Jr. What Black Educators Are Saying. New York: Hawthorne Books, Inc. 1970.

Writers Program of The Works Project Administration. Oklahoma: A Guide to The Sooner State. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1942.

Young , Whitney M., Jr. Beyond Racism: Building an Open Society. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1968.

INTERVIEWS

Anderson, Julia Seward. Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Interviews, March 7, 1977; March 11 - May 11, 1978; December 12, 1981.

Anderson, Thelma Lawson. McAlester, Oklahoma. Interviews, August 15, 1975; February 10, 1977; March 14-17, 1978; September 14, 15, 19, 1979; October 10, 1979, April 15, 1977; May 15, 1979.

Brown, Helen. Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Interview, January 27, 1980.

Boxley, Helen J. Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Interview, January 2, 1977.

Brown, Wyolene Wilson. Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Interview, November 1, 1981.

Cunningham, LaRuth Maloy. Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Interview, December 21, 1981.

Fowler, Larcell. Lehigh, Oklahoma. Interview, November 25, 1978.

Fleming, Dorothy. McAlester, Oklahoma. Interview, September 30, 1978.

Fleming Rubye Collins. Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Interview, February 22, 1982.

Hale, Beverly Porter. Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Interview, January 10, 1982.

Hall, Ira D. Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Interviews, October 2-10, March 15, 1980.

Hall Rubye Hibler. Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Interview, October 2, 1980.

Jackson, Jeni Dennis. Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Interview, February 2, 1981.

Jones, Reubelle. McAlester, Oklahoma. Interview, August 15, 1975.

Mason, Betty G. Hopkins. Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, Interview, December 3, 1981.

Miller, Gwendolyn Fleming. San Joe, California. Interviews, June 16, 1978; July 8, 1978.

Mitchell, Bessie. Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Interview, May 12, 1978.

Moore, Josephine. Fresno, California. Interview, March 12, 1981.

Pleasant, Paralee. Atoka, Oklahoma. Interview, December 8, 1980.

Richardson, Jeraldean Hayes. Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Interview, February 10, 1978; July 20, 1978.

Seward, Walter E., Jr. Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Interviews, April 15, 1977; May 17, 1977.

Shaw, Thelma South. McAlester, Oklahoma, Interviews, October 7, 1977; May 12, 1979.

Smiley, Laura Bowen. Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Interview, November 1, 1981.

Strong, Ruth J. Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Interviews, January 9-11, 1977; April 14, 1977; November 11-19, 1977; February 2, 1978; September 12-20, 1978; May 5-10, 1977; June 6, 1978; May 12, 1979.

Tilford, Kermit. Sapulpa, Oklahoma. Interviews, September 9, 1977; May 28, 1977.

Thomas, Charles C. New York, New York. Interview, July 20, 1978.

Thompson, Jessee B. Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Interviews, May 24, 1977; March 22, 1978; June 3, 1978.

Watts, Wade. McAlester, Oklahoma. Interviews, March 15, 1978; April 4, 1978.

Wickham, Pearl Whittaker. McAlester, Oklahoma. Interviews, September 9, 1977; December 18-19, 1977.

Wrenn, Joel Porter. Kansas City, Missouri. Interview, July 10, 1978.

L'Ouverture Alumni Reunion. McAlester, Oklahoma. Interviews held with various alumni, August, 1975.

L'Ouverture Alumni Reunion. McAlester, Oklahoma. Interviews held with various alumni, July 1978.

PROCEEDINGS

McAlester Board of Education, Minutes of the August Monthly Meeting. McAlester, Oklahoma, 1924.

McAlester Board of Education, Minutes of the February meeting. McAlester, Oklahoma, 1938.

McAlester Board of Education, Minutes of the Meeting. McAlester, Oklahoma, May 10, 1954.

McAlester Board of Education, Minutes of the June Meeting. McAlester, Oklahoma, June 14, 1954.

McAlester Board of Education, Minutes of the Meeting. McAlester, Oklahoma, June 12, 1967.

McAlester Board of Education, Minutes of the Meeting. McAlester, Oklahoma, December 11, 1967.

McAlester Board of Education, Minutes of the Meeting. McAlester, Oklahoma, April 14, 1968.

REPORTS

State Superintendent of Public Instruction. Annual Report. A report to the State of Oklahoma Department of Education: 1912.

State Superintendent of Public Instruction. Eighth Biennial Report. A report to the State of Oklahoma Department of Education: 1920.

State Superintendent of Public Instruction. Thirteenth Biennial Report. A report to the State of Oklahoma Department of Education: 1929-30.

State Superintendent of Public Instruction. Sixteenth Biennial Report. A report to the State of Oklahoma Department of Education: 1934.

State Superintendent of Public Instruction. Eighteenth Biennial Report. A report to the State of Oklahoma Department of Education: 1940.

U.S. Bureau of Education. Secondary Education For Negroes. A report to the U.S. Department of Education: 1932.

U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. Racial Isolation In The Public Schools: A report to the President of the United States: 1967.

U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. Fulfilling The Letter and Spirit of The Law: Desegregation of The Nations Public Schools: A report to the President of The United States: 1976.

Oklahoma State Legislative Council. Summary and General Recommendations to the Interim and Education Committee. A report to the Interim Committee: 1948.

SPEECHES

Height, Dorothy I. "Keynote Speech." National Conference of Colored Women: Washington, D.C.: November, 1963.

