OKLAHOMA CITY'S JAMES 'JIMMY' E. STEWART: TWENTIETH CENTURY RACE PROGRESS IN THE SOONER STATE AND BEYOND

by

STACY MICHELLE REIKOWSKY

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THESIS APPROVAL

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COMMITTEE APPROVALS:

Dr. Jere Roberson, Ph.D.
Committee Chairperson

Dr. Kenny Brown, Ph.D.
Committee Member

Dr. Xiao-Bing Li, Ph.D.
Committee Member

ABSTRACT OF THESIS

University of Central Oklahoma

Edmond, Oklahoma

NAME: Stacy Michelle Reikowsky

TITLE OF THESIS: Oklahoma City's James "Jimmy" E. Stewart: Twentieth Century Race Progress in the Sooner State and Beyond.

DIRECTOR OF THESIS: Dr. Jere Roberson, Ph.D.

ABSTRACT: James "Jimmy" E. Stewart developed his abilities to influence people and applied diplomatic skills to create the social, cultural, and political networks that, over time, improved the lives of black Americans in Oklahoma and the nation. Recognizing the need for basic human equality, Stewart committed his efforts and struggled for black civil rights throughout the twentieth century. He also understood that the connections to more prominent and influential individuals were vital to his mission and believed in the people and associations who held the power to generate change.

Stewart originally founded his progressive ideas in Oklahoma; where after, he gained national attention with multiple achievements. His contacts with well-known citizens spanned an array of important leaders in the military, schools, and job markets. Stewart's associations with those having social and political clout helped him quickly step into a leadership role, thereby positioning him as a valuable figure who unpretentiously established new, far-reaching, and long-lasting institutions for black Americans.

An examination of Stewart's life not only establishes his contributions to the social, economic, and educational advancements of black Oklahomans, but also adds to an overall understanding of civil struggles compared to developments in other states. Race progress in surrounding states reflected numerous points of contention with unrelenting courtroom battles, disorderly and violent protest, and even public displays of punishment and exercise of power. Although Oklahoma was not without examples of lynching and riots during the twentieth century, the state's part in civil rights history developed with far less militant demonstrations.

Stewart carefully pushed an optimistic black agenda in areas that staunchly excluded black involvement and scored victories for Oklahomans. Stewart did so in such a socially and politically sensitive way that more publicly bold events overshadowed his early work for civil justice and race equality. By examining his archival collection of personal letters, documents, and activities, Stewart's contributions to achieving equal right become clear. Furthermore, both black and white-oriented newspapers also help outline his place in race history.

Stewart lived during a time of risk where black activism was not always popular and often problematic. Still, he resolutely coupled his inner strength with powerful ideals and developed a markedly effective approach to fighting for black justice and race progress. Because of his ability to balance his skills, connections, and leadership options, Stewart achieved success for blacks within specific fundamental social, cultural, political, and economic sectors throughout America during a racially tumultuous twentieth century; all the while promoting a personal brand of non-militant civil and human rights advancement.

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FORWARD

In order to help the reader understand the culture of Oklahoma and conceptualize twentieth century race progress, the author of this thesis uses the term “black” throughout the work instead of “African American” in deference to the expressed and clear preference of black Oklahomans of all ages.

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Introduction

Throughout his life, James "Jimmy" E. Stewart sought to improve the lives of black Americans by using diplomatic methods and creating social, cultural, and political networks. Rather than violent confrontation and aggression, he used an assertive, proactive, and personal strategy to achieve his goals. The ongoing desire for basic human equality drove Stewart's commitment to the struggle for black civil rights and kept his agenda moving forward.

Stewart undertook his efforts first in Oklahoma, but gained national attention, while his networks with key leaders aided each of his efforts. Vital to his mission for improvement, Stewart understood the importance of connections with prominent and influential people. He believed strong associations with both white and black leaders could generate change in areas critical to black advancement. His contacts with well-known people included lawmakers, governors, military officers, and journalistic personnel, many of whom also operated at the national level.[1] As a result, he positioned himself as a figure crucial in establishing new, far-reaching, and long lasting institutions for black Americans.

Stewart knew what his alliances could do for the people who needed it most. In order to ensure the sustainability of his movement, he built strong relationships based on respect and sensitivity to race-related issues. A unique signature, diplomatic, unpretentious approach emerged as Stewart acted with determination and compassion rather than with militant, outspoken rebellions. His character and methods of achieving

[1] "Correspondence," folder 1, box 2, James E. Stewart Collection, Research Center, Oklahoma History Center, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. (Hereafter, "Document Title," folder, box, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma History Center.)

success maintain a wider market appeal. His actions demonstrate an unparalleled quality of upliftment for blacks still fighting the effects of long-term, systematic discrimination. Moreover, Stewart's lifelong dedication to black advancement contributes to an existing articulation of race progress in twentieth-century American history.

The term race progress characterizes the twentieth century movement of black rights, opportunity, and ideology away from notions of their subservience found in previous centuries. Many historians, journalists, and political pundits define race as a social construct based on physical traits, yet also as a category developed through centuries of social practice, law, politics, and history. In conditions specific to Stewart, he was born early in a century when blacks had already begun a struggle away from the historical trappings of slavery, oppression, and inferior citizenship. Like Stewart, many blacks fought to develop personal identities of race, culture, and class where there had been none before. Blacks held tightly to a desire to define an individual and equal position in the white American infrastructure. They also wanted to enhance the position of their race, social standing, financial comfort, and diminish unchecked racism; all of which refers to race progress in the context of this work. However, blacks discovered that their forward movement in all of these areas faced a steep climb wrought in resistance.

An examination of Stewart's life recognizes his contributions to the social, economic, and educational advancements of black Oklahomans. It also adds to an overall understanding of civil struggles compared to developments other states. Race progress in adjoining states like Arkansas and Texas reflected numerous points of contention with unrelenting courtroom battles, disorderly and violent protest, public displays of

punishment, and exercise of power in the form of inhumane lynching.[2] By the beginning of the twentieth century, central Oklahoma and Oklahoma City were home to extensive, albeit segregated, black communities with substantial populations.[3] Often unavoidable, everyday interaction between whites and blacks created potentially vicious situations in populated urban areas. Although whites in the state sometimes lynched Native Americans, whites, and blacks, Oklahoma was not typical of other southern states.

The historiography of the black experience in Oklahoma and Stewart's methods provide some explanation for the state's more orderly racial transition. As a black American, who grew up in the heart of Oklahoma City,[4] Stewart experienced the pains of living in a segregated community while being the object of white ridicule. He also saw the disappointing results of violent rebellion and race riots both inside and outside Oklahoma. During such highly controversial times, his stylized approach to achieving risky liberal goals transcended the fiercely confrontational methods often exercised in other states. He rose beyond the demeaning hostility and unsatisfactory results of other belligerent approaches. Therefore, a biography of Stewart shows how he molded his persona and placid democratic proscriptions into a positive, forceful, and successful example of race progress. More importantly, it also shows how Oklahoma experienced a markedly less volatile racial transition throughout the mid to late twentieth century.

In addition, a chronological overview of Stewart's life will provide a timetable of his movements through the twentieth century and can be referenced during the later

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[2] Jimmie L. Franklin, "Black Oklahomans: An Essay on the Quest for Freedom," Davis D. Joyce, ed. *Alternative Oklahoma: Contraire views of the Sooner State,*)Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007), 64.
[3] Sharon Jessee, "The Contrapuntal Histography of Toni Morrison's Paradise: Unpacking the Legacies of the Kansas and Oklahoma All-Black Towns," *American Studies* 47 (2006): 81.
[4] "Jimmy Stewart's Autobiographical Papers," folder 1, box 1, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma History Center.

topical discussions contained within this work. Born September 16, 1916, in Plano, Texas, Stewart and his family moved to Oklahoma City shortly after his Reverend father found work for a local black congregation. After his father passed when Stewart was eight, his older brother and sister left to live with relatives while he and his mother stayed in Oklahoma City.

As a young boy in Oklahoma, Stewart attended elementary and junior high school at Orchard Park in Oklahoma City. He spent his freshman and sophomore years at Douglass High School, also in the city, before moving with his mother to Wichita, Kansas, in 1928 during his junior year to live with his older sister. He played football during his time at Wichita High School North and graduated in 1929 with an athletic scholarship waiting for him back in Oklahoma City at Langston University (LU).

Stewart attended LU for only one year in 1930 before meeting his wife and moving on to seek full-time employment and support his beginning family. Throughout the 1930s, he worked a variety of service jobs that included being a waiter at the Biltmore Hotel in downtown Oklahoma City. While at the Biltmore, he caught the attention of employers at the Oklahoma Natural Gas (ONG) company. Officials soon offered Stewart a job that he readily accepted in 1937.

Shortly after starting work at ONG, Stewart began to write an editorial column, "Jimmy Says," for Roscoe Dunjee's *Black Dispatch* in 1938. He continued to contribute his column for nearly four decades until it last appeared in 1979. Meanwhile, Stewart increased his presence within local black civil circles, including the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and became the President of the Oklahoma City branch from 1942 until 1959.

However, he had to place his presidency on hold when he volunteered for service as a Marine Corps Reserve and enlisted in 1942. The Stewarts had two children while serving as a Montford Point Marine at Camp Lejeune in North Carolina and stayed on active duty with the reserves until honorably discharged 1946. He returned home to Oklahoma City and resumed his civilian life as NAACP branch president, ONG employee, and writer for the *Black Dispatch*.

Throughout the 1950s, '60s, and '70s Stewart continued to increase his progressive activities. He participated in numerous civil rights demonstrations, law suits, and public speaking engagements, including the desegregation of public building in Oklahoma City and the Ada Lois Sipuel-Fisher case. He continued to write and generate black awareness and served on many local councils focusing on black rights and community interests. Throughout the decades, he also pursued an interest in developing better black cultural and historical resources in Oklahoma.

By the beginning of the 1980s, after his retirement from ONG in 1977 and final column in the *Black Dispatch* in 1979, Stewart began traveling to speaking invitations and industry consultations extended by national energy companies across the nation. In 1982, council members elected him Chairman of the Urban Renewal Authority where he continued to develop new policies and opportunities for blacks in education, energy, and employment.

By all accounts, Stewart stayed active in the community and kept close contact with his private and public associates until his passing on April 17, 1997 at the age of 85. Although never completed, evidence suggests he was working on an autobiography

throughout the 1990s. His last written work reflects Stewart's enduring spirit and strong commitment to black understanding and advancement.

Having established the timeframe for Stewart's operations, the turbulent racial, social, cultural, and political climates of his time affected the historiographical evolution of scholarship and literature addressing the black American experience. In fact, Stewart kept a personal collection of publications centering on various aspects of racial history.[5] His book selection indicates a desire to supplement his knowledge of black history. It also shows an effort to understand the evolving black experience within Oklahoma and the nation during his lifetime. Still, the white perspective dominates much of Stewart's selected literature as it did with early historical accounts.

By standing out as one of the first publications from the black view of race and history, W.E.B. DuBois's scholarship correlates with Stewart's interests and later actions. DuBois's seminal work, *The Tragedy of Jim Crow*, published in 1923, challenged the traditional mainstream white accounts. Because it was an unprecedented work published from the black perspective, the book served as an influential factor in the black struggle for justice. With his pen, DuBois became among the first to denounce Jim Crow legislation and point out the detrimental effects the racist laws had on the development of schools.[6] He writes a potent thesis that addressed the pervasive existence of segregated schools and the resulting discrepancies in funding between white and black institutions. Stewart later likewise expressed many of the same thoughts about black education, but with his tailored temperate approach. As one who also experienced the injustices of Jim Crow and the struggle to break free from them, Stewart simply wrote, "Do unto

[5] Collection of 22 Published Books, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma Historical Center.
[6] W.E.B. DuBois, *The Tragedy of Jim Crow*, (New York: Crisis Publishing Co., 1923), 25.

others…That's about all I ask for and demand throughout the years."[7] Although humbly written, the implications of both men's beliefs were as significant to reaching their goals as they were for continued race progress.

Like Stewart's later challenges to the white-dominated institutions, DuBois takes his argument beyond the restrictions of educational conflicts. He does so by targeting the political and legalized harassment that black communities experienced in education and employment opportunities. Despite the social turmoil through which DuBois and Stewart operated, their ideas created a strong public foothold in their respective communities. Based on their explicit arguments against the lasting impressions of the Jim Crow discrimination, their work heralded a new era for black progress.

Stewart took ideas from a variety of spheres and created his own distinctive values for success. As a result, he developed an ideology of black thought that paralleled the thoughts of other early black historians. Although similar in views, but differing in approach to DuBois, Booker T. Washington generated black scholarship that served as the foundation for future contemporary pieces. To all three men, Jim Crow legislation represented a social and economic degradation of race progress. The laws not only increased the difficulties of the black struggle, but also discouraged their wider notion of black freedom. Contrary to Dubois, but much in the same vein as Stewart's later approach to change, Washington maintained a social philosophy that outlined a concept of self-reliance based upon hard work. He coupled his ideas with a strong belief in the power of the United States Constitution and its function for the protection of blacks.[8]

[7] "Letter from Jimmy Stewart," folder 1, box , Stewart Collection, Oklahoma History Center.
[8] Booker T. Washington, *Up from Slavery*, (New York: Doubleday, Page, & Company, 1919), 42.

First published in 1901, Washington's autobiography, *Up From Slavery,* illustrates the multiple factors that influenced his work and more astute approach to black progress. His more discreet thoughts also appealed to a widespread audience than earlier fights for black justice. Many criticized him for his more conservative approach, believing that it undermined his ultimate desire for racial equality. Still, Washington's work stands as a strong written testament that first allowed blacks to publicly attack racism. Additionally, *Up From Slavery* provided a backdrop for the fight against the restrictive legislation that kept blacks down long after the Emancipation Proclamation declared them free. Some blacks may have found the more passive ideas of Washington and Stewart too slow in getting satisfactory results. Nevertheless, both shared the like-minded methods that achieved sustained race progress in the United States. Stewart once drove his point home in a letter to the mayor of Oklahoma City by quoting Washington when he stated, "You can't keep a man down in a ditch, unless you stay down there with him."[9] Furthermore, their works encouraged greater divergence in black scholarship from traditional white interpretations.

Unfortunately for both Stewart and Washington, their approaches and mainstream popularity somewhat faded in the face of more forceful, militant methods like those encouraged by DuBois and his contemporaries. After World War II, Stewart and other black proponents experienced a transition to trench warfare as they continued to fight for civil justice. As the initial efforts of Stewart and Washington slowed, new, younger, and increasingly combative black factions emerged to break through racial attrition and push the minority agenda forward with more violently outspoken tactics. Stewart saw the same division occur among blacks in Oklahoma City, but kept a loyal commitment to his

[9] "Letter to Mayor," folder 1, box 4, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma History Center.

engrained approach. Although each faction's presence remained strong and influential, the more liberal and less-controlled events became the larger public focus. Still, Stewart remained dedicated to his colleagues, ideology, and mission. In the end, each group carried out their operations in concert and represented black interests for race progress.[10]

Taking black historiography that directly involved Stewart, Vicki Miles-Lagrange and Bob Burke published a pertinent biography of him in 1999. Their research traces his public activities and historic achievements in combating deeply ingrained black American racism and poverty in Oklahoma. The thesis in *A Passion for Equality: The Life of Jimmy Stewart* highlights the triumphs in the state's black civil rights because of movements led by Stewart. Their work also exhibits how he fashioned himself as one of the state's most powerful utilities in instigating race change and opportunity.[11] Miles-LaGrange and Burke commit much of their work to an expansive survey of Stewart's numerous involvements, but fail to go into detail on specific personal and private events critical to validating their argument. They also take a somewhat glossy surface approach in penning his public character and the unique attributes that made his agenda successful. Miles-Lagrange and Burke advance a thesis with the intent of elevating Stewart's role in Oklahoma race history. They succeed in creating an honorable impression of his life, but *A Passion for Equality* seems to demand additional in depth research, new perspectives, and interpretations of Stewart's disposition and his utilization of a social network for race progress.

The general historiography helps place Stewart in the context of other aspiring blacks who worked as fastidiously as he did toward similar goals. Furthermore, to not

[10] E. Melvin Porter, interview by author, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, December 7, 2010.
[11] Vicki Miles-LaGrange, and Bob Burke, *A Passion for Equality: the Life of Jimmy Stewart*, (Oklahoma City: Oklahoma Heritage Association, 1999), 13-15.

understand Stewart and the influences on the social and political strata through which he operated is to not understand civil rights, trench warfare (before and behind the lines), and the breakout tactics that he and his contemporaries fostered. He lived during a time of risk where black activism was not always popular and often problematic. Still, he resolutely combined his inner strength with the powerful ideals of predecessors like DuBois and Washington and developed an inimitably effective way of fighting for black justice and black progress.

Because Stewart often acted in a socially and politically sensitive way, more public and colorful events overshadowed his early activities. Yet, while many black activists turned their attention to the violent outbreaks of protest, Stewart remained steadfast in his goals and operated with a less explosive approach to race-related issues. Acknowledgement of his efforts often appear late after the events that led to his accomplishments. Nevertheless, because of his special nature with controversial black movements, Stewart's recognition will not remain like an addendum. He left a legacy of race progress unmatched in the state and with resounding national effects.

Chapter 1

Early Experiences and the Building of a Network for Change

Jimmy Stewart was born September 16, 1916, in Plano, Texas, to the Reverend Zena Thomas Stewart and Mary Magdeline "Maggie" Fegalee Stewart, their third and youngest child.[12] His family moved to Oklahoma City the same year, when his father found work spreading his messages to receptive parishioners.[13] Zena passed away when Stewart was eight, leaving him the sole "man of the household" since his older brother and sisters had already left to live with relatives. Difficult times followed the loss of his father, so in a manner typical of his later life, Stewart sharpened his survival skills by scavenging alleyways for discarded metals and glass bottles to sell to junkyards to help his mother make ends meet. He was a survivor with pride and integrity. He also picked up odd jobs shinning shoes, washing dishes, and making deliveries for the neighborhood drugstore to supplement the family income.[14]

Stewart lived in West Town, a black settlement along the sandy North Canadian River, near present day downtown Oklahoma City and Exchange Avenue. Conditions were primitive and restrictive in West Town. Likewise, blacks in other communities around the river, like Sand Town, also had a difficult time conquering the less-than-ideal living situation. Still, Stewart faced hardships head-on and always looked ahead to a better future.

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[12] Miles-Lagrange and Burke, *Passion*, 17.
[13] "Jimmy Stewart's Autobiographical Papers," folder 1, box 1, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma History Center.
[14] "Jimmy Stewart's Autobiographical Papers," folder 1, box 1, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma History Center.

Later, Roosevelt Milton, state chapter president of the NAACP in the twenty-first century recognized that, "No issue regarding the civil rights of African-Americans either in his home state or nationally, escaped Mr. Stewart's scrutiny and efforts towards resolutions thereof,"[15] largely because Stewart experienced segregation and white aversion to color early in life. The discrimination contributed to Stewart's deeply rooted passion to overcome demeaning and degrading labels. Therefore, he began demands for equality early. Part of his determination resulted from the loss of his father, as Stewart felt the need to help provide for his disadvantaged family in any way he could. He quickly learned he could rely on close friends and family to help and seized any opportunity to improve the black position. With his inner drive and the support from those around him, Stewart took an early role in the black struggle against segregation and unequal treatment in Oklahoma.

Like other black people in his neighborhood, Stewart faced countless instances typifying the cruelty of segregation. In 1907, a decade before Stewart's birth, lawmakers began passing Oklahoma's "Jim Crow" legislation. Once passed, Jim Crow extended to nearly every public sphere within the state of Oklahoma and held on tightly. The racist ideology encouraged the notion that black citizens lived with less social standing and as people whose contributions were far less significant than whites. Therefore, whites used Jim Crow as a justification for black inferiority in mainstream society. As a result, added legislation swiftly extended segregation and inequality to practically everything outside of one's home, and even in it.[16]

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[15] "Roosevelt Milton, NAACP Bulletin, April 1997," folder 1, box 4, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma History Center.
[16] Nikki, L.M. Brown and Barry, M. Stentiford, eds., *The Jim Crow Encyclopedia*, (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2008), 374.

Jim Crow ordinances applied to hotels, restaurants, restrooms, drinking fountains, parks, schools, libraries, saloons, telephone booths, trains, boats, theaters, doorways, stairways, prisons, cemeteries, and brothels—virtually everything.[17] Jim Crow further dictated that blacks, like Stewart and his family, were to sit only in the back of the streetcars. In fact, if the cars arrived filled with whites, blacks had to wait for another streetcar altogether.[18] What *de jure* segregation missed, *de facto* caught, like separation of the races in churches, hospitals, and funeral parlors. Ubiquitous "white only" signs annotated black restriction throughout Oklahoma City and stood as specific reminders that stripped black access and everyday mobility.[19]

Legal segregation eroded the human and civil rights of blacks with local, state, and federal legislation. The system remained antiquated with little change by the time Stewart arrived in his black world. As a man matured in racism, but not crushed by it, he developed a social consciousness that ignited his motives for change. He took profound values from his close-knit community and refused to remain a victim of white subjugation. With a desire to support his community's upliftment, Stewart joined in the struggle against the discrimination, racism, and prejudices created by Jim Crow. He would spend the rest of his life fighting against the injustices rooted inside him from boyhood.

In addition to other inequalities, Oklahoma City had not adequately cared for the education of its black children. From the first decades of the twentieth century, education for black children in Oklahoma and Kansas was inferior, certainly compared to the

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[17] Intimate relations, like marriage, between blacks and whites was illegal; as was interracial adopting, medical practices in the home, and much more.
[18] Dr. Jere Roberson, interview by author, Edmond, Oklahoma, December 9, 2010.
[19] Catherine M. Lewis and Richard J. Lewis, eds., *Jim Crow America: A Documentary History*, (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas, 2009), 286.

facilities for white children. *Plessy vs. Ferguson* aside, not only were white and black schools divided, they were dilapidated structures located considerable distances from the communities they served. Perfectly adequate white schools stood much closer with superior supplies and instruction, but their doors remained closed to black students.[20] As a result, schools were separate, but clearly not equal.

As a grade school boy, Stewart recognized a need for improved conditions in all-black schools. In fact, his first protests came in school. Through the Oklahoma and Kansas schools he attended, Stewart built the foundation for his networks with measured diplomacy. Once connected, Stewart could initiate improvements that blacks desperately needed.

He attended Orchard Park Elementary School, Orchard Park Junior High School, and Douglass High School for his freshman and sophomore years while living in West Town in Oklahoma City until 1928. After that, Stewart and his mother moved to Wichita, Kansas, to live with his oldest sister, Ella Gravelly. Once in Wichita, he first attended the city's only segregated high school, Wichita High School East. The following year he transferred the following to the city's newest facility to allow blacks, Wichita High School North.

Stewart's mission and network evolved as he progressed through high school. In 1929, during his senior year at Wichita North, Stewart marked the first success in his campaign fighting discrimination with a diplomatic approach. He saw a chance to act after an all-white chorus visited the school and performed a piece from the musical "Showboat." They sang out the line, "Niggers all work on the Mississippi…Niggers all

[20] Vincent P. Franklin and James D. Anderson, eds., *New Perspectives on Black Educational History*, (Boston: G.K. Hall and Co., 1978), 15.

work while the while folks play…"[21] Rather than accept the open humiliation of the performance, Stewart took it as an opportunity to defend the sanctity of blacks, regardless of whether it was acceptable for him to argue his position as a black student himself. Living unashamed of his color, he quickly took his concerns to the school principal. He asserted his protest without aggressive force. As a result, the principal agreed with the appeal and promised to have the words changed in future performances.[22] The success of his first petition demonstrated Stewart's ability to tactfully instigate change without offending those who could help his cause. With this incident, he showed the first sign of an unbreakable commitment to fight for future improvement in civil rights.

Stewart swiftly used his newfound connection with Wichita North's principal to build on his early victory. With his new resources, Stewart pursued another project to combat discrimination and biased practices in the high school. In this instance, Wichita North's curriculum gave partial credit in gym class for swimming. Since the rules of segregation restricted blacks from using the pool at any time, it left them with little recourse to fulfill the class requirements. At this point, Stewart again took his concerns to the principal. Because of school officials' hesitation, Stewart sought to reach a compromise. By the end of the controversy, school leaders relented and eventually agreed to let black students begin using the pool, but only on Fridays. In an attempt to minimize white protest, school officials adhered to a "Fridays Only" agreement and ordered the pool to be drained every Saturday after black use. At considerable expense, maintenance workers would be able to prepare the swimming facility again for white

[21] "Jimmy Stewart's Autobiographical Papers," folder 2, box 1, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma Historical Center.
[22] "Jimmy Stewart's Autobiographical Papers," folder 2, box 1, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma Historical Center.

students to use Monday through Thursday without compromising the integrity of white social acceptance.[23]

While many may have considered the agreement just another facet of discrimination rather than a progression from its racist implications, Stewart considered it a momentous triumph for black advancement and equality. Furthermore, the new subscription spurred him to strengthen his resolve and move forward with his agenda. Even though Stewart was unable to completely abolish the segregation at the pool, his ability to strongly, but respectfully appeal to authorities sparked new degrees of change in long-oppressed black interests; no small feat for a teenager, especially a young black activist in a sea of whites.

Throughout the rest of his time at Wichita North, Stewart played football and excelled in his studies. He graduated in 1929 with his sights set on attending college.[24] However, Kansas University denied his application for admission based on his race, but Langston University, Oklahoma's only college for blacks, extended him admission with an athletic scholarship. Stewart readily accepted the opportunity and moved back to central Oklahoma in 1930.

Within his first year returning to the state at LU, he met and married Mae Lois Layne. Because Stewart needed to help support his new wife and eventual family, he left LU after one year and started working full-time. Once married and back in Oklahoma City, Stewart took various janitorial and service jobs available to blacks. He also joined the local NAACP chapter and reoriented himself to the issues still plaguing black Oklahomans.

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[23] "Jimmy Stewart's Autobiographical Papers," folder 1, box 1, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma Historical Center.
[24] "Copy of High School Diploma," folder 4, box 5, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma Historical Center.

Through the NAACP, Stewart met with some of the most enthusiastic black activists in and around the city. Stewart meshed well with other members and discovered an agreeable ideology within the organization. At its inception in 1910, the sole purpose of the NAACP was to alleviate the blatantly unequal social, political, and cultural conditions under which almost all black American lived.[25] Black Oklahomans, like Stewart and his new associates, as well as those from the rest of the nation, had already been fighting for their civil rights before the creation of the NAACP. But, with the organization, they had a legitimate resource to help them in their individual and joint battles.[26]

In 1913, the NAACP headquarters in New York City first established a local branch in Oklahoma City to combat similar issues faced by blacks in and around Oklahoma. Ever important to race progress, the NAACP held the power to initiate investigations into the troubling events that beleaguered many blacks. One of the main goals of the organization aimed at fighting the fixed forms of discrimination that proliferated throughout numerous white institutions. As a result, the organization began strongly pushing for equivalent standards among blacks and whites in social, cultural, political, and economic areas. The NAACP also provided support for the individual missions of people like Stewart and his colleagues.

Oklahoma was awash in traditions that limited the rights and practices of blacks. Most seem to have grown used to the practices as part of the culture and way of life in the

[25] John Hope Franklin, From *Slavery to Freedom: A History of American Negroes,* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1947), 87.
[26] Murray R. Wickett, *Contested Territory: Whites, Native Americans, and African Americans in Oklahoma, 1865-1907,* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 2000), 221.

state.[27] For the black activists, the disenfranchisement of black voters was a particularly galling act of discrimination. Long before Stewart came along, white opposition to black voting rights had already become an explicit customary practice of anti-black bias.

Oklahoma's constitution of 1907 banned the passage of any legislature that would bar any citizen from the right to vote. In 1910 though, white leaders introduced and voters readily passed State Question 17. The statute modified the state constitution and introduced a literacy test requirement for all citizens wishing to exercise their right vote. Undoubtedly, the purpose of the proposition was to prevent blacks from voting. Given the high illiteracy rate, due in part to blacks' educational oppression, the statute could easily work without overtly violating the Fifteenth Amendment.

The NAACP took this situation to heart, and challenged the structure of the Oklahoma constitution regarding its discriminatory voting rights. In 1915, as victories were still minimal, NAACP members registered one of their first significant gains with *Guinn vs. United States.* While limiting its ruling in scope to a violation of the Fifteenth Amendment to the Constitution, the U.S. Supreme Court struck down Oklahoma's "grandfather clause." Diverted, but undeterred, the Oklahoma legislators then passed a restrictive voter registration law the same year while whites implemented outright violent tactics meant to intimidate and stop blacks from voting.[28] The Supreme Court also struck down the politicians' new attempts at thwarting voter equality, just as it had the original

[27] As an example, reaction (or lack of reaction) to the Tulsa Race Riot in June 1921 seems to have reaffirmed such a cultural perspective, given that the riot was covered up for over a generation.

[28] Many states, like Oklahoma, required black voters to satisfy literacy and understanding. Yet, white registrars administered the test and subjectively applied the criteria. As a result, officials rejected most black voters in the process. Early in the twentieth century, most blacks were literate, but even many of the best educated "failed" the literacy tests administered by white registrars. Furthermore, while the states' voter registration requirements applied to all citizens, in practice, laws still disfranchised most blacks. In fact, officials often removed less educated and impoverished, blacks, and sometimes, whites from voter registration rolls.

grandfather clause. As in the *Guinn* case, the Court ruled that the legislation violated the Fifteenth Amendment, which states, "The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude."[29] The *Guinn* case helped solidify the presence of the civil rights associations both in and out of the state and marked a turning point for NAACP influence in future achievements for black progress. Still, the white arsenal was full, and the victory was generations away.

Roscoe Dunjee, founder of the first NAACP chapter in Oklahoma, in Oklahoma City, was never one to sit on the sidelines when presented with an opportunity to help the black community. Dunjee also owned and edited the *Black Dispatch,* a newspaper he founded at the beginning of World War I and published in the city. He became the state president of the NAACP and held that position for twenty years.[30] By 1929, branches in Oklahoma City, Guthrie, Chickasha, Tulsa, and Muskogee combined their efforts and created a conglomerate organization titled the Oklahoma Conference of Branches. Stewart recognized the lasting momentum the NAACP and members like Dunjee were capable of creating. Consequently, he maintained an enthusiastic and constant presence at meetings and thereby ensured a strong connection with other members, including Dunjee.

As he searched for new ways to push for civil equality, Stewart relied on his relationship with a childhood friend, Ralph Ellison. Ellison was one of Stewart's closest acquaintances in West Town and they were classmates at Orchard Elementary and through their junior high days. As the author of *Invisible Man*, Ellison became a

[29] Arthur L. Tolson, *The Black Oklahomans: A History 1541-1972*, (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1972), 168.
[30] Miles-LaGrange and Burke, *Passion*, 44.

cornerstone figure in Stewart's network and overall agenda because he could assist Stewart in developing a public voice. After the publication of *Invisible Man*, many people and critics regarded Ellison as a groundbreaking writer who portrayed the true trials, tribulations, and injustices endured by blacks in twentieth-century America.[31] His powerful piece of literature also defined the life and educational system that blacks typically experienced during the beginning decades of the twentieth century.

Stewart's connection with Ellison held the potential to boost his goals into the public eye. Through a series of written correspondence, Ellison encouraged Stewart to develop abilities as a skilled writer and seek publication.[32] Ellison understood the importance of conveying the anti-discrimination sentiments that he and Stewart shared. Stewart therefore prudently heeded Ellison's advice and worked diligently to establish and improve his skills as a persuasive writer. Coupled with his knowledge and experience producing change and his friend's guidance, Stewart ardently enhanced his writing skills as a young adult. Because Ellison believed in both Stewart and the power of writing from the black perspective, Stewart was able to develop another powerful tool in his cache. The new element of Stewart's abilities would later become an essential device and help him propel his civil rights movement deeper into the many systems built and dictated by whites.

As he excelled in the NAACP and fostered his writing skills, Stewart also committed to a strong, determined work ethic. While working as a waiter at the Biltmore Hotel in downtown Oklahoma City, Stewart soon drew the attention of ONG representatives who frequented the hotel. One of the regular patrons, Thomas H.

[31] James Smallwood, *Crossroads Oklahoma: The Black Experience in Oklahoma,* (Stillwater: Crossroads Oklahoma Project, College of Arts and Sciences Extension, Oklahoma State University, 1981).
[32] "Ralph Ellison to Jimmy Stewart, 1939," folder 8, box 2, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma History Center.

Sterling, ONG district manager, befriended Stewart while he was working as the captain of banquet service at the Biltmore. After numerous encounters with him as a server, Sterling grew increasingly impressed with Stewart's astute, polite, and mannerly demeanor with wealthy upper class whites and offered him a position at ONG. [33] Compared to his wages at the Biltmore, the career shift to ONG meant a significant setback in income, but Stewart saw the offer as a long-awaited opportunity for race progress in the local energy industry and economic sectors. He therefore deemed the monetary sacrifice worth the struggle and became one of the first black employees at ONG.

What began for Stewart on June 1, 1937 as an entry-level janitorial position at ONG, quickly grew into a series of recognitions and promotions within the company. At the same time, Stewart used his intelligence and sociability to his advantage and cultivated a positive and sustained dialogue with his supervisors. Rarely one to pass on a smart discussion on any topic, Stewart spent hours mixing business and conversation with Sterling, as well as George Frederickson, the Oklahoma City ONG Vice President, mulling over a gamut of social, economic, political, and industrial issues.[34]

Likewise, long time personnel director, Roy B. Deal, and Stewart's first supervisor at ONG, saw potential for him to succeed beyond basic proletariat work. In fact, Deal often commissioned Stewart's advice on how to handle sensitive employee issues.[35] As a result, Stewart not only earned the respect from key industry leaders like Deal, but also garnered support from a regionally recognized corporation that, before

[33] "Jimmy Stewart's Autobiographical Papers," folder 1, box 1, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma History Center.
[34] "Oklahoma Natural Gas Papers," folder 18, box 2, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma History Center.
[35] "Oklahoma Natural Gas Papers," folder 18, box 2, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma History Center.

Stewart, had employed only whites. With his new associations, Stewart rapidly moved beyond his cleaning duties to an office position.

Stewart successfully networked with the high standing officials at ONG and continued to nurture favorable contact with industry leaders. Because of their mutually respected relationships, high standing members of the ONG family supported many of Stewart's objectives for an increased black presence in the energy field. With daily interaction, people like Sterling, Frederickson, and Deal understood that Stewart did not undertake sensitive racial issues out of malice, vengeance, or anger. In fact, ONG employers showed interest in hiring more blacks and considered any applications, especially when recommended by Stewart.[36] Their acknowledgments of his character not only validated Stewart's social and workplace maneuverability toward a higher goal, but also strengthened vital support from within the white-dominated profession.

In 1939, two years after beginning his career with ONG, and after taking Ralph Ellison's advice, Stewart caught the attention of Roscoe Dunjee. Stewart held tightly to his ardor for race equality and Dunjee's professional and personal relationship with him, like Ellison, became instrumental to his early work. After their years of devotion to the NAACP and its progressive activities, Dunjee reviewed some of Stewart's written work and gave him an opportunity to write for the *Black Dispatch*. Stewart did not hesitate and seized the monumental break to showcase his opinions in a public forum for the first time.

Stewart quickly demonstrated an apt articulation of his thoughts in his editorial column, "Jimmy Says." Beginning in 1939, his column appeared nearly every week until

[36] "Jimmy Stewart to Roy Deal, May 16, 1938," folder 18, box 2, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma History Center.

1979, interrupted only by his military service. Even then Stewart continued to contribute his column sporadically. With a valuable place in the local media, Dunjee and the *Black Dispatch* gave Stewart his first chance to reach a large audience with his message. Stewart's ability to write cohesively opened the door to making serious headway in his civil rights movement. Dunjee's discretion not only allowed Stewart to write publicly, but also furnished him with a critical sounding board to promote agenda for the abolition of patent racism and pursuit of justice for everyone, everywhere.

Stewart worked diligently for the *Black Dispatch* with little monetary compensation, yet Stewart was rewarded because Dunjee closely mentored him and their friendship deepened. Despite the age difference, both men adamantly believed in many of the same goals that included black political, social, cultural, and economic progress. Fortunately for Stewart and his mission, Dunjee had already carved his presence into Oklahoma City's black community in and eagerly took Stewart in as his protégé. The relationship considerably strengthened Stewart's network. It also gave him an invaluable resource for promoting a stronger civil rights movement in the city. Readers of the *Black Dispatch* received Stewart and his column with acclaim and insisted on hearing more from him.[37]

Initially, Stewart wrote about local school and social events. However, he soon encouraged black Oklahomans to become more active and outspokenly involved in civil rights questions. With Dunjee's guidence and "Jimmy Says," Stewart's notoriety in the community grew and other leaders took notice. J.D. Moon, principal of Douglass High School in Oklahoma City, illustrated the power and influence of Stewart's editorial. In the letter, Moon wrote that he was encouraged by Stewart's words and wanted to give

[37] "Letter to the Editor," *Black Dispatch*, May 5, 1940, Page 5, Oklahoma City edition.

greater service for his race and community and that the *Black Dispatch* would help him create wider public contacts. He also thanked Stewart for helping make America more democratic, and that the goals for black equality could be achieved by direct action since both races desperately needed education and integration.[38] Stewart took Moon's approval to heart. Through his continued writings and actions, Stewart upheld his commitment to Dunjee, the *Black Dispatch*, ONG, and the black struggle for a better life.

The recognition Stewart achieved with the readers of the *Black Dispatch* also helped strengthened his voice with his superiors at ONG. With his new position in the public spectrum and good relationships at work, Stewart diplomatically expressed the need for an ONG office, among other public services, on Oklahoma City's black eastside. Because Jim Crow ordinances restricted their access to services and whites ignored their needs, an eastside office could easily cater those in the black community without conflict.

In 1940, while at ONG, Stewart put his network and voice into action. While writing of the situation in his column, Stewart approached his ONG superior, Roy Deal and asked for support with his idea to open an eastside office. Because of their valued relationship, Deal respectfully answered Stewart's petition. He soon contacted the home office secretary treasurer, Oakah L. Jones in Tulsa, Oklahoma, with a recommendation for a new branch on Oklahoma City's eastside.

Jones, who later served as the president of a large gas utility company in Canada, was already aware of Stewart and his positive representation of ONG because of regular updates from managers in the Oklahoma City area. After three years of working with him, Deal, Sterling, and Frederickson had grown to respect Stewart as a valuable employee and person with sound ideas for the future of blacks in the company. Deal had

[38] "J. D. Moon to Jimmy Stewart, 1954," folder 1, box 2, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma History Center.

regularly sent Stewart's performance reviews to the home office with accolades for his work and executives paid close attention.[39] In a letter to Jones regarding a new office, Deal articulated both the strength of Stewart's character and his belief in Stewart's mannerly way of managing his responsibilities and maintaining positive relationships throughout the company.[40] Combined with his creditable performance reputation and personal recommendation from Deal, Jones rewarded Stewart with an approval for a new office. In fact, in September of 1940, officials promoted Stewart to manager of the new eastside installation despite warnings from oppositional white leaders that the appointment of a black manager would harm ONG's reputation and operation.[41] Nevertheless, the success of his idea and quick promotion marked renewed recognition of Stewart's dedicated work and measured disposition in a predominately white company. More importantly, it was another progressive step for blacks seeking equal access to important resources around the city.

The career advancement soon showcased Stewart's managerial talent. His professionalism as one of the first blacks to serve in a management position for a public utility in the southwestern United States made his work notable and accepted. ONG's endorsements were also another example of Stewart's predilection for black equality through calm, but assertive networking both inside and outside the company.

As he ascended through the ranks of ONG, Stewart also thrived within the NAACP and looked forward to his meetings with like-minded blacks in the city.[42] In

[39] "Roy Deal to Jimmy Stewart, January 13, 1939," folder 18, box 2, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma History Center.
[40] "Roy Deal to Oakah Jones (cc to Jimmy Stewart), July 18, 1940," folder 18, box 2, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma History Center.
[41] "Oklahoma Natural Gas Papers," folder 18, box 2, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma History Center.
[42] "Jimmy Stewart's Autobiographical Papers," folder 1, box 1, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma Historical Center.

1942, the Oklahoma City branch president abruptly left town and vacated the local office. Even though Stewart preferred to hold a meeting and determine the next president by consensus, Dunjee and other members supported Stewart's patient but progressive approach and insisted he accept the consul himself. Stewart prudently obliged and moved into the presidential position at the NAACP Oklahoma City branch on February 8, 1942.[43] He undertook the prestigious duty with his typical unwavering dedication. In addition to an editorial in "Jimmy Says" that outlined his respect for the position and commitment to using it to help promote black issues,[44] Stewart also issued a NAACP member bulletin thanking members for their confidence in his abilities. In the same statement, he encouraged members to continue their diligent work and keep pushing for new victories.[45] Like his promotion at ONG, the NAACP presidential appointment illustrated another instance when Stewart's connections, ingenuity, and sensitive nature led to an opportunity to work on an elevated stage for sustainable progress.

Early in life, Stewart developed influential skills that resulted in his humanitarian character and strong interpersonal network. Stewart used his diplomatic methods and created a uniquely stylized civil rights and race movement in Oklahoma. Invigorated by the success of "Jimmy Says," his ONG promotion, rise within the NAACP, and growing recognition, Stewart did not show any signs of letting up. Partly because of the increased support from white and black figures in the 1930s and 40s, he cultivated an unstoppable, but measured approach to achieving civil equality. Stewart remained set on obliterating anti-black civil conscriptions and helping blacks achieve long-awaited justice.

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[43] "NAACP Resolution, February 8, 1942," folder 10, box 2, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma History Center.
[44] "Oklahoma City NAACP," *The Black Dispatch*, February 10, 1942, Page 5, Oklahoma City edition.
[45] "NAACP Bulletin from Vice-President Jimmy Stewart, February 8, 1942," folder 10, box 2, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma History Center.

Stewart once encompassed his motives in a letter to the mayor of Oklahoma City by writing, "I shall continue to offer my services and my skills, wherever need be, with malice towards none, in an orderly building of a better Oklahoma City than when I came. Likewise, I would challenge the Mayor and the City Council to do as well, if not better, toward orderly, forthright direction and meaningful guidance…to which all men of goodwill may look with hope and pride."[46] As a result, his agenda found traction in Oklahoma's early twentieth century decades. As it expanded beyond the state, his agenda ensured continuing race progress through difficult decades.

[46] "Stewart to Oklahoma City Mayor," folder 1, box 4, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma History Center.

Chapter 2

Montford Point March: Jimmy Stewart and the Marine Corps

After having sparked his mission with an evolving network of associations in the 1930s and early 1940s, Jimmy Stewart confronted resistance to his progressive agenda in the United States Marine Corps enlistment policy. To help improve black civil rights in the military, he employed a fight against race-based recruiting restrictions. In 1942, during his first year as president of the NAACP Oklahoma City branch, Stewart first initiated contact with NAACP national representatives and then sought changes with officials in Washington. He used his "Jimmy Says" column and NAACP branch presidency to reinforce support for his inquiries into the discriminatory practices.[47] Stewart set a strong example for race progress by becoming among the first to volunteer for enlistment and spearheaded a NAACP sponsored recruiting drive in central Oklahoma. Ultimately, his efforts helped distinguish a new step for civil equality and pushed his agenda further into the twentieth century.

Many historians offer interpretations of the black American experience in the United States armed services that parallel Stewart's military activities during the 1940s. Much of the historiography addresses a transition from enlistment discrimination to the initial stages of a segregated military, and then to the eventual integration of all races. Stewart lived through this and fought against the inequities. Certain works on black military scholarship correlate with Stewart's experiences fighting for equal military service rights, namely the Marine Corps Reserve.

[47] "NAACP Stewart Appointment Bulletin," folder 10, box 2, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma History Center.

As an example of military race progress similar to Stewart's place in history, Richard M. Dalfiume's work, *Desegregation of the U.S. Armed Forces: Fighting on Two Fronts 1939-1953*, published in 1969, explores the changes in racial policy made by American military branches. Dalfiume examines American race relations against the backdrop of a social revolution and believes each worked in concert to create the Civil Rights Movement. Moreover, the work's thesis centers on the social, cultural, and political impact of black incorporation into the armed forces. Dalfiume argues that integration led to a decrease in racial conflict and prejudice.[48]

Dalfiume presents an early, yet reliable analysis similar to Stewart's experience as a Marine Reservist. *Desegregation of the U.S. Armed Forces* emphasizes the importance of black military service and reflects the significance of Stewart's commitment during times of high race tensions. His piece stands as a seminal study on what it meant to be a black Marine. Dalfiume connects the contemporary social and political alterations of the time to the centripetal role the armed forces and activists, like Stewart, played in equalizing military service with more peaceful solutions.

As the written history of blacks evolved and black servicemen, like Stewart, gained national attention, new scholars emerged and built on the work of earlier academics. With the 1981 publication of *Blacks in the Military: Essential Documents*, editors Bernard C. Nalty and Morris J. MacGregor develop a societal and political perception of blacks in armed services by using military documents to interpret civil

[48] Richard M. Dalfiume, *Desegregation of the Armed Forces: Fighting on Two Fronts 1939-1953*, (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1969), 24.

history. [49] Their study encompasses work from the time of slavery and stretches to the decades after the racial integration of the armed forces.

Nalty and MacGregor specifically include an analysis of the Montford Point Marines, one of the first black Marine regiments and the installation where Stewart trained and served, and Montford Point's significance in the evolution of black military history. The authors offer a history that concentrates mainly on the social and political repercussions of black integration into the U.S. military.[50] By doing so, Nalty and MacGregor notably place their work within the greater context of blacks in the military during the twentieth century.

As a young man in the early part of the twentieth century, Stewart lived and shaped his ideology at a time when most Americans viewed military service as a natural-born right, privilege, and honor.[51] He realized early that the denial of a black person's right to fulfill a respected duty subjected blacks to cruel injustices of unequal citizenship. It also exposed them to other manifestations of discrimination and segregation. Stewart was constantly aware of both the intrinsic and explicit reasoning for the restrictive policies of the armed forces. Through his column in the *Black Dispatch* and leadership position at the NAACP, Stewart expressed the desire to end the overt discrimination and characteristically undertook the fight for change.

While the enlistment practices continued to slow race progress,[52] Stewart resolved to make the tough changes. With its large military installations, like Tinker Air Force

[49] Bernard C. Nalty and Morris J. MacGregor, eds., *Blacks in the Military: Essential Documents*, (Wilmington, Deleware: Scholarly Resources, 1981), 12.
[50] Nalty and MacGregor, *Blacks in the Military*, 55.
[51] Martin Binkin, et. al., eds., *Blacks in the Military*, (Washinton, D.C.: Brookings Instiution, 1982), 108.
[52] Dalfiume, *Desegregation of the Armed Forces*, 78.

Base[53], Oklahoma played a major part in the United States defense industry; specifically, with production of planes and other defense materials vital to the American war effort during World War II. Having been in Oklahoma for several years, Stewart understood the importance of military service as well as the significance of discrimination against one's right to enlist. In the newspaper and with officials in the United States Department of Defense, he publicly campaigned for blacks and diligently sought to volunteer and serve his country and people. He also believed that black inclusion would reward all black Americans with increased rights in other social, political, and economic sectors vital to race progress at local, regional, and national levels.[54] Additionally, as a successful serviceman, Stewart saw potential to foster a positive public image as a committed Marine loyal to the nation.

Having already advanced his equality-oriented agenda with the NAACP and ONG, Stewart stayed vigilant for any opportunity to break down other restrictive barriers with his sensitive appeal. As Stewart began pushing the envelope from Oklahoma, so too did A. Philip Randolph from Washington.[55] During World War II, Randolph led numerous protests against segregation in the armed forces and American defense industries. In 1941, Randolph intensified pressure when he threatened to bring thousands of blacks to Washington, D.C., and march in protest of continued segregation in defense sectors.[56] His efforts soon prompted President Franklin D. Roosevelt (FDR) to issue

[53] Formerly known as Midwest Air Depot and renamed to Tinker AFB on October 27, 1942.
[54] "Jimmy Stewart's Autobiographical Papers," folder 1, box 1, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma History Center.
[55] As the organizer of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Porters in 1925, Randolph represented the first black labor union to obtain a bargaining agreement and establish a charter from the American Federation of Labor (AFL) and led the way in demanding employment in defense and overall integration of the United States Armed Forces.
[56] Paula F. Pfeffer, *A. Philip Randolph: Pioneer of the Civil Rights Movement*, (Baton Rouge, Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 1996), 114.

Executive Order 8802 as an attempt to diffuse racial tensions and halt a protest at the capital.[57] The order arose at such a time that it immediately altered the course of the budding national civil rights campaign and began to modify the military and defense industry. More importantly, Randolph's success and the creation of 8802 reinforced Stewart's work in Oklahoma for blacks in the armed forces.

Executive Order 8802 stated that it was, "Affirming the policy of full participation in the defense program by all persons regardless of color, race, creed, or national origin…".[58] FDR expressed that he created 8802 to formally address race in the United States military. He also stated that the order would encourage further changes in all departments of the government and lead the way in ending discrimination.[59] By allowing blacks to enlist with no more restrictions than whites, Order 8802 was taken by Stewart to represent an effort to fully open the defense industry to black Americans. Once in service, though, most blacks remained seriously segregated and received nowhere near an equal chance at jobs or housing.[60]

Once issued, Stewart jumped at the chance to utilize the changes in governmental policy made by 8802 and establish a black presence in federal offices and defense departments. Although the order signaled a breakdown of discriminatory restrictions, most black enlistees served as segregated laborers because whites still viewed them as subservient, or at best second-class. Even though FDR's order showed the country's willingness to bring all citizens together in a collective effort, discrimination and

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[57] "A Threatened March on Washington-1941," *American Memory: African-American Odessy*, The United States Library of Congress National Digital Library, http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/aaohtml/exhibit/aopart8.html, (accessed February 3, 2011).
[58] "Military Pamphlet," folder 4, box 7, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma HistoryCenter.
[59] "Military Pamphlet," folder 4, box 7, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma History Center.
[60] Ronald T. Takaki, *A Different Mirror: A History of Multi-Cultural America*, (New York: Bay Back Books and Little, Brown, and Co., 2008), 360.

segregation still marked black military service conditions. Stewart faced the complexities head-on and editorialized his thoughts in his "Jimmy Says" column by writing that he, like Randolph, wanted to see an end to the inequalities of an American birthright.[61] As a result, he soon mobilized his network and resources within the NAACP and the *Black Dispatch* and instigated a black military movement from within Oklahoma.

Because the policy change encouraged participation of all citizens in national defense matters, Stewart wrote of his belief that the modifications encompassed unmatched opportunities for blacks in the armed services. With an influx of willing volunteers from black communities, Stewart also felt that FDR's policy of open enlistment could evolve into a larger civil movement, specifically by offering an opportunity for blacks to further progress as equal citizens. Through the *Black Dispatch* and the Oklahoma City NAACP branch, he strongly encouraged local blacks to join in the pursuit of justice.[62]

Despite the historic precedence of 8802 and Stewart's strong support with immediate involvement, noticeable changes were slow and largely discouraging overall. He still wanted to capitalize on 8802 and push for wider black involvement in the military. As a result, during 1942, in conjunction with James M. Reid, editor of the *Pittsburgh Courier* and member of the NAACP, Stewart instigated a national recruiting drive that sought enlistment of at least 900 black volunteers. Reid and Stewart both made the implications of enlistment clear and asked their readers to answer the call for duty.[63] As branch president, Stewart also issued local NAACP charter bulletins that focused on

[61] Jimmy Stewart, "Jimmy Says," *Black Dispatch*, September 9, 1941, Page 4, Oklahoma City edition.
[62] Jimmy Stewart, "Jimmy Says," *Black Dispatch*, September 16, 1941, Page 4, Oklahoma City edition.
[63] "James Reid to Jimmy Stewart, March 15, 1942," folder 1, box 7, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma History Center.

generating additional volunteers for enlistment from Oklahoma.[64] Reid and Stewart kept in constant contact and maintained eager involvement in the drive. By August 21, 1942, both men received commitments from 542 recruits combined from various sections of the country.[65] By cultivating a greater public awareness through the newspaper and NAACP organization, Stewart and Reid sustained their recruiting drive and pushed for early black advancements in the military even though no definite opening date existed for completion of a segregated training camp.

Activities like Stewart and Reid's recruitment drive showed strong promise for black progress within the military, yet permanent changes remained in infancy. Roadblocks still manifested as conspicuous forms of discrimination. Even though Stewart and his contemporaries set a constructive example for race progress with a national black enlistment promotion, the transformation of the U.S. military was not seamless. Problems quickly arose with the actual availability of positions for black volunteers within the Marine Corps.

When he tried to enlist, Stewart experienced first-hand the discrepancies between 8802 and the actual availability of positions for blacks in the military. Originally, Stewart wanted to enlist in the Marine Corps, but the Department of the Navy informed him that no positions existed for new recruits within general services of the Corps. Upset by the response that he and other blacks received, Stewart immediately initiated communications with the Department of the Navy. With support from his growing NAACP network, Stewart sent the U.S. Navy a formal inquiry and complaint asking why

[64] "NAACP Bulletin, April 18, 1942," folder 1, box 7, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma History Center.
[65] "Jimmy Stewart to James Reid, August 21, 1942," folder 1, box 7, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma History Center.

the United States Navy had withheld permission for blacks to enlist in the Marine Corps.[66]

On September 14, 1942, following the military chain of command, Colonel Frank Halford, Marine Corps Director of Recruiting, answered Stewart's inquisition through Walter White, national head of the NAACP from 1931 to 1955. Col. Halford stated that he was specifically addressing Stewart's original inquest and grievance and suggested White advise Stewart that the Corps currently held a full quota of enlistments for general services. Any vacancies existed only in special branches, and he did not think blacks were likely to meet the criteria standards. Col. Halford then closed his statement by saying that the Corps was still calling for black enlistees to begin training in other branches with the hopes that general service positions might develop in the future.[67]

Although Col. Halford avoided acknowledging any deliberate form of prejudice within the Corps's conscripting efforts, his answer signaled a bias that Stewart was familiar with seeing. Stewart sought to correct it with help from his colleagues, readers of the *Black Dispatch*, NAACP, and a powerful, but carefully written appeal to military officials. Although the results of his early campaign yielded unsatisfactory results, Stewart's letters to some of the highest military offices illustrated his unwavering pledge to black citizens on another defining front.

Even though service in the armed forces became an exercisable right for blacks and many clamored to join-up, Stewart, among other volunteers, faced one of the more difficult transitions in civil equality. Since much the country accepted and practiced segregation throughout multiple institutions, problems also existed in providing adequate

[66] "Stewart to Department of Navy," folder 1, box 7, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma History Center.
[67] "Col. Frank Halford to Walter White," folder 1, box 7, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma History Center.

and equal training bases to prepare the new recruits. Bringing blacks to "white bases" held the potential for violent disruption and extreme confrontation between white and black servicemen. Until the military could construct separate facilities, segregated sections of existing white installations emerged to "solve" more immediate logistical problems of training and living accommodations.[68] In spite of the initial limitations and hardships represented by separate training camps, Stewart and countless other blacks nevertheless took the opportunity to embrace their American right.

In 1942, as the only Marine boot camp for blacks during World War II, the formation of the Montford Point Marines at Camp Lejeune in North Carolina, cemented a step forward in race relations. Montford Point stood as a segregated training camp from 1942 until 1949. Still, through education and utilitarian training, the organization symbolized a commitment to facilitating a black recruit's transition from civilian to military life.

Approximately 1,200 enlistees ranging in age from 17 to 29 formed the first experimental group of black Marines in 167 years. Upon arrival, the Corps classified the Marines according to relevant experience and training and then assigned roles anywhere from riflemen to mess stewards. Once given their assignment, every Marine received mandatory primary combat training at the Montford Point Recruit Depot Battalion for twenty-four days and twenty-one days at Rille Range for firearms and artillery instruction. Once passing their requisite training, the new Marines settled into their respective military appointments.[69]

[68] Dalfiume, *Desegregation*, 216.
[69] "Montford Point Recruit Booklet," folder 4, box 7, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma History Center.

Soon, officers and organizers at Camp Lejeune heralded the initial success and rapid increase of the Montford Point Marines with the publication of an information pamphlet. The pamphlet highlighted the achievements of the recruits and outlined the many accomplishments of the segregated camp.[70] Stewart and other blacks, now engaged in the same honorable service as whites, started building personal identities as proud Marines. In fact, the Montford Point camp also issued a letter to the Marines and their families that outlined the administration's goals for their participation. Included in the outline were the hopes that these men would excel as fighters, make the proper appearances before the public while operating as real Marines, and become good citizens later in life.[71] Most importantly, the triumph of Montford Point in fostering principled black servicemen set a precedence for future race progress.

Despite his election in 1942 as NAACP branch president and issues with the Department of the Navy's enlistment practices, Stewart was among the first to volunteer for service when the Marines began accepting black draft registrations on June 1, 1942.[72] Enlistment in the United States Marine Corps as a reservist meant a three-year hiatus from the branch presidency as his military service spanned from 1943 to 1946. More importantly, Stewart's time in the Marine Corps Reserves accompanied significant changes for him, his family, and for race relations.

Along with fifteen other black Oklahomans, Stewart generated more public interest around Oklahoma City when the men became the focus of an article discussing their image as civic leaders answering the call to service. Complete with pictures of the swearing in ceremony, three members of the *Black Dispatch*, John Dunjee, manager,

[70] "Montford Pamphlet," folder 4, box 7, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma History Center.
[71] "Letter from Montford Point," folder 1, box 7, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma History Center.
[72] Dalfiume, *Desegregation*, 68.

Albert White, news editor, and James Simpson, photographer, acted as official witness with enthusiastic support.[73] The story and images conveyed a sense of unity and captured the meaning of the men's mission. By selflessly volunteering as some of the first black Marines, Stewart and the other enlistees not only set a positive example, but also helped lay the foundation for more changes in civil rights and black upliftment.

On the other hand, white mainstream publications, like the *Daily Oklahoman's* tradition dating back to World War I, showed little interest in the black volunteers and their military service. The newspaper failed to acknowledge their enlistment movement and ignored their experiences and accomplishments throughout the 1940s and 1950s. Much of the media addressed other aspects of World War II and the Korean conflict, including stories of white Oklahomans and even a series of articles titled, "MacArthur the Magnificent."[74] Only sporadically, and then tersely, did any articles mention blacks in the war effort and military service. Not until the later decades of the twentieth century did the *Oklahoman* staff commemorate the men of Montford Point and other black servicemen and their historic representation as the first black Marines.[75]

At Montford Point, Stewart took charge of his first assignment as a clerk in the office of the Camp Sergeant Major. He quickly recognized his skills and previous civilian experience did not match the daily duties of the job. He then pursued an alternative route with a formal request through the Camp Adjunct's office for transfer. In the application, Stewart carefully articulated his concerns and reasoning behind the request. He stated that he was not a practiced clerk and did not volunteer for the

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[73] "Clipping from Unknown Paper, 'Civic Leaders'," folder 1, box 7, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma History Center.
[74] Bob Constantine, "MacArthur the Magnificent," *Daily Oklahoman*, 1 March 1942, sec. I, p. 1.
[75] "Article Clippings from the *Daily Oklahoman*," folder 9, box 7, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma History Center.

Reserves as such. He also wanted to transfer to the Camp Recreation Department because it was a field in which he believed he was better qualified and could best serve the Marine Corps.[76]

By using his characteristically subtle method, Stewart's handling of the transfer request reinforced his previous successes with white superiors. Officials rewarded his diplomatic approach with a transfer to the Steward's Branch Company as non-commissioned officer in charge of the Hostess House. Once transferred, Stewart thrived as manager of the on-base Piney Green housing project, where he and his family lived, and embraced his new duties as Assistant Steward of the Hostess House.

His ranking and responsibilities as Platoon Sergeant at Montford Point also helped expand his larger agenda. Stewart's position kept him in constant contact with like-minded individuals who recognized his hard work, diplomacy, and patriotic commitment. It also provided him with managerial and operative experience that served a manifold purpose once he returned to civilian status and continued his mission at home. His service as a Montford Point Marine demonstrated his ability to balance his role as a subordinate Marine with his activism for black causes. Due in part to his dedication to his new responsibilities and his skill in working with the commanding officers, Stewart received a series of promotions and quickly moved up the ranks.

Stewart encountered first-hand struggles with the ongoing complications of segregation at Montford Point. As a means to supplement his wages while on active duty, Stewart accepted part-time work as a book sales representative for Campus Publishing Company, Inc. While on base, he used his leisure time to market a pictorial

[76] "Request for Transfer Form," folder 6, box 7, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma History Center.

history of the Montford Point Marines and attempted to promote the material throughout the installation. However, rules of segregation prevented Stewart from entering prime selling locations, like the Recruiting Area. Discouraged by the restrictions that kept him from performing his job, Stewart sent a letter to Leonard Brown at the publisher's office and asked for his help to get permission from his superior officers to enter segregated areas.[77] Brown then contacted Captain Troup at Montford Point and proposed that he, in conjunction with other officers in charge, lift the limitations for Stewart when making his book sales.[78]

Although Brown and Stewart handled the situation with tact, Marine officials refused to relent. Stewart eventually shipped 71 boxes of books back to Campus Publishing and expressed deep regret that he could not sell them. The situation showed the destructive trappings of segregation within the Marine Corps. Yet, because Stewart recognized that it was better to seek assistance from the publishing company than to confront his superiors as a "subordinate" black Marine, he stayed true to his quiet dedication for change and progress. Equally important, he kept his integrity intact while still doing his duty.

Through some of his obligations at the Hostess House, Stewart indicated a belief that black education was an integral agent for race progress. In one instance, his responsibilities as Assistant Steward included the organization of promotional activities such as social gatherings meant to encourage harmony among the black Marines and their

[77] "Jimmy Stewart to Leonard Brown, July 25, 1944," folder 3, box 7, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma History Center.
[78] "Leonard Brown to Capt. Troup, August 17, 1944," folder 3, box 7, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma History Center.

families. Stewart used the opportunity to center the activities on the celebration of Negro History Week and accordingly structured an on-stage quiz of black history and facts.[79]

In order to formulate accurate and respectable questions for the quiz, Stewart wrote to both Carter G. Woodson, founder of Negro History Day, at Howard University in Washington, D.C., and the archivists of the Schromburg Collection at the Harlem Library in New York City. By asking them to supply suitable questions with emphasis on black art, literature, science, government, music, business, and war, Stewart promoted black culture and history and helped supplement participants' knowledge in fundamental subjects.[80]

In addition to the promotion of black education through his work on the quiz, Stewart showed interest in continuing his own college education during his time in the Reserves. Shortly after modeling the black history activity, Stewart wrote to the extension director at the University of Chicago asking about a correspondence studies program for men in the Marine Corps. He requested a list of courses offered and approved by the U.S. Armed Forces and War Department. Because of his time and development at the *Black Dispatch,* Stewart emphasized an interest in journalism.[81]

Furthermore, Stewart saw that accomplishments in higher education could lead to promotions to Commissioned Officers, something black men had yet to achieve in the Marine Corps. In fact, Roscoe Dunjee, without Stewart's knowledge, supported his enlisted colleague through his involvement with Oklahoma's Congressional House

[79] "Montford Point Bulletin, January 24, 1945," folder 3, box 7, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma History Center.
[80] "Letter to Woodson, Archivists, January 24, 1945," folder 6, box 7, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma History Center.
[81] "Stewart to Extension Director, February 26, 1945," folder 6, box 7, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma History Center.

Representative Mike Monroney. Dunjee first wrote of his belief in Monroney's abilities as a progressive congressman and then asked him to help Stewart receive a promotion as a Commissioned Officer while stationed at Montford Point.[82] Even though Dunjee and Monroney were unable to get the promotion for Stewart, their efforts still showed growing support for black Marines in higher military positions and Stewart in particular.

Although he could only maintain occasional contributions to the *Black Dispatch* and his "Jimmy Says" column, Stewart took any chance to use his writing power and improve his skills as an amateur journalist. As a steadfast reader with interest in current events and the depiction of blacks in the newspapers and magazines, Stewart encountered racism in prominent media sources that discussed blacks in the military. In one instance, *Time* magazine published a piece in August 1943, saying, "The arrival of the Negroes to this country was probably the most tragic event in American history."[83] Upset by the statement at a time when blacks sacrificed their lives for their country, Stewart swiftly took action and wrote a strongly worded letter to the editor of *Time* demanding justification for the outrageous quote.

Before contesting the piece, Stewart asked the editor for the reasoning behind the statement. In the same letter, Stewart formulated his argument and became an ambassador of black interests. He informed the editor that he had volunteered to fight for the United States because it was the only home he had ever known. Stewart pointed out how immigrants, such as Germans, Italians, and Japanese, took part in the rights of full citizenship, while blacks, who arrived 324 years before, still experienced the denial of the same rights; a situation that Stewart used to oppose the writer's view and declared it to be

[82] "Roscoe Dunjee to Rep. Mike Monroney, December 1, 1944," folder 1, box 7, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma History Center.
[83] "Jimmy Stewart to *Time* magazine," folder 7, box 7, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma History Center.

among one of the truly tragic events in American history. To drive his point home and leave a lasting impression, Stewart signed his letter as a "Native American", incidentally one of color.[84]

A month later on September 27, 1943, Helen Whitman, representative of *Time*, forwarded a reply to Stewart's inquiry and claimed a technical fault within the copyediting. The statement had therefore appeared out of context as the opposite of its original intention.[85] The exchange signified Stewart's continuing resolve and his efforts to contest the black social, cultural, and political position with any outlet available, and use his position as a Marine to augment his modest, yet forceful power of appeal.

Although the armed services accepted blacks into the ranks by the 1940s, segregation and discrimination remained the underlying policy, even within the veterans' sectors, while congressional ambivalence still dominated the prospects of any eminent changes. After having served his entire enlistment period at Montford Point at Camp Lejeune, Stewart's honorable discharge from the Marine Corps Reserve took effect on December 6, 1946. He left the Corps as a Sergeant First Class and qualified rifle marksman and then returned to civilian life with a new focus on veteran affairs. [86]

As returning NAACP branch president, Stewart took immediate action to get better care for black veterans. He believed blacks had served their country in the same honorable capacity as whites. Therefore, blacks merited equal access to the valuable technical, educational, and medical benefits offered by the VA. The director of the

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[84] "Stewart to *Time* magazine, August 21, 1943," folder 6, box 7, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma History Center.
[85] "Helen Whitman to Jimmy Stewart, September 27, 1943," folder 7, box 7, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma History Center.
[86] "Copy of Discharge Paper, December 6, 1946," folder 8, box 7, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma History Center.

NAACP also elicited Stewart's assistance to help integrate the veteran's system with a petition to President Harry S. Truman and General Omar Bradley and bring national attention to the matter.[87]

Stewart then tapped into his network and sought aid from Harry L. Wright, a field representative of the Veterans Services Division from the Southern Regional Council in Atlanta, Georgia. Wright sent Stewart an article published through the council that discussed the lack of care for black veterans and called for a rectification of the injustices. The article increased awareness of the bias against black veterans and encouraged wider involvement for improving the rights of black servicemen.[88] Progress proved slow, and the apathy of policymakers and the military difficult to overcome. Still, leaders like Stewart refused to lessen the pressure on Washington.

On July 16, 1948, President Truman issued Executive Order 9991 that fully integrated the United States armed forces, including Veteran's Affairs.[89] The order could not abolish entrenched racism and covert discrimination, though. Nevertheless, it reflected the executive office's continuing efforts towards equalizing the rights of black soldiers' first introduced by FDR's policy and pushed by activists like Stewart.

In addition to his promotion of blacks in the Veterans of Foreign War and the American Legion, Stewart helped launch a regional branch of the Montford Point Marines Association in 1965. From 1942 to 1949, more than 20,000 blacks became Marines through Montford Point and made their mark within the social and political ranks encompassed by military service. The organization and its associates wanted to

[87] "NAACP to Stewart," folder 9, box 7, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma History Center.
[88] "Harry Wright to Jimmy Stewart, August 28, 1946," folder 1, box 2, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma History Center.
[89] Nalty, *Blacks in the Military*, 214.

preserve the legacy of the men who endured extreme white resistance and still volunteered in order to serve their country.

The chapters sought to provide leadership with community orientation and place emphasis on senior citizens and youth activities, all for a meaningful contribution to America on behalf of the black veterans of Montford Point.[90] As another way to move the black agenda forward with a non-violent and effective approach, Stewart not only contributed his time, but also acknowledged the association, its objectives, and their achievements in the *Black Dispatch* and in NAACP member letters.[91] He, and many more members, used the scruples shaped by the charter to advance race issues in Oklahoma the United States for many decades to come.

Stewart identified an obstruction to his civil agenda with the Marine Corps enlistment policy and later, the Veteran Administration. He joined the battle against race-based recruiting restrictions and added his diplomatic voice to the black cause with military issues. He became among the first to personally volunteer for enlistment and performed his duties in a highly commendable and exemplary manner. True to character and never shelving his crusade for black rights, Stewart drove efforts that addressed the injustices with laudable results. He and the other black soldiers tolerated derogatory insults and actions from whites because they believed that participation in the military furnished them with a promissory note for enduring freedom and equalization of their rights. Stewart worked to eliminate patent discrimination from U.S. military policy and pushed race progress forward throughout the twentieth century. His personal

[90] "Montford Point Commemorative Pamphlet, 1965," folder 11, box 7, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma History Center.
[91] "Newspaper Clipping from the *Black Dispatch*, April 19, 1965," folder 11, box 7, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma History Center.

contributions and progressive activities with the armed services constructed a new platform for black rights and created new avenues for race advancements at the local and national stages.

Chapter 3

Source of Energy: Oklahoma Natural Gas and Black Employment Ascension

Once discharged from the Marines in 1946, Stewart returned to Oklahoma City and again focused his attention on local and national civil issues. He resumed his job as manager of the ONG eastside office, NAACP branch president position, and maintained his column in the *Black Dispatch*. Having already broken through race-restrictive barriers at ONG with a successful career, Stewart wanted to end the discriminatory practices in other local hiring and employment environments. With his quiet, but adamant approach, and his strengthening political and media relationships, he navigated the social and legal inequalities that existed within the American workforce. With his actions and connections at ONG, Stewart poised the black community for another successful non-violent movement in Oklahoma that had national effects.

The historiography of black American labor helps provide a backdrop for Stewart's involvement in twentieth-century black employment movements. With complex interpretations, perspectives, opinions, and arguments, a composite historiography emerges and addresses black American work history. Many of the sources illustrate the difficulties for blacks in the job sector and show the struggle Stewart undertook and the meaning of his achievements.

Several scholars codify a body of work that transcends the classic ties between slavery and modern economics. As a result, many sources contain work ranging from class textbooks to the contemporary interpretations of black labor history. Several sources unite with Stewart's activism and the reader can place his forward-thinking

activities within the larger context of twentieth century race advancements. Typical of a progressive, Stewart's methods of confronting labor-related discrimination were both unprecedented and risky.

As an example of more classic scholarship that related closely to Stewart's part, in 1971, Gary S. Becker tackled the taboo topic of Stewart's time with *The Economics of Discrimination*. He explored the black experience with the market-place events that occurred following the period of the monumental Supreme Court ruling outlawing segregation by color in public schools. Becker's interpretation maintains that the general economic literature and economists responsible for developing a financial field of study neglected the role and increased importance of discrimination in black history.[92]

Becker argues that prejudicial practices assumed greater importance in the history of black employment and economic histories, not only because of the direct economic consequences of biases against both major and minority groups, but also because of the pervasive belief that elimination of market discrimination could potentially eradicate much of the discrimination from non-market areas.[93] Becker's work shows a coordination with Stewart's experiences. It also establishes a foothold in the classic perspectives of twentieth century black employment areas.

Michael Keith Honey's 1999 publication, *Black Workers Remember*, reflects on the decades through which Stewart and countless others fought for black employment justice. Furthermore, Honey's work demonstrates a more recent interpretation of the historic black employment events that Stewart helped mold with his efforts. Honey uses personal accounts of individual black employees, like Stewart, and creates a larger story

[92] Gary S. Becker, *Economics of Discrimination*, (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1971), 40.
[93] Becker, *Economics*, 51.

that discusses the experience of black American workers. Honey's study, like Stewart's forthright actions, encourages the reader to learn firsthand about the racial violence and deprivation of rights that underwrote segregation, discrimination, and racism rooted in Jim Crow ideology, hiring practices, and labor markets in the United States.[94]

Even more recent academic works, like Cecilia A. Conrad, John Whitehead, Patrick Mason, and James Stewart's 2005 study, *African Americans in the U.S. Economy*, exhibit the modern direction of black history interpretations. Their research also shows where our Stewart's activities fit into the larger historiographical complexion of twentieth century job and economic discrimination, the self-assertive successes, and the ongoing problems with government dictated hiring practices. Mason's and Stewart's study provides a twenty-first century perspective with positive tones for the most current black progress in the U.S. economy. They utilize multiple scholarly essays to generate an economic history based in black education, social and cultural structures, and governmental roles in workplace discrimination.[95]

As it had been occurring for over three centuries before Jimmy Stewart's generation, job and economic prejudice was a way to deny blacks equal work and class mobility. As a result, the poignancy of Stewart's efforts to push and pull both the black community and the whites up a steep and slippery slope of often unpopular transitions become clear through his actions aimed at reversing the centuries-long denial of black peoples' equal rights to fair employment.

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[94] Michael K. Honey, ed., *Black Workers Remember: An Oral History of Segregation, Unionism, and the Freedom Struggle,* (Berkley, California: University of California Press, 1999), 189.
[95] Cecilia A. Conrad, John Whitehead, et. al., *African Americans in the U.S. Economy*, (Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield Publisher, Inc., 2005), 5.

The Jim Crow Era, in combination with the political and economic climate of the twentieth century, signaled continuing efforts to oppress and limit black economic and job growth.[96] As whites fought harder with legislative action to keep blacks segregated from white businesses and industry, racist propaganda dominated conventional media and politics. Staunch social, economic, and political hardships amplified the volatile relationships between blacks and whites in the national workforce.[97]

Stewart wanted black equality within the American job market, but his mission sustained a markedly uphill climb due in part to Oklahoma's Jim Crow legislation and the discriminatory cultural ideology and practices it created. Jim Crow laws seriously limited economic agents of mobility for blacks by preventing them from accessing the businesses and industries that offered better jobs. Because the laws also manifested as a more formal version of economic racism, they discouraged Stewart's goals for race progress in job markets and created multiple obstructions to basic human and civil rights progress.[98]

The state of Oklahoma began life based on racial discrimination in the workplace. Even before Stewart's birth, Roy E. Stafford, an editor of the *Daily Oklahoman*, projected his attitudes towards blacks sharing a working environment. "It was never intended by the Almighty," he claimed in 1907, "that the races should be placed upon social equality… His [a Negro's] mind is as much a slave to dictations of superiors as his

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[96] Thomas Knight, "*Black Towns in Oklahoma: Their Development and Survival*," PhD diss., Oklahoma State University, 1975, 54.
[97] Timothy J. Minchin, *Hiring the Black Worker: The Racial Integration of the Southern Textile Industry, 1960-1980*, (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 42.
[98] Jimmie L. Franklin, "Black Oklahomans: An Essay on the Quest for Freedom," in *Alternative Oklahoma: Contraire views of the Sooner State*, ed. Davis D. Joyce (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007), 138.

body was a slave to masters who owned it before the [Civil] war."[99] Stafford based his justification for laws of segregation upon his religious beliefs that blacks should not have contact with whites and upon his persistent belief in God-ordained black inferiority.

Stafford's early twentieth-century assertions characterized a powerful and popular conjecture that influenced the negative legislative and political trajectory of a segregated, oppressed, and unequal labor class that Stewart and blacks confronted throughout their lives. Stafford wrote vehemently and continuously against the mixing of the races and forcefully attacked black intelligence. Stafford justified his pejoratives with the religious implications that the Almighty never intended to have social equality. Furthermore, he wrote that any ideas favoring an elevated black role in society would prove foolish, shameful, and no good to either race.[100] He also publicly lobbied for the adoption of Jim Crow Laws in the first Oklahoma state legislative session.

The president of the 1906 Constitutional Convention, "Alfalfa" Bill Murray, also embodied the history and foundation of popular anti-black notions when he was reported to have declared that blacks would always remain bootblacks, barbers, and farmers, and worthy of only labor positions subordinate to whites.[101] As Murray rose into the upper echelons of western and Oklahoma politics, he took with him support to intensify the discriminatory and segregating legislation of Jim Crow, which had a powerful influence over his constituents.[102]

Murray and Stafford's views illustrated how public figures helped shape the white mentality towards blacks at the time of statehood. Early ideology also showed their

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[99] Roy E. Stafford, "Jim Crow Law," *Daily Oklahoman*, April 16, 1907, 1, Oklahoma City edition.
[100] Roy E. Stafford, "Jim Crow Law," *Daily Oklahoman*, April 16, 1907, 1, Oklahoma City edition.
[101] Staff, "Comes to Tell the Truth," *Daily Oklahoman*, September 11, 1906, 2, Oklahoma City edition.
[102] "Notes, 1906," folder 12, box 1, legislative series, William H. Murray Collection, Carl Alberts Congressional Archives, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma.

intentions to permanently damage the social and economic standing of blacks who sought to overcome their inferior past in the American economic strata. Through the power of their respective positions, Murray and Stafford, among others, did not just lend their insights and influence to the public, they also helped form the future of human and civil rights.

Shared negative feelings toward blacks infiltrated countless publications, legislative actions. Figures, like Murray and Stafford, also suppressed race progress in the workforce.[103] Given the history and public outlook, the black struggle for freedom and independence through a unified job market appeared insurmountable. Nevertheless, with his communal roots, growing network, and supporters at ONG, Stewart had the strength to battle the legal and social implications of segregation and fight for equal rights, opportunities, and identities as workers in Oklahoma and throughout the nation.

Imbued with such determination and assets, Stewart entered the movement to obliterate Jim Crow sanctions and establish new rights for blacks in the workforce. Stewart began with a strong push to eliminate segregation in all public facilities and quickly took action with a call to the readers of the *Black Dispatch*.

Stewart was fully and personally aware that Jim Crow's proprietors supported the laws and practices that obstructed the physical and economic movement of blacks. Although the Jim Crow laws did not explicitly or universally prevent blacks from seeking jobs at white businesses, the ordinances did obstruct their accesses to most public places holding better, higher paying jobs, including federal and government employment. The overriding principal was that if a black person was not allowed to enter certain buildings

[103] "Article Report, 1910," folder 1, box 4, Harry Culver Collection, Carl Alberts Congressional Archives, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma.

and white-owned property, they could not expect to find and execute gainful employment on the same grounds as whites. [104]

Most citizens supported the laws that prevented blacks from entering white-run businesses and equal access to other federal and public buildings, like the post office. When he issued a letter to members of the NAACP, Stewart shared his belief that the ordinances were not only a violation of a basic human right for personal freedom and movement, but also one of the root causes that promoted bigotry in hiring and job markets. He also felt the laws prevented blacks from ascending to their rightful places as equal employees.[105]

Stewart also wrote to the readers of his column that he believed with the integration of public places a destruction of socially and legally endorsed discrimination in job markets would shortly follow.[106] He hoisted the racially charged objective to the forefront of his operation and began swift action calling for *Black Dispatch* readers and NAACP members to help pioneer a groundbreaking demand for equal rights in Oklahoma City. The implications of Stewart's drive resounded with success. Despite the potential for negative repercussions, Stewart and members of the local black community staged sit-ins and wrote letters to state congressional representatives demanding attention to the injustices.[107]

Because of his professionalism and career advancements at ONG, Stewart received support from his influential white supervisors and the company continued to hire

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[104] Catherine M. Lewis and Richard J. Lewis, eds., *Jim Crow America: A Documentary History*, (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas, 2009), 286.
[105] "NAACP Member Correspondence, February 1947," folder 2, box 3, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma History Center.
[106] "Clipping from 'Jimmy Says,' the *Black Dispatch*, February 19, 1947," folder 2, box 3, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma History Center.
[107] Roscoe Dunjee, "Black Push for Equal Rights," *Black Dispatch*, June 8, 1947, 1, Oklahoma City edition.

qualified black workers even though similar businesses still refused to consider similar employment practices. He also sustained his agenda at NAACP gatherings by emphasizing a resolve to keep seeking rights beyond the current limitations. As a result, the liberal movement Stewart and other civil rights proponents began in the late 1940s, led to a series of transitional desegregations of public facilities.[108]

True to character, Stewart marked his initial push with an emphatic, but non-violent manner and achieved a form of black progress that promoted lasting changes. His achievement within the public sphere reflected an incoming tide for uplifting black Oklahomans. His approach also showed how he accomplished a tough goal, rooted in resistance and racism, in such a way that ensured a legitimate black voice for decades to come.

Stewart dovetailed his inaugural victory with his desire to keep his labor-focused schema moving forward. Therefore, he adjusted his sights to the malignancies of discrimination that still existed in civil service hiring practices and operations. His outspoken actions had first led the way to achievements at local facilities, but Stewart also sought additional job equality in federal offices and government employment, as they were at the apex of the American economic structure. Like his ideology for blacks in public jobs, Stewart believed separation from patent prejudice in the United States civil service sectors would also lead to further irrevocable advancements in equal labor rights.[109]

Stewart's tenure as NAACP branch president and his ability to pilot the social politics of his networks proved even more valuable as he went deeper into the

[108] Jimmy Stewart, "Jimmy Says," *Black Dispatch*, October 23, 1947, 5, Oklahoma City edition.
[109] Jimmy Stewart, "Jimmy Says," *Black Dispatch*, November 21, 1947, 5, Oklahoma City edition.

emotionally and politically charged arena for equal employment rights. Although he divided his presidential appointment among many valuable tasks, Stewart focused considerable attention on the malfeasances present local government workplaces.

By the early 1950s, Stewart identified one of the more obvious examples of hiring discrimination was with the United States Postal Service. The absence of black employees at local post offices confronted Stewart on a daily basis, and he saw the void as a clear opportunity for action beyond written admonishments. In 1950, he traveled to Washington as the local NAACP representative to formally file his grievances over the blatant discrimination in the hiring policy and practices at the post office, which was directly across the street from his ONG office. Typically Stewart, he prudently insisted on an amicable resolution with legislators and drew on an official NAACP statement that contradicted the fairness of current federal hiring practices.[110]

At the time of Stewart's visit, a Jim Crow directive required blacks to complete a difficult written exam to demonstrate literacy before employers would consider a candidate for a civil service position. By contrast, Jim Crow grandfathered whites into the hiring system and did not require them to prove their literacy with a written test. Therefore, the grandfather clause resulted in a legal and dispiriting white-favored partisanship when applying for government employment. Moreover, black examinees who accepted the challenge, needed to score above ninety percent to pass, further compounding the difficulties to enter federal service.[111] To appease his immediate demands, delegates in Washington instructed Stewart to return home and encourage blacks to test at all levels, despite the fact that civil service procedures did not mandate

[110] "NAACP Statement," folder 2, box 3, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma History Center.
[111] Nathaniel Jason Washington, *Historical Development of the Negro in Oklahoma*, (Tulsa, Oklahoma: Dexter Publishing Co., 1948), 55.

whites testing for the same positions, nor did any plans exist to amend the status quo. Characteristically unflappable, Stewart put the power of the press and the authority of his network to the task.

He and his constituents lobbied as many blacks as possible to take the test. Again, with powerful publications, meetings, and speeches, Stewart and local NAACP members generated enthusiasm and determination for the cause. Their goal was to form a large enough pool of legitimate black candidates so federal human resources management could no longer ignore their presence. Ultimately, numerous blacks tested and proved their proficiency. As a result, they were allowed to stand in equal competition for civil service jobs, thus beginning a sustained destruction of workplace discrimination altogether. Stewart's initiatives created such a substantial group of qualified blacks that the local post office was soon filled to capacity with black workers.[112]

As one of the first black employees of the company, Stewart's career at ONG was also influential to his mission and proved tantamount to helping him alter the black position in the American workforce. As he constantly expressed the importance of black justice in the workplace in "Jimmy Says", Stewart also combined his authority as NAACP leader with his dedication to a composed and respectable work ethic at ONG. His ascension through positions at ONG helped elevate him among his national contacts and gain further attention for his cause. As a result, his network connections expanded and helped him optimize his movement for equal employment opportunities.

Due in part to Stewart's accomplishments as a black employee in a predominately white business and his composed persuasion with delegates in Washington over postal

[112] "NAACP Correspondence," folder 2, box 3, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma History Center.

hiring practices, Walter White contacted Stewart in 1952 and declared the Oklahoma City organization the largest and most influential branch in the region. Having already worked with Stewart regarding U.S. military enlistment policies ten years before, White praised Stewart's achievements at ONG and his progressive involvement and continued commitment to the NAACP's purpose. [113] White's praise illustrated one of Stewart's fruitful connections with national figures and acknowledgement of his efforts in the workforce. The men remained in close contact and collaborated their efforts on several issues of local and national importance to black America, including employment issues.

In fact, also in 1952, White sent Stewart documentation of his testimony before the U.S. Senate Rules Committee for his perusal. White also asked Stewart to evaluate his portrayal of developing events in black civil rights in Washington.[114] Perhaps White thought it would help Stewart target his own local and national efforts because of the close-knit professionalism and constant communication. As a result, both men fittingly prioritized the association's aims against more deplorable and restrictive race practices. Both agreed that the ongoing injustices of Jim Crow tainted hiring practices, limited employment opportunities, and subsequently upward mobility.[115]

While at ONG, Stewart saw even greater prospects for black involvement in the energy industry and shared his views with White. Through their correspondence, both men felt that opening the energy field to black workers would create new jobs equal to white labor positions. More importantly, new opportunities in the energy field possessed

[113] "Walter White to Jimmy Stewart, March 28, 1952," folder 14, box 2, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma History Center.
[114] "Walter White to Jimmy Stewart, April 13, 1952," folder 14, box 2, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma History Center.
[115] "Walter White to Jimmy Stewart, April 13, 1952," folder 14, box 2, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma History Center.

the potential to abolish the social, cultural, economic, and political confines brought by Jim Crow.[116]

Furthermore, White, by his senior position within the NAACP and his working relationship with the Oklahoma City division, granted Stewart wider resources to project his voice. Accordingly, with his column in the *Black Dispatch*, Stewart frequently directed his views at local citizens and business owners. With support from White at the national office and building on his previous successes, Stewart encouraged citizens to demand additional labor reforms.[117] With careful, but assertive appeals, Stewart wrote numerous letters to politicians in Washington calling for more legislative revisions favoring black rights.[118] With a constant exchange of information, support from White, and his ongoing poise at ONG, Stewart buttressed his position.

Stewart's relationship with White connected him with invaluable resources at a time when he was first gaining momentum. Equally as important, his connection with White helped him reach a broader audience and enlarge his sphere of influence. Together, both men could peaceably, yet adamantly push for more equal opportunities not just in the Oklahoma white-saturated job market, but also across the nation. Their combined persistence paid off in dividends.

Eight days after the May 17, 1954, Atlanta Charter, (the Supreme Court decision that outlawed segregation in public schools) White issued a formal call to action on behalf of the NAACP. He wanted to both raise awareness of first breakdowns in Jim

[116] "Walter White to Jimmy Stewart, April 13, 1952," folder 14, box 2, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma History Center.
[117] Jimmy Stewart, "Jimmy Says," the *Black Dispatch*, July 18, 1952, 5, Oklahoma City edition.
[118] "Letters to Congressional Legislators, June 1952-November 1952," folder 14, box 2, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma History Center.

Crow mandates and rally members to seek the thorough dissolution of Jim Crow in all institutions.[119] True to form, Stewart stepped forward.

Stewart and White, with the backing of the NAACP, seized the moment. White rapidly drafted a petition destined for Washington demanding an immediate prohibition of Jim Crow ordinances that denied blacks access to public areas and jobs, based solely upon race. As a nod to Stewart's increasing influence, White sought his help in gathering an optimum number of signatures. Stewart accordingly designed a committee made up of local black associates and NAACP activists, including Clara Luper and Dr. E.C. Moon, Jr. Typical of Stewart's motivation, he relayed the call in the *Black Dispatch*, gave speeches at NAACP meetings, and issued local bulletins. Through these outlets, Stewart accentuated a positive sense of black worth in the job market and encouraged all blacks to take action.[120] He reached deeper into the black community with the organization's loaded message and punched into the heart of systemic economic discrimination.

Ultimately, White's and Stewart's joint efforts, and their commitment to the cause, produced a formidable opponent to Jim Crow and the white tactics that kept blacks in social, political, and economic subordination. Furthermore, Stewart's intuitive sense for making the most of his skills, connections, and position as NAACP branch president and ONG manager helped guide black citizens through their opposition to Jim Crow. With Supreme Court rulings, unification, and a collective desire to purge all public facilities of discrimination, the answer came to White's call. By 1958, all of the metro Oklahoma City public areas, including the state capitol, were entirely integrated,[121]

[119] "NAACP Bulletin," folder 14, box 2, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma History Center.
[120] Jimmy Stewart, "Jimmy Says," *Black Dispatch*, May 30, 1954, 5, Oklahoma City edition.
[121] "NAACP Correspondence," folder 2, box 3, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma History Center.

thereby opening the door for Stewart to seek more improvements and equal opportunities for working blacks.[122]

As Stewart continued to focus his skills and wisdom, he discovered a new strength for black productiveness in areas of primary social, political, and economic concern. As a relentless civil rights campaigner and child of the Jim Crow era, he saw and experienced the unfair practices of the local labor and employment environment. With his measured, yet unyielding approach, political and media relationships, and social savvy, Stewart negated overt discrimination and transcended the traditional confines of the white-appointed black labor class. He also sought an end to the cultural and legal inequalities that still existed within the American workforce.

His employment at ONG and his NAACP branch presidency represented keynote factors that pushed his objective and reached more people with powerful political and legislative connections to alter lives and reverse the historically oppressive effects of Jim Crow. After returning from his military service with a renewed mission, Stewart's accomplishments steadily grew into a series of civic acknowledgements and helped empower his voice at a higher level with even more influential individuals—across the nation and at home.

Through his actions and early experiences with ONG, the NAACP, the *Black Dispatch*, and his growing network, Stewart poised the black community for another successful non-violent advance of civil rights in Oklahoma. With his mission for equality in the American job market, Stewart distinguished a new and more persuasive level of race progress that soon spread into other vital areas of the black experience.

[122] However, this opening did not extend to the suburbs, like Norman and Edmond. The University of Oklahoma (Norman) and The University of Central Oklahoma (Edmond) were like islands in a sea of bigotry.

Chapter 4

Race Progress in Oklahoma Education, Black Cultural Development, and Technical Skill Vocation

At the time Jimmy Stewart struggled with segregation and discrimination in American job markets, he also undertook a similar fight to equalize black education. Like his efforts to make progress in the military and workforce during the 1940s and 1950s, Stewart began to build on the first race advancements he achieved in high school. With the University of Kansas having once denied him admission because of his race, Stewart profoundly believed in the importance of a black presence in higher education. With an increasingly active involvement in the local community, publications, and politics, Stewart aimed to elevate another element of his forward moving agenda with Oklahoma public and collegiate institutions. Once making valuable contacts in both white and black communities through ONG and the NAACP, he renewed his focus on making changes and creating opportunities for blacks in higher education, cultural arts, and technical trade skills.

Stewart once wrote that he believed a strengthening of black secondary and cultural education along with access to better colleges and technical schools were ways for blacks to uplift themselves.[123] As one who attended LU on a football scholarship, but did not complete a college degree program, he knew that other opportunities were limited with few alternatives. As he wrote in "Jimmy Says", education represented a measure of honor, an agent for mobility, and a way to improve one's life. He was not content to let someone's basic right to formal learning be suppressed indefinitely by segregation and

[123] "Jimmy Stewart's Autobiographical Papers," folder 1, box 1, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma History Center.

discrimination.[124] In addition, he hoped his movement for educational equality and opportunity would provide a constructive example for the rest of the nation to follow. Through positive, progressive, and non-violent means, Stewart wanted young blacks to have access to an elevated education and prepare them for an equal participation in society. With his supporting cast of colleagues and influential contacts, he used his emblematic forceful, but subtly compromising approach, and took the initiative to involve blacks in higher, technical, and cultural education. Ultimately, Stewart helped achieve race progress in Oklahoma learning institutions; his efforts soon had wider national implications.

The development of education for black Americans and the accompanying documentation of it embodied multiple social, cultural, political, and legislative reformations. Highly charged events, perspectives, and interpretations about schools placed both positive and negative connotations on the historiography of black academia and helped shaped the views of twentieth-century race progress in black education.

While Stewart's surviving reading material encompassed mostly historical literature separate from black education analyses, his written ideology on black education that often appeared in the *Black Dispatch* coalesced with the historiographical interpretations of several authors of the time. More importantly, Stewart's reading material characterized a rich collection and included books controversial by early to mid-twentieth century standards. Therefore, his early goals for black progress in education assimilated with the ideas of certain authors who developed literature as contentious as it was progressive for mid-twentieth century America.

[124] Jimmy Stewart, "Jimmy Says," *Black Dispatch*, September 18, 1947, 5, Oklahoma City edition.

By the closing of the 1960, after the largest public civil rights movement, social historians wrote numerous works on black educational history against the backdrop of continued civil activism, like Stewart's influencing movements. The influx of new publications formed an increasingly diverse edification as more scholars devoted their studies to the black experience in United States educational institutions. Moreover, the scholarship further assists in understanding the motivating factors and subsequent approaches Stewart used to achieve justice for blacks.

In 1969, Lawrence A. Cremin, Professor of Education at Columbia University, compiled *American Education: Its Men, Ideas, and Institutions* as a representation of selective works indicative of the ideas that influenced mid-twentieth century black educational consideration, perspectives, and approaches, many of which appear similar to Stewart's stance on the same issues. By reproducing specific works of thought and scholarship that had been out of print or otherwise unavailable, Cremin takes an alternative approach to traditional intellectual presentation of black material. Much of Cremin's work supports continued advancements for blacks in education. Furthermore, his thesis focuses on influencing a long-term movement for additional equal rights. As a result, like Stewart's views and liberal activities, Cremin becomes one of the early writers to validate a dynamic position in the historiographic make up of black education and race progress in the United States. [125]

In 1978, following Cremin's *American Education*, Vincent P. Franklin and James D. Anderson published *New Perspectives on Black Educational History.* Their work coincided with the evolution of Stewart's principled mission. Franklin and Anderson

[125] Lawrence A. Cremin, ed., *American Education: Its Men, Ideas, and Institutions,* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1969), 21.

originally began their work after a 1976 session on Black Educational History at the Chicago convention of the Association for the Study of Afro-American Life and History.[126] By taking a similar approach as Cremin, Franklin and Anderson showcased a number of essays, either heretofore unpublished or written specifically for their book, and completed a preliminary survey of current research interests and topics in black education history. Their work shows the advance of black scholarship and the rapidity of changes in thought, approach, and academic procedure in the twentieth century. *New Perspectives* also reflects the societal, cultural, and political transformations, that appeared in concert with Stewart's progressive agenda.

Also important to the study of Stewart's involvement, Franklin and Anderson showed a desire to fill the gap in black educational historiography, while initiating a dialogue with other researchers and active members in the black community.[127] They accomplished their objectives with a book that contains individual works relevant to the time. Franklin and Anderson's work also placed emphasis on the importance of a collective effort that aimed at positive advancements in education; all of which verified Stewart's work and achievements with similar education goals.

Like Stewart's advocacy for black progress, the historiographical component of black educational studies grew by leaps and bounds throughout the remainder of his life and well into the twenty first century. Scholars, activists, and educators continued expand the genre. With his book, *Strengthening the African American Educational Pipeline: Informing Research, Policy, and Practice*, published in 2007, Jerlando F.L. brought black scholarship to a more modern context. In his thesis, Jackson acknowledges

[126] Vincent P. Franklin and James D. Anderson, eds., *New Perspectives on Black Educational History*, (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1978), 3.
[127] Franklin and Anderson, *New Perspectives*, 6.

that while decades of past research sufficiently describe the dismal educational conditions for blacks, the federal legislation aimed at improving the historically bad conditions and the social support for a new movement remained slow and mostly insignificant without any immediate or long lasting positive effects.[128] Jackson's thesis also identified many of the same inequalities and disparate black representations that Stewart saw and constantly fought against throughout his life.[129]

Because he wanted to help improve the conditions of minority education, Jackson posed tough questions with a contemporary interpretation of black educational progress at critical stages in the modern American school structure.[130] Like Stewart before him, Jackson sought to improve education practices and push minority education progress in a more favorable and positive direction. Stewart would probably be the first to say that even though he helped accomplished seemingly insurmountable feats in black education and progress overall, there was much more work still to be done.

Building on his previous victories with hiring and workplace discrimination, Stewart and his allies launched a massive and contentious campaign in 1947 on behalf of black instructors in Oklahoma. Stewart brought forward his concerns about the clear imbalance he saw between white and black teacher pay and pub them at the forefront of the Oklahoma City NAACP.[131] He wrote in the *Black Dispatch* that he believed it was time to push for equalization in salary. Stewart called for other activists to join together

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[128] Jerlando F.L. Jackson, *Strengthening the African American Educational Pipeline: Informing Research, Policy, and Practice*, (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 2007), 65.
[129] Jackson, *Strengthening*, 17.
[130] Jackson, *Strengthening*, 18.
[131] "NAACP Meeting Minutes, June 21, 1947," folder 3, box 2, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma History Center.

and support another civil rights movement.[132] Typical of Stewart's diplomatic methods, he began sending letters to the Oklahoma City School Board with his strong, but measured opposition, and encouraged his readers to do the same.[133]

At the time, because schools were segregated and therefore had an adversely separate state education funding scheme, black teachers suffered a salary deficit to white teachers, of nearly $300 per year, well over a month's salary.[134] Stewart was never one to pass on an opportunity to transcend a classic derogatory and discriminatory practice and boost black interests beyond traditional social and legal constraints. After his initial promotion, he conceived the idea for a gifted Douglass High School physical education teacher, Emma Lee Freeman, to bring a lawsuit against the Oklahoma City Board of Education and force equal pay for equal work. The Freeman case quickly ignited controversial social and political debates in Oklahoma over black schools and those employed within them.[135]

Despite the public controversy, with his power of appeal, unending commitment to black rights in education, and network of influential people, Stewart and his supporters drove the Freeman case forward. To ensure a strong standing against the highly charged opposition, provide a legitimate voice for the minorities' side of the case, and secure fair representation of the confrontation, Stewart conscripted the legal services of Amos T. Hall into his arsenal. Hall had a history as a champion for the poorer, socially, and legally oppressed blacks.[136] Hall, like Stewart, had stood at the forefront of other early

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[132] Jimmy Stewart, "Jimmy Says," *Black Dispatch*, March 18, 1947, 5, Oklahoma City edition.
[133] "Jimmy Stewart to the Oklahoma City Board of Education, March 12, 1947," folder 3, box 3, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma History Center.
[134] Kaye M. Teall, *Black History in Oklahoma: A Resource Book*, (Oklahoma City, Oklahoma: Oklahoma City Public Schools, 1971), 287.
[135] Staff Writer, "Equal Teacher Salary," *Daily Oklahoman*, July 17, 1947, 1, Oklahoma City edition.
[136] Miles-LaGrange and Burke, *Passion*, 105.

civil rights battles in Oklahoma and had gained national recognition as an NAACP representative in legal matters and with a long list of judicial successes.[137]

Since he wanted a federal court venue, Hall, with the courtroom presence of Stewart, Dunjee, and other black leaders, took a constitutional approach to the racially sensitive topic.[138] In April 1947, Hall petitioned the United States District Court for the Western District of Oklahoma for a simple declaratory judgment. In his plea, Hall asked for a legal pronouncement stating that the unequal pay system violated the Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution. Hall targeted the amendment because he believed that, on paper, it constitutionally guaranteed equal protection for all citizens, but it was still ineffective in practice in Oklahoma, specifically with equal teacher pay.[139]

Supported by additional written insistence from Stewart and others in the black community, the initial filing of the lawsuit motivated the Oklahoma City School Board Vice President, Ira Williams, to declare that the board had created new non-court mandated arrangements for the contracts of black teachers in the city. The new voluntary system began paying teachers' salaries on a per contract, individual basis that helped better equalized the city's pay scales. Because the school board established the stipulations outside a court of law, however, black educators were without a court-mandated guarantee that their salary would match the earnings of white teachers. Williams exemplified the board's rationalization saying, "We have tried to make salaries equal, but sometimes there is nothing we can do about it."[140] Regardless, the District

[137] "Jimmy Stewart to Amos Hall, March 7, 1947," Stewart Collection, folder 4, box 3, Oklahoma History Center.
[138] Jimmy Stewart, "Day in Court," *Black Dispatch*, April 17, 1947, 5, Oklahoma City edition.
[139] "NAACP Informational Bulletin, 1947," Stewart Collection, folder 4, box 3, Oklahoma History Center.
[140] Staff Writer, "School Board," *Daily Oklahoman*, June 9, 1947, 1, Oklahoma City edition.

Court dismissed the Freeman case because authorities took William's pseudo-equalization of Oklahoma City School's pay scale in good faith.[141]

Even though the negotiation showed the board's attempt to listen to black patrons' concerns and seek an amicable resolution, Stewart and supporters saw any compromise short of an official declaratory judgment on their challenge as nothing more than idle appeasement. Stewart wrote that without unequivocal victory, black leaders saw little promise for true change or legal rights for equal pay at any point in the future. Furthermore, that William's efforts attempted to address the situation of black teachers in Oklahoma City only, ostensibly ignoring the same injustices against other state district instructors. He also felt that backing down at this time, and accepting the new but still unequal solution before pursuing a new suit in federal court, was only a shortsighted act with few implications for positive and meaningful race progress in white-run public education.[142]

Through continued writing and public speeches, Stewart, Dunjee, and Hall fastidiously urged the NAACP, its members, and readers of the *Black Dispatch* to support a continuation of the case in federal venues.[143] They promoted the public campaign and court action believing that the counties, state, and eventually national governments would become legally obliged to provide black teachers with the same pay as whites and encourage further advancements for blacks teachers in academic intuitions. The group also wanted to push for more opportunities for blacks to continue their education at the graduate level. Through constant and meticulous references, penetrating opinions, editorials, and in NAACP organization member bulletins, Stewart made suggestions for

[141] Staff Writer, "School Board," *Daily Oklahoman*, June 9, 1947, 1, Oklahoma City edition.
[142] Jimmy Stewart, "Jimmy Says," *Black Dispatch*, August 23, 1947, 5, Oklahoma City edition.
[143] Roscoe Dunjee, "Editorial," *Black Dispatch*, January 17, 1948, 6, Oklahoma City edition.

more involvement in teacher and school issues. He kept the unsatisfactory results of the local Freedmen case fresh in the minds and actions of the black community. True to form, he never relented until there was a definitive and favorable outcome.

In October 1948, United States District Judge Edgar S. Vaught rewarded Stewart and his group's temperate, but outspoken persistence in the legal channel. Vaught struck directly at the core of the matter when he handed down a ruling ordering all local school boards in the state to equalize black and white teacher salaries. Citing the Fourteenth Amendment, he made it abundantly clear that race-based discrimination in salaries between teachers in "white majority schools" and in separated "black schools" was unlawful.[144]

Because of ideals embodied by the Freeman case and Stewart's indefatigable drive for the reassessment of educational salary structure, the legal victory helped open the door for continuing advancements. By succeeding within legal channels, the constitutional victory set a new precedence for the race progress in schools and in the rest of the state. With his leading involvement in the case and constant promotion of progressive ideology, Stewart achieved an important part of his mission through legal and non-violent methods.

Stewart's approach in reaching an amicable change and the success of the equal teachers' salary case represented a growing civil and humanitarian movement in central Oklahoma. His activities placed Oklahoma's black-related events in a national perspective with budding influence in both white and black communities. Ultimately, Stewart's accomplishments with the Freeman case further encouraged widespread advances in black education.

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[144] Roscoe Dunjee, "Salary Victory," *Black Dispatch*, October 14, 1948, 1, Oklahoma City edition.

Having made strides for race progress in the military, the workforce, and now in public schools, Stewart took another step forward with his agenda for black educational reform and equal opportunities. Now he forged a connection to academic figures in central Oklahoma's collegiate institutions. He utilized his network connections and aligned with Roscoe Dunjee and NAACP attorney, Thurgood Marshall, and in 1948, after the Freeman ruling, began the push to desegregate the University of Oklahoma (OU).

As with Stewart, countless thousands of Oklahoma blacks had their educational opportunities severely limited by the state providing just one college for blacks, LU. As beloved as LU was, Stewart, Marshall, and Dunjee wanted to establish an equal presence for black students within the white educational system and thought the time was right during the convoluted years of other transitional desegregations.

As Stewart had found in Oklahoma and Kansas high schools in his youth, discrimination retained a strong foothold at OU and all other state institutions.[145] Doubtlessly remembering those days when his options were LU or nothing, Stewart wanted something better for the post-World War II generation and expressed his thoughts on higher education at NAACP meetings. [146] He also showed his malcontent with the patent injustices as a writer for the *Black Dispatch* when he wrote that he refused to tolerate watching whites deny black students access to a better system that could drastically improve their lives and lives in the black community.[147]

To begin the fight for change in discriminatory admissions policies, Stewart initiated correspondence with administrative officials at OU—tactically and as

[145] Miles-LaGrange and Burke, *Passion*, 68.
[146] "NAACP Meeting Minutes, April 21, 1948," folder 3, box 2, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma History Center.
[147] Jimmy Stewart, "Jimmy Says," *Black Dispatch*, May 1, 1948, 5, Oklahoma City edition.

diplomatically as ever. In the letter, he pressed for immediate attention to his concerns. More importantly, he wanted OU officials to address his views favoring equal opportunities for black admission into a college that received far more funding than the only black institution still marked for inferiority.[148]

OU, and other traditionally white institutions like the Agricultural and Mechanical College at Stillwater (now Oklahoma State University), and the Normal School at Edmond (now the University of Central Oklahoma), had carefully established rules that preventing the admission of blacks. Jim Crow legislation and the social and cultural barriers under the "separate but equal" practices explicitly discouraged any school integration and accomplished total exclusion of one and only one race of students—black ones.[149]

As with economic and workplace institutions, many traditional race-based attitudes ran so deep in Oklahoma from statehood that segregation ostensibly barred blacks admission into any college or university, except LU. Dunjee went so far as to call the practices, "Perhaps the most indefensible and reprehensible in the nation."[150] Additionally, the eighteen Jim Crow laws passed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries dictated the legal and monetary consequences for whites and blacks who entertained the idea of breaking segregation laws. White interest groups rarely hesitated to use the legal and political approach to sustain black oppression.[151]

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[148] "Jimmy Stewart to OU Office of Admissions, May 5, 1948," Stewart Collection, folder 2, box 2, Oklahoma History Center.
[149] Robert R. Weyeneth, "The Architecture of Racial Segregation: The Challenges of Preserving the Problematical Past." *The Public Historian* 27 (2005): 33.
[150] Roscoe Dunjee, "Editorial," *Black Dispatch*, February 23, 1941, 5, Oklahoma City edition.
[151] W. David Baird and Danney Goble, *Oklahoma: A History*, (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 2008), 269.

Nearing the end of the 1940s, Stewart and Dunjee continued to raise awareness with the *Black Dispatch* and generated support from readers who also emphatically encouraged the administration at OU to consider changes and alter their outlook on accepting black student. OU officials could not ignore the pressure from Dunjee, Stewart, and the incessant requests for equality from the black community. Neither could they ignore the Supreme Court's rejection of the state's argument in 1948.[152]

On prior occasions, students had accepted the evasive practice of having the state finance their education outside Oklahoma in states that did not discriminate. As a graduate of the state's only black college, Ada Lois Sipuel (who later became Sipuel-Fisher), and her legal team lead by Marshall, refused to accept the ruse, especially since LU could offer only a Master's program for advanced education.[153] Even so, blacks, like Sipuel, were unable to seek a quality recognized legal education within Oklahoma, much less have it funded by the state.

When speaking at an NAACP engagement, Stewart agreed with Dunjee, Marshall, and other members that, because of her collected demeanor and exemplar grades at LU, Sipuel was a strong candidate for the landmark mission.[154] As a result, in 1949, with strong public backing from Dunjee, Stewart, the *Black Dispatch,* and the NAACP, Sipuel applied for admission to OU, Oklahoma's only law school, exclusively serving whites only. A clear majority at the admissions committee denied Sipuel's application because of her race, sometimes expressed paternalistically. Ready for a quick response, a team of NAACP lawyers, led by Marshall, filed suit against the State Board

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[152] Catherine L. Hobbs, *Are You Doing Fine, Oklahoma?*, (Norman, Oklahoma: Mongrel Empire Press, 2008), 110.
[153] Worth J. Hadley, "Roscoe Dunjee on Education: The Improvement of Black Education in Oklahoma, 1930-1955" (Master's Thesis, University of Oklahoma, 1981), 57.
[154] "NAACP Speech, April,1948," folder 3, box 2, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma History Center.

of Regents. Stewart remained closely involved as the NAACP branch president. He continued writing powerful letters to the university and kept readers updated with "Jimmy Says". In both written forms, Stewart strongly stated his support for Sipuel and his belief in her capabilities to perform as an equally valuable student, regardless of her race.[155]

Stewart and other supporting proponents of *Sipuel vs. the Board of Regents of the University of Oklahoma* maintained a steadfast dedication to their goals. Ultimately, the case made it to the U.S. Supreme Court where, because the state of Oklahoma had failed to live up to "separate-but-equal" doctrine, as it could not definitively prove that they had provided a separate legal education equal to OU, the court ruled in favor of Sipuel. For one of the first times a legal entity officially and publicly maintained that the state of Oklahoma did not in fact provide equal opportunities for black students for advanced education within the state. With the absence of a law school alone, LU was not equal to OU. The outcome of Sipuel's case set documented precedence for change.[156] As a result, The OU College of Law admitted Sipuel into their program in 1949; she became the first black person to pursue a law degree inside the state.

Later, during the 1950s, when the state had all but given up on barring blacks from entering public colleges and universities, the Attorney General's office, for one of the first times in the state's history, officially and publically admitted the state hurriedly and rather half-heartedly tried to make a law school at LU and to declare it equal to the school at OU. The ruse was transparent. The state could not, in the face of unrelenting

[155] "Jimmy Stewart to the OU Board of Regents, May 10, 1949," folder 3, box 2, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma History Center.
[156] Roscoe Dunjee, "Ada Sipuel," *Black Dispatch*, August 15, 1949, 1, Oklahoma City edition.

pressure from people like Stewart and Dunjee's group, prove separate was equal.[157] A new age had begun.

Showing Sipuel's strong character during the battle, George Lynn Cross, OU's seventh president from 1944 to 1968, met with Sipuel after the decision and said, "The young woman was chic, charming and well poised as she entered my office, and I remember thinking that the association had made an excellent choice of a student for the test case."[158] The success of Sipuel's case and her disposition throughout the ordeal affirmed Stewart and his colleagues' decision to promote Sipuel's right for an equal education and to tackle a hazardous battle against segregation in higher education. As a result, Sipuel's accomplishment was fundamental to race progress in Oklahoma's antiquated and discriminatory education system. Stewart was elated and praised Sipuel and her triumph by commending her resolve and bravery in his column.[159]

Sipuel still faced seemingly endless cases of discrimination because of the strict conditions OU administrators and faculty placed on her while at school. Even though OU had desegregated, it was not integrated. In an effort to prevent interracial "mingling," guards escorted Sipuel throughout the campus, required that she use different doors, and sit separate from whites in a raised seat with a sign reading, "Colored" before her; all were various examples of specified forms of "in house segregation".[160]

Regardless of the detrimental circumstances and the constant pressure on her to quit, Sipuel personified a crusading spirit similar to Stewart's and many other black persons' desires for equal opportunity. With continued support from Stewart and other

[157] Hadley, "Roscoe Dunjee," 85.
[158] David Levy, "The Day the President Went Fishing," *Sooner Magazine* 18 (1998): 27.
[159] Jimmy Stewart, "Sipuel Success," *Black Dispatch*, September 2, 1949, 5, Oklahoma City edition.
[160] Miles-LaGrange and Burke, *Passion*, 69.

black Oklahomans, Sipuel endured her initial stigma and garnered even more success and pride. She graduated with a law degree in 1951, and much later in 1992, was appointed to the OU Board of Regents, the very same body she and her supporters fought in her case. Most of all, she represented a key figure in Stewart's positive actions for civil rights and race progress.

While Sipuel's admission was not an immediate or complete abolition of deep-seated racist notions, it embodied another victory for Stewart, his colleagues, and black Americans across the country. Roosevelt Milton, Oklahoma City NAACP branch president in the 1990s, later reflected on the breadth of Stewart, Dunjee, and Marshall's endeavors by stating that they had been, "instrumental in the removal of legal and social barriers that preempted black citizens from attending the University of Oklahoma from the late 1940s."[161] Milton's words confirmed the enduring importance of Stewart's diplomatic influence in a socially, legally, and politically tense situation for black advancement in Oklahoma. His opinion also showed the long-term effectiveness of Stewart's powerful network at action against stubborn education reforms.

Despite his other activities that promoted equal justice for blacks, Stewart maintained deep involvement in increasing instructional opportunities and kept the meaningful issues at the fore of his publications for the blacks. He continuously emphasized the importance of a black voice and presence beyond the traditional journalistic outlets in the *Black Dispatch* and NAACP. While many white sectors still showed resistance to formal cultural, social, and political integration of education, Stewart's accomplishments provided blacks with the tools, skills, and knowledge to begin uplifting themselves without waiting for majority approval or support. As many

[161] "NAACP Resolution, April 17, 1997," Stewart Collection, folder 10, box 2, Oklahoma History Center.

protesters often engaged in violent, loud, and belligerent demonstrations, Stewart managed to raise a special awareness with his measured, *avant garde* ideas for helping blacks.

With his participation in Oklahoma higher education, integration, and equal teacher salaries, Stewart soon built on the legal advances for black civil and human rights. He envisioned an enhancement and availability of black liberal arts as another positive and powerful inroad through which blacks could advance themselves without white proscription or oversight.[162] With the same passion and candor he applied in his other racially progressive endeavors, Stewart further utilized writing skills, methods of diplomacy and influential network to heighten black cultural awareness through focused art and history. After his first achievements in education, his next goal was to provide an elevated understanding of the black American experience and opportunity for individual advancement. He helped create another integral dynamic in twentieth century race progress in black education, art, and culture.

[162] "Jimmy Stewart's Autobiographical Papers," folder 1, box 1, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma History Center.

Chapter 5

Advancing an Agenda: Culture, Energy and More Networking

During the 1950s, after the Sipuel and Freeman cases had begun to affect Oklahoma's system, Jimmy Stewart's ongoing career with ONG, his constant participation with the NAACP and the *Black Dispatch* increased his public presence and grew his connections. Having established the civic associations critical to his network's continued effectiveness, Stewart corresponded with local judges, attorneys, and legislative representatives with national service ambitions and nurtured greater legislative associations. He sought additional links as a way to not only diversify and augment his existing strong social, economic, and political network, but also as a means of sustaining his ambitious agenda in jobs, energy, education, culture, and skill vocation.

In one example, because of Stewart's positive role in the community and his high school football experience as a young minority athlete in Wichita, J.D. Moon, one of Stewart's early contacts and still principal of Oklahoma City's Douglass High School in the 1950s, appointed him president of the Douglass Athletic Association.[163] In a state where blacks prided themselves in their schools' sports programs, the designation was no small accomplishment, and it further elevated his recognition in local minority circles as a role model for black youths. Already enabled by Dunjee and the *Black Dispatch*, Stewart had demonstrated his aptitude for successfully pushing progressive and positive agendas. Moon had hopes of enriching and strengthening black youth programs and wanted to use Stewart's skills and services to promote black athletic programs and highlight their good sportsmanship. Image could be a powerful tool.

[163] "Resume of Activities," folder 1, box 3, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma History Center.

Of course, Stewart enthusiastically obliged. He provided black students with the guidance and sagacious expertise of a man who could empathize with their situation. Furthermore, Stewart's relationship with Moon cemented another influential connection that helped him with the protracted fight to further equalize education.[164]

Beyond his achievements in the local athletic, education, and job market spheres in the 1950s, Stewart's message reached countless more people and grew beyond the limits of the city and the state. In a letter, W.C. Handy, father of the blues movement and an influential songwriter, wrote to Stewart after having read his column in the *Black Dispatch*. Handy told Stewart he believed what Stewart was doing in Oklahoma City to better race relations was also noticeably improving conditions in Henderson, Kentucky and Memphis, Tennessee. Handy also felt that Stewart's victory with the Sipuel case would lead to more changes in black rights.[165] With contact from someone as well known as Handy, Stewart could better make his mark outside Oklahoma and expand his positive, progressive movements.

Stewart kept an eye out for future opportunities for race progress and looked to combine his critical network of black interest attorneys and politicians with other influential figures in the civil right movement. Stewart therefore initiated contact with the up-and-coming black legal representative from Wewoka, Oklahoma, Junita Kidd-Stout in the mid-1950s.[166]

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[164] Even today, Douglass High School represents a virtually "black school" with a very active and admirable sports program, like the 2010 State 4-A Championship.
[165] "W.C. Handy to Jimmy Stewart, December 1, 1955," folder 3, box 2, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma History Center.
[166] "Jimmy Stewart to Junita Kidd-Stout, May 25, 1954," folder 10, box 2, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma History Center.

Because she endured many of the same experiences with discrimination in Oklahoma as Stewart, he readily identified with Kidd-Stout. Like Stewart, she refused to let the oppressive traditions continue and took matters into her own hands. She also saw education as a means of mobility, upliftment, and evolution for blacks. Because no accredited college in Oklahoma admitted black students before the Sipuel case, Kidd-Stout obtained her law degree in Indiana. After graduation, she found employment in the offices of the Philadelphia District Attorney where she made great strides with her legal employment and increased her notoriety back home in Oklahoma.[167] Stewart likewise recognized the meaning of her accomplishments and offered support to her groundbreaking career.[168]

According to Stewart, Kidd-Stout's legal studies and career served as a critical example of the minority transcendence over past discriminations, a similar mission to which committed his life. Stewart believed her status and an upwardly mobile career of a black woman validated his own work and attitudes for black progress and positive race relations in Oklahoma. He believed that her pursuit of an education and work in the field of law not only elevated the position of blacks and women at a critical mid-century time, but also laid the groundwork for more victories against unjust state and federal moratoriums. Stewart then began generating outspoken support in the *Black Dispatch* for Kidd-Stout and other blacks seeking judicial appointments and thereby adding another powerful element to his social network.[169]

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[167] Gene Aldrich, *Black Heritage of Oklahoma* (Edmond, Oklahoma: Thompson Book and Supply Company, 1973), 135.
[168] Jimmy Stewart to Junita Kidd-Stout, December 19, 1954," folder 10, box 2, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma History Center.
[169] Jimmy Stewart, "Jimmy Says," *Black Dispatch*, August 13, 1959, 5, Oklahoma City edition.

In September 1959, as further representation of Kidd-Stout's later success with Stewart's public encouragement, Pennsylvania Governor David L. Lawrence appointed her as judge of the Philadelphia municipal court. In November of that year, she ran for a full term on the bench and was decicivly elected, making her the first black woman to be confirmed to a United States judgeship. She stayed active in the judicial system and won numerous reelections over the decades with a record setting number of votes.[170] Furthermore, Stewart's relationship with Kidd-Stout and her accomplishments as a proponent of racial justice in the legal field connected Stewart and his ideals to national audiences. Ultimately, after his initial activity in the public sphere, the ties with Kidd-Stout fortified his network and created a stronger foothold for Stewart's civil movement and for future goals in race progress.

Another Stewart contact outside Oklahoma formed in 1959 when a committee of executive directors of labor from the Fair Employment Committee in Gary, Indiana, sent a letter of commendation to the administrative managers at ONG. Having read his articles appearing in the *Black Dispatch*, the directors acknowledged Stewart's achievements at ONG and his provocative ongoing focus on black jobs in the energy field.[171] The committee complimented Stewart for his actions pushing equality in the workplace through his journalistic expanse. They also believed that he personified an exemplary civic leader who gave guidance and leadership in much needed areas, specifically, in the energy industries.

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[170] Special Collections and University Archives, "Judge Juanita Kidd-Stout," *Bennett Distinguished Award List,* Digital Archives, Oklahoma State University Library, Stillwater, Oklahoma, http://www.library.okstate.edu/about/awards/bennett/stout.htm.
[171] "ONG to Jimmy Stewart, May 16, 1959," folder 1, box 2, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma History Center.

The committee members went on to state that they were ashamed that the scope of Stewart's positive example had yet to reach everywhere in the United States, and that his words of wisdom were exposed to too few citizens.[172] They closed their glowing letter with praise for Oklahoma City and indicated the members' opinion that both Oklahoma City and ONG were making great strides in the energy field—due largely to Stewart. Their support further encouraged Stewart to pursue additional openings for blacks in the energy field and to expand national participation in skilled vocations.

Stewart's relationship with Dunjee and the *Black Dispatch* remained vital to his mission and enhanced his networking over the next decades. Former Oklahoma State Senator, E. Melvin Porter, exemplified support for both men when he wrote to Stewart in 1960, "I appreciate your close and warm relationship with Roscoe Dunjee."[173] Senator Porter set several firsts for blacks by working hard to become a civil rights attorney, Oklahoma City branch President of the NAACP in 1961, rising politician, and the first black person to win an Oklahoma Senate seat.[174] Offering his legal services and expertise, Senator Porter participated with Stewart, Ed Stamps, Clara Luper, and thousands more in staging numerous sit-ins and boycotts against Oklahoma's discriminatory and segregated accommodations.[175] Senator Porter dared to march with his constituents during his Senatorial tenure and was even arrested on a few occasions.[176] Senator Porter's contact showed not only how fruitful Stewart's time with Dunjee and his

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[172] "Note of Appreciation," folder 1, box 2, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma History Center.
[173] "E. Melvin Porter to Jimmy Stewart, May 23, 1954," folder 11, box 4, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma History Center.
[174] Stephen Michael Ward, "Ours too was a Struggle for a Better World: Activist Intellectuals and the Radical Promise of the Black Power Movement, 1962-1972" PhD diss., Texas University, 2002, 122.
[175] Roscoe Dunjee, "Clara Luper Sit-in," *Black Dispatch*, August 20, 1958, 1, Oklahoma City edition.
[176] Oklahoma Historical Society, "Edward Melvin Porter, (1930-)," *Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*, http://digital.library.okstate.edu/encyclopedia/entries/P/PO017.html.

writing for the *Black Dispatch* had become, but also how rapidly Stewart had ascended the social and political ranks and found notice from more prominent figures.

While still networking and struggling with injustices in education and job opportunities well into the 1950s, Stewart also began formulating ideas for black-centered cultural enrichment programs in Oklahoma. In his autobiography and his *Black Dispatch* column, he showed deep interest in developing specific educational curricula, programs, and higher education collections geared towards black art and history. He further characterized a belief that improved and equal education opportunities for blacks would mean transcendence from ongoing legally and socially accepted oppression.

In a letter to his son, Stewart conveyed his ideas that the chance for a black person to access and explore their unique culture and history would enhance black-oriented education; it was also a way to better one's life.[177] He also told his son that he believed the knowledge of the historic black experience helped develop black identities as Americans, and that black cultural studies elevated personal fulfillment and facilitated social, cultural, political, and economic mobility.[178]

Stewart demonstrated his measured character as a humanitarian and activist with continuing dedication to Oklahoma schools, vocational technology, and evolving black culture. His actions with the Freeman and Sipuel cases showed how he refused to accept the traditional separate-but-equal structure in American education. With his direct involvement, Stewart also discovered a marked gap in the availability of black culture and history materials for young minority students. The artistic discrepancies illustrated

[177] "Jimmy Stewart Undated Letter to James Stewart Jr.," folder 3, box 1, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma History Center.
[178] "Jimmy Stewart's Autobiographical Papers," folder 1, box 1, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma History Center.

additional inequalities in key black cultural education sectors.[179] Stewart then took interest in specializing a black art and history curriculum in schools and other cultural installations, like archival collections and museum exhibits. Most of all, he pushed for liberal social and educational reform so blacks would have the same cultural opportunities as whites.

In 1968, over twenty years after his first participation in the victory that desegregated higher education in Oklahoma, Stewart again took the initiative with OU. After opening the lines of communication with OU with the Sipuel case, Stewart nurtured another diplomatic relationship with officials when he vied for a black historical collection at the university. He also wrote to Oklahoma Republican Governor Dewey Bartlett and asked that he appropriate a three million dollar fund for a collection of a written history of black Americans in Oklahoma. Stewart mentioned that past distributions tended to overlook funding for projects specific to minorities; in fact, in recent history, the Oklahoma state budget showed that legislators had approved only one such project with black favor. Stewart wrote that he wanted a written history of black Americans in Oklahoma because it would create self-esteem through the knowledge of personal history. Stewart also said that he was upset because he believed numerous institutions omitted or entirely ignored black history, not only in Oklahoma, but across much of the nation and that instilling new standards for black cultural education in the state was far overdue. [180]

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[179] Olga M. Welch and Carolyn R. Hodges, *Standing Outside on the Inside: Black Adolescents and the Construction of Academic Identity*, (Albany, New York: State University of New York, 1997), 45.
[180] "Jimmy Stewart to Governor Bartlett, October 25, 1968," Stewart Collection, folder 2, box 2, Oklahoma History Center.

Stewart continued with his temperate power of appeal and suggested that if the governing body saw fit to make the project official, it would serve a manifold purpose. Statewide interest in this history would be more enthusiastic and not limited only to black citizens. Stewart felt that the funding and the project would leave state agencies and schools freer to cooperate, and result in more fundraising for future projects. To help persuade the governor, Stewart completed the letter to Governor Bartlett with an extensive list of professionals in his impressive personal network.[181] The articulate, discreet, but insistent letter to Bartlett again strongly embodied Stewart's signature penchant to motivate prominent leaders for change. The correspondence also illustrated how he used his connections without appearing overbearing and how he approached sensitive issues with the utmost concern for what was best for blacks and all Oklahomans.

Stewart added strength to his argument when he used one of the well-developed connections he had cultivated at OU. For Governor Bartlett, Stewart outlined the enthusiastic support for a black history project he had already received from OU's History Department Chair, Donald J. Berthrong[182] and the sociology department at the university. Berthrong made his support for Stewart's objective clear when he wrote to Stewart and said that he fully supported a project for the Collection of Oklahoman Negro History exclusively at the University of Oklahoma.[183]

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[181] "Jimmy Stewart to Governor Bartlett, October 25, 1968," Stewart Collection, folder 2, box 2, Oklahoma History Center.
[182] Ph.D. candidate, Arthur Tolson, Jr., was already busy writing a history of black Oklahoma. Jimmie Franklin later emerged as "the" historian of black Oklahoma and was even a student of Berthrong.
[183] "Donald Berthrong to Jimmy Stewart, October 23,1968," Stewart Collection, folder 2, box 2, Oklahoma History Center.

Berthrong outlined his goal for creating a collection and wrote he hoped with a larger historical project, OU would become the center of study for the role of blacks in Oklahoma history and society. He stressed that a Negro Oklahoman History Collection would generate a greater public consciousness and recognize the black contribution to society. The collection would enable scholars a proper assessment of the black American contributions to Oklahoma communities, he explained.[184]

Even though the funding for an specialized Oklahoma black history collection project at OU never came through, the process Stewart introduced still generated greater support for a cultural history where no black voice or representation had previously existed. Stewart had nearly came full-circle from fighting for Sipuel's individual equal rights at the university. Still, he struggled to have his ideas fully realized in areas more resistant to the tough changes. For Stewart, cultural integration proved a tougher battle than desegregating a law program.

Stewart did not see the loss of the history project as a defeat as he had come so far since his first contact and battles with the OU administration. More importantly, he successfully established reliable academic contacts where he had met past opposition. As strong as ever, Stewart stayed resolute and kept black civil rights and his quest for equality at the forefront of as many social, cultural, educational, and political institutions as he could reach with his extensive affiliations.

In addition to an unfailing dedication for black progress in public and higher education in law and the liberal arts, Stewart also fostered a commitment to increasing black opportunities in technical education and the acquisition of vocational skills. He

[184] "Donald Berthrong to Jimmy Stewart, October 23, 1968," Stewart Collection, folder 2, box 2, Oklahoma History Center.

knew that despite the great strides made in college and cultural environments, equal opportunities for blacks in pragmatic skill development remained in infancy.[185] Chances were limited in the 1960s and 1970s, and many blacks could still not afford to participate in the openings Stewart and his network had created.

The career advancements Stewart made at ONG influenced his valuation of black skills and vocational education. In addition, his job as one of the first black employees at ONG helped him see the racial implications and importance of new opportunities in getting a vocational education. The proverbial foot stood in the doorway for blacks to contribute in new fields, like the ONG. Stewart felt the development of pertinent trade skills gave blacks an edge to completely integrate into the social, educational, and economic systems.[186] Most of all, he realized that his experiences, triumphs, and extensive body of social, political, and legal savvy people greatly increased the odds of more black success and long-term, positive undertones for non-militant race progress.

The notoriety of Stewart's activism continued to grow in the community. During the beginning months of 1975, members of the Oklahoma City Urban Renewal Authority (URA) elected Stewart to the board of directors. In a personal letter to his children, Stewart noted the importance of his recent appointment to the URA as it provided yet another agent for inculcating permanent changes in racial policies and practices within Oklahoma City service, employment, and energy institutions.[187]

By 1976, officials at ONG were even more impressed with Stewart as an exemplary employee with peremptory influence in the poorer communities; so much so,

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[185] "Jimmy Stewart's Autobiographical Papers," folder 1, box 1, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma History Center.
[186] Jimmy Stewart, "Jimmy Says," *Black Dispatch*, May 30, 1950, 5, Oklahoma City edition.
[187] "Jimmy Stewart to Children," folder 3, box 3, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma History Center.

they tailored a new promotion specifically for him.[188] In his new post as Assistant to the Oklahoma City District Vice President, Stewart was now free to concentrate on vital community relations.

Stewart's position commissioned him to provide consulting services to employees, thus carrying out the affirmative action program ONG developed as a budding equal opportunity employer. Administrative efforts on behalf of ONG to elevate Stewart to higher official service benefited both the company and its symbolic representation in the local community as a progressive industry for black employment. For Stewart, as an outspoken activist and dedicated worker in a white-dominated industry, the final promotion meant another iconic step forward for blacks who wanted to obtain similar work opportunities. It was also a definitive example of positive racial progress in American labor.

Before retiring from his Vice Presidential assistantship at ONG, Stewart spearheaded correspondence with Alan L. Smith, President of the National Energy Foundation in 1977. He hoped to affect future energy legislation. Specifically, Stewart wanted new policies to increase the amount of domestic energy and help poorer citizens. He also wanted a change in policy to create positions for blacks who sought employment regardless of race, class, gender, or creed. From the home office in New York City, Smith acknowledged Stewart's long experience in the gas industry and his respect for Stewart's opinions. By saying Stewart could rely on him as a willing participant with

[188] "Oklahoma Natural Gas Papers," folder 18, box 2, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma History Center.

high hopes of success, Smith signified his pleasure and confidence in Stewart's important undertaking.[189]

Stewart knew that the changes in legislation would not occur overnight, yet his commitment never wavered. Stewart continued correspondence with Smith and made a concerted effort to keep himself connected to his network of people who helped promote blacks for jobs in energy. Again, his relationship with Smith showed how his ideas became highly regarded by yet another prominent figure, one who also had a stake in what Stewart accomplished. With calculated social and political networking, Stewart built a new foundation for racial equal opportunity in the energy service industry. Through ONG, Stewart accessed numerous national gateways, like Smith and the National Energy Foundation. They helped ensure future favorable legislation and more opportunities for blacks across the country.

Both Stewart's position at the URA and his widely-known progressive activities succeeded in promoting black employment and affordable energy. Within a span of fewer than ten years from the date of his first appointment, Stewart had not only became chairman of the URA board and assistant to the Vice President at ONG, he also received numerous invitations for consultation at national energy forums.

During 1982, the American Petroleum Institute (API) approached Stewart with the intent of mapping out plans for a nationwide program to bring blacks and other minorities into the mainstream of the American energy field.[190] The next year, satisfied

[189] "Alan Smith to Jimmy Stewart, November 28, 1977," folder 3, box 2, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma History Center.
[190] "API Invitation, June 1982," folder 1, box 4, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma History Center.

with Stewart' work for blacks in energy, the API invited him to another forum addressing consumer affairs and the role of blacks in the energy service sector.[191]

At this same time, Conoco Oil management requested Stewart's presence and expertise at their energy forum held at Yale University.[192] His outstanding service on the board of the URA, and recognition among key national players in energy, circulated Stewart's race-oriented ideology within the local community. It further disseminated his work throughout the nation. Most importantly, his URA service and national recognition not only accomplished sizeable goals for black employment and energy availability, it augmented Stewart's résumé with a stronger voice in the future of race progress. From Stewart's skills, his intimate knowledge of the inner workings and network of industry professionals, and his position as URA board member, Stewart was also appointed to the NAACP Energy Committee in the early 1980s. This position proved instrumental in founding the American Association of Blacks in Energy (AABE), also in the 80s. Stewart had already sent out several NAACP national bulletins calling on members, as well as the oil, gas, and other energy industries, to begin using their talents en force to restructure black involvement in the energy fields and in the labor sectors.[193] In order to fully utilize black opportunity in energy, though, Stewart needed an organization that centralized black skills and bring them out of their low employment stagnation.

In conjunction with other progressives in the NAACP and gas businesses, Stewart founded the AABE based on the flagship motto, "Equity through Unity."[194] His mission for the AABE emphasized the power of a national association of black energy

[191] "API Invitation, 1983," folder 1, box 4, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma History Center.
[192] "Conoco Invitation, September 1982," folder 1, box 4, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma History Center.
[193] "NAACP Bulletin," folder 14, box 2, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma History Center.
[194] "AABE Pamphlet," folder 2, box 3, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma History Center.

professionals dedicated to ensuring the input and involvement of blacks and other minorities in the discussions and developments of energy policies, technologies, and employment. Furthermore, founders like Stewart, intended the organization to function as a resource for blacks by participating in the economic, social, and political issues of energy policy and practice. By providing scholarships and other financial incentives, Stewart also wanted the AABE to help students to pursue careers in energy-related fields.[195]

Most importantly, the AABE persuaded both public and private sectors to be responsive to the problems, goals, and aspirations of blacks in the energy industry and job markets. Again, Stewart's unwillingness to back down from the tough, seemingly impenetrable issues with equality in the workforce succeeded as the AABE continued to stand as a gathering ground for blacks in energy. Because of his position and influence with ONG, the NAACP, and the AABE, Stewart brought a new level of involvement for blacks and other minorities in the energy field. In a commemorative booklet on Stewart's retirement from ONG in 1977, executives commended him, saying that he had caused a rethinking among industry leaders in the United States.[196] Indeed, his dedication to blacks in energy and his network of supporters helped elevate twentieth century race progress to a new and national level.

Also in the 1980s, Stewart continued to promote a strong black presence in skilled technical vocations. His persistence that began in the 1940s again paid off with the creation of the Junior Achievement (JA) program in Oklahoma City. The local JA stemmed from the national association first founded in 1919 in Springfield,

[195] "AABE Charter Documents," folder 2, box 3, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma History Center.
[196] "Jimmy Stewart Retirement Booklet, 1977," folder 2, box 3, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma History Center.

Massachusetts.[197] Through his encouragement with letters to ONG executives, local developers geared the program towards young blacks and other Oklahoma minorities an encouraged their participation in an experiential learning course with an ONG consulting group; later to become one of the state's largest JA sponsors and financial contributors.[198] By now, Oklahoma City schools were moving fast and job opportunities were expanding. The JA program allowed black students access to valuable educational resources and had the potential of carrying them into a successful future that discrimination had previously blocked in Stewart's early days.

Additionally, the JA program awarded blacks an academically strong opportunity to focus on pertinent real-life subjects like money management, workforce readiness, career exploration, civic participation, problem solving and teamwork.[199] The eight-week program culminated with a visit to Exchange City.[200] The students had further opportunity to work hands-on in an expansive array of professional environments, including city hall, banks, a newspaper, technology centers, post offices, and retail shops. Through these activities, black students had the never-before-seen chance to recognize the relationship between what they learned in school and successes in life. Because the JA curriculum helped students understand the value of academic learning and prepared

[197] "JA History: Our Story," Junior Achievement, accessed August 13, 2010, http://www.ja.org.
[198] "Junior Achievement Pamphlet," Stewart Collection, folder 18, box 2, Oklahoma History Center.
[199] "Junior Achievement Pamphlet," Stewart Collection, folder 18, box 2, Oklahoma History Center.
[200] The JA created Exchange City and is used in the Oklahoma City JA program as a new vision of teaching and learning about American enterprise and entrepreneurism. As in Stewart's time, it is still both a hands-on learning lab site and a curriculum approach in the classroom and in the home. Exchange City helps to shape young people's attitudes about the opportunities and responsibilities of a citizen in the American free enterprise system.

them for economic and employment issues they face in the real world, the program still existed in 2011.[201]

Although Stewart did not personally consult directly with administrators of the JA program, he remained in contact with his associates at ONG and raised awareness with news articles reporting on JA activities.[202] As a result, the program involved nearly 600 Oklahoma City high school students by the mid 1980s.[203] Stewart experienced the pains of discrimination early as a young adult trying to start a fruitful vocation. He understood the potential of young black students to greatly contribute to society, and due to his long and noteworthy career with ONG, Stewart kept opening doors for future generations of black in Oklahoma and around the country.

In the 1980s, Stewart continued to invigorate his public contacts when he enthusiastically supported the racially progressive and law-oriented career of Vicki Miles-LaGrange. He first used his local influences to promote Miles-LaGrange during her bid to become one of the first black females in the Oklahoma state senate. She served in the state senate from 1987 to 1993.[204] Years later, showing additional strength of career and character, Miles-LaGrange was sworn in as the first black female U.S. attorney for the Western District of Oklahoma. Unwilling to let her successes fade and with continued support of liberal progressives like Stewart, Miles-LaGrange currently stands as Chief U.S. District Judge for the Western District of Oklahoma.

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[201] Journal Record Staff, "Junior Achievement of Greater OKC," The Oklahoma City Journal Record, http://www.journalrecord.com.
[202] Staff Writer, "Junior Achievement Program," *Daily Oklahoman*, June 13, 1987, 3, Oklahoma City edition.
[203] "Junior Achievement Pamphlet," Stewart Collection, folder 18, box 2, Oklahoma History Center.
[204] "Jimmy Stewart to Vicki Miles-LaGrange, December 1, 1986," folder 4, box 3, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma History Center.

Even long after the Ada Lois Sipuel victory should have ended the need for it, Miles-LaGrange received her notable degrees from outside Oklahoma because discrimination higher education.[205] No doubt her emotional connection with Stewart reflected her professional relationship with him and exemplifed his effective national connections with like-minded and influencial individuals. He kept in close contact with Judge Miles-LaGrange while maintaining the standards he set with his diplomatic methods. More importantly, his working relationship with her illustrated the continuation of the key goals and achievements for race progress.

Even after his retirment from ONG and his final "Jimmy Says" column in 1979, Stewart worked hard to keep his connections from lapsing and throughout the latter part of the twentieth century, continued to bring fresh contacts into the fold. As he found allies from within black groups, he also sought contacts from the white community. Furthermore, a relationship with a white U.S. District Judge, Ralph G. Thompson, asserted Stewart's standing as a socially savvy and mobile activist in Oklahoma who acquired greater connections beyond the local level. Thompson's career centered on the elements of ongoing civil and criminal litigation. Later, U.S. Supreme Court Chief Justice Rehnquist appointed Thompson to the Executive Committee of that body, the policymaking arm of the federal judiciary, upon his election as the U.S. District Judge representing the Tenth Circuit.[206] As a white judge with a long standing career on the bench, Thompson's support helped Stewart close the discriminatory divide within the legal system.

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[205] Oklahoma Historical Society, "Vicki Miles-LaGrange, (1953-)," *Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*, http://digital.library.okstate.edu/encyclopedia/entries/M/MI021.html.
[206] "Oklahoma's U.S. District Judge to Step Down," *The Oklahoma City Journal Record*, Digital Archives, August 7, 2007, http://journalrecord.com.

Thompson's close involvement in state and federal legal affairs and Stewart's interests in changing black procedure through the legal system further attracted the attention of high officials, like Oklahoma Governor Dewey Bartlett. In a letter from Thompson to Stewart, Thompson discusses their mutual friendship and correspondence with the governor and reveals that through contact with him, Governor Bartlett "Holds you in the highest esteem and valued for friendship as few others." [207] His growing list of both black and white contacts signified Stewart's tactful approach to balancing the sensitive relationships from opposing camps while still advancing goals for black Oklahomans. Professional working relationships like those among Thompson, Stewart, and Governor Bartlett additionally reflected support for his diplomatic method; thereby proving that Stewart's compromising and non-violent technique could influence people, politics, and practice for race progress.

With the desire to abolish prejudice in cultural education, job markets, and skilled vocation, Stewart initially invested his affiliations as a non-militant tactic for the change. Eventually, Stewart created new black-oriented organizations that helped equalize opportunities. By initiating efforts to fill a void in black liberal arts and vocational opportunities for young blacks, Stewart kept his agenda moving forward. Through his involvement with OU, ONG, and other contacts, he intrepidly pushed for liberal social and educational modification. He helped give blacks the same cultural opportunities as whites and prepared them for a new, positive, and progressive advancement.

Stewart contributed to a long legacy of black culture, tradition and history in education and job opportunity in Oklahoma and the nation. Aligned with his reliably

[207] "Ralph Thompson to Jimmy Stewart, October 10, 1996," folder 4, box 3, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma History Center.

supportive group and influential contacts, he used his characteristic potent, but delicately compromising approach and took active enterprise in involving blacks in mainstream American institutions and ultimately marked further twentieth century race progress in the state of Oklahoma with national implications.

Stewart's efforts to develop and promote black enrollment, arts, curriculum, and trade education, as well his notable triumphs in public sectors aided Oklahoma in a relatively orderly transition through racially charged decades. His activism also provided a new social background for continued progress inside and outside the state. The new inroads he created for blacks in education not only gave them a chance to turn classic and systematic discrimination on its ear, but also delivered an opportunity for minorities to establish equal standing among major groups. With poise and control, Stewart's actions cultivated an optimistic, non-militant form of protest with predominantly positive effects.

Through his involvement in issues like Sipuel's case and the JA program, Stewart built on the initial race advancements in education and labor from his early activism and first contacts. He accomplished his goals with a focus that created a place for blacks in higher education, technical development, and cultural enrichment programs. While his contemporary aims met resistance along the way, Stewart never faltered in his belief in the power of his diplomatic methods and strong public contacts. Because of his own personal achievements as a self-taught writer, journalist, activist, Stewart maintained a firm belief in the magnitude of a black presence in higher education and skill growth. [208]

Most of all, with his commitment and belief in equal participation for blacks in mainstream education, Stewart successfully embodied a favorable image for race

[208] "Jimmy Stewart's Autobiographical Papers," folder 1, box 1, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma History Center.

progress and ideology in the public eye. He thereby received additional support and resources from influential groups. He attempted to keep his presence on the periphery of hot button issues and rarely coveted the media spotlight with his gentle approach. However, Stewart stayed deeply committed to helping ethnic minorities enter a new era for equality in social, cultural, and educational opportunities. With his numerous resources and connections, he never let silence fall on his agenda.

Conclusion

Transcending Adversity and a Lifetime of Race Progress

Phyllis Bernard, a professor of law and founding director of the Center on Alternative Dispute Resolution at Oklahoma City University School of Law, once expressed her gratitude for Stewart in a letter. "No limits are set to the ascent of man," she wrote him, "and the loftiest precincts are open to all. In this, your choice alone is supreme. Thank you for helping us recognize the cost, yet still choose the hard, right way."[209] Certain instances of Bernard's description of the hard way not only came from white opposition, but manifested itself within the black religious community. In spite of roadblocks, even from within the black community in Oklahoma City, Bernard, and leaders at large, recognized and honored Stewart's role.

Despite the enormous strides and wholehearted support on behalf of blacks within civil service, education, labor, and from candid media influence, Stewart came into direct contact with members of the black church community who refused to support his outspoken public efforts for integration and advancement in majority-white institutions.

Black churches developed conservative attitudes towards black involvement in conventional American institutions, most poignantly perhaps, early in the twentieth century. Although they did not speak with one voice, secular leaders like Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. DuBois promoted an ideology of racial solidarity and group unity as the only path toward progress and upliftment.[210] Their ideas fostered a belief that blacks should support blacks without the patronization of white economic, political,

[209] "Phyllis Bernard to Jimmy Stewart," folder 1, box 3, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma History Center.
[210] C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience*, (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2003), 237.

or religious institutions. Many church leaders believed in backing only self-sustaining practices within the black community, like local businesses. Most blacks within church congregations were generally satisfied to maintain a considerable distance from close relationships with whites in public, and they discouraged using white institutions for race progress.[211]

Although, rarely one to argue with respected citizens, Stewart remained undeterred by the setbacks white and black institutions presented to him. As a nationally recognized and honored as an NAACP official, Stewart overcame much of the opposition, like the promotion of total self-segregation, from within the black religious community. Despite internal opposition, he continued his mission for positive race progress in and outside Oklahoma. He used the same diplomatic tactics that bolstered his social networking and influence in race related matters in the beginning and enabled his mission to transcend the naysayers who attempted to keep him down. As a result, Stewart cemented his presence, civil disposition, influence, success, and acceptance in the twentieth century history of race progress in Oklahoma and the nation.

Having already brokered positive relationships with the district manger and personnel director of an established energy business early in his life, Stewart conveyed his optimism for raising black economic security by aligning with ONG and its employees through his "Jimmy Says" column. He also shared with black churchgoers his enthusiasm for the future of blacks on a leveled employment field in hopes of generating additional minority support and participation in mainstream economic sectors.

Despite his accomplishments and sound network creations, Stewart long remembered how an unnamed black minister had discouraged him. Stewart once wrote

[211] E. Melvin Porter, interview by author, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, December 7, 2010.

in his autobiography that the leading Methodist minister nearly crushed his early confidence for advancements in black employment. During a discussion with the minister about the potential for blacks obtaining equal and elevated job positions, Stewart told of a particular instance when the man, as he gestured to a white electric lineman working on a pole close by, said, "Son, you see those men down there, Negroes will never have those kind of jobs and I haven't got time for your foolishness."[212] True to his personally stylized brand of diplomacy, Stewart referenced the preacher in a speech without specifically calling him out by name.[213] He seldom instigated unproductive conflict and did not see any point in agitating members of the black religious community and thereby shifting focus away from central issues. Despite the minister's lack of support, Stewart stayed locked on the goals he had already laid out.

His relationship with the National Episcopal Church[214] in 1968 signified an overall lack of support from within the black community itself for black interests in white institutions. For example, Stewart's campaign with OU for a library collection for black history, stirred mixed emotions among black leaders. Some people staunchly disapproved of Stewart's liberal approach to change. In fact, according to E. Melvin Porter, many