Ruffin, Josephine St. Piere. "The Beginnings of The National Club Movement." First National Conference: Washington, D.C.: 1895.

Strong, Willa A. "Current Challenges in Child Development." Parent Teacher Assocation Meeting: McAlester, Oklahoma, 1966.

Strong, Willa A. "The Quest For Self." Southeastern Oklahoma State College: Durant, Oklahoma: 1964.

Strong, Willa A. "The Challenge of the PTA." PTA Meeting: McAlester, Oklahoma: 1965.

ARTICLES

Archland, Henry. "Are These Great Teachers?" Educational Research Quartedly. (Spring 76)

Arnez, Nancy Levi. "Desegregation of Public Schools: A Discriminatory Process." The Journal of Afro-American Issues. (Winter 76).

Balyeat, Frank A. "Segregation in The Public Schools of Oklahoma Territory." Chronicles of Oklahoma. (Spring 61)

Banks, James A. "The Destruction Of Black Schools: An American Tragedy." Educational Leadership. 30 (December, 72): 269-271.

Banks, Samuel and Harris, June. "A Bicentennial Challenge." Negro History Bulletin. (April, 76); 580-581.

Baxter, Katherine B.: Cosby, J.R. and May, Frances. "What We've Been Through Is The Introduction." Integrated Education. 22 (November-December 74): 28-31.

Frelow, Robert D. "Minority Administrators and Desegregation." Integrated Education. 21 (May-June 73): 27-29.

Gardner, Booker T. "The Educational Contributions of Booker T. Washington." The Journal Of Negro Education. 44 (Fall, 75): 502-518.

Homel, Michael. "Race and Schools In Nineteenth-Century Chicago." Integrated Education. 22 (September-October, 74): 39-42.

Littleford, Michael S. "Case Study Of A Desegregation Administrative Policy Upon A Social Subsystem." The Journal Of Negro Education. 42 (Spring 73): 170-175.

Middlebrooks, Bruce A. "A Principal Humanizes His School." Peabody Journal Of Education. 53 (October, 75): 24-26.

Johnson, Joe S. "The Challenge." The Journal of The Oklahoma Association of Negro Teachers. (July 55).

Nesbitt, Paul. "J.J. McAlester." Chronicles of Oklahoma. (Spring 33).

Strong, Willa A. "Activities of The Schools." The Journal of The Oklahoma Association of Negro Teachers. (May 42.)

NEWSPAPERS

Daily Capitol, South McAlester Indian Territory, 9 April, 1887.

Daily Oklahoman, 2 February, 1948; 3 September, 1958; 9 November, 1961; 20 October, 1963.

Black Dispatch, 1-17 June, 1921; 3 May, 1923; 9 September, 1923; 24 September, 1925; 12 November, 1925; 18 February, 1926; 13 March, 1943; 6 February, 1948; 3 September, 1958; 19 November, 1961.

Muskogee Cemiter, 2 June, 1904; 13 September, 1906.

Norman Transcript, 9 November, 1889.

Oklahoma Guide, 23 June 1902.

Little Dixie Visitor, 7 May, 1953.

Washington Bee, July 1889.

St. Louis Globe Democrat, 11 March, 1980.

UNPUBLISHED MATERIALS

Hatcher, Ollie F. "The Development of Legal Controls In Racial Segregation in the Public Schools of Oklahoma, 1865-1952." Ph.D dissertation, University of Oklahoma, 1954.

Moon, F.D. "Organization and Administration of Accredited Secondary Schools for Negroes in Oklahoma." Masters Thesis, University of Chicago, 1938.

Moon, Mary C. "Frederick Douglass Moon: A Study of Black Education in Oklahoma." Ed.D dissertation, University of Oklahoma, 1978.

Nolan, Mae Frances. "Career Patterns of Female and Male Administrators In Oklahoma Secondary Public Schools Including Administrative Assistants to the Superintendent and Assistant Superintendents." Ph.D dissertation, University of Oklahoma, 1981.

Saxe, Alan. "Protest and Reform: The Desegregation of Oklahoma City." Ph.D dissertation, University of Oklahoma, 1969.

Strong. Willa A. "The Origin, Development and Current Status of the Oklahoma Federation of Colored Women's Clubs. Ed.D dissertation, University of Oklahoma, 1957.

Strong, Willa Allegra. "Criteria of Effective Supervision and their Application To A Supervisory Program For A School In McAlester, Oklahoma." Paper presented to Professor Paul B. Jacobson, University of Chicago: Chicago, Illinois, September, 1942.

YEARBOOKS

The Eagle Yearbook. L'Ouverture High School, McAlester, 1953.

L'Ouverture Alumni Second Reunion Handbook. L'Ouverture Alumni Association, McAlester, 1978.

The L'Ouverture Heritage: 1907-1968. L'Ouverture High School, McAester, 1968.

The Eagle Yearbook. L'Ouverture High School, McAlester, 1966.

McAlester City Directory, Vol. II. St. Paul: R.L. Polk and Company, 1914-1915.

Rosenwald School Day Program, Memorial Edition. Oklahoma City: State Department of Public Instruction, 1932.

L'Ouverture First Reunion Handbook. L'Ouverture Alumni Association, 1975.

The Program. The Oklahoma Association of Negro Teachers, 1951.

A Look at Your Schools. McAlester Public Schools, 1958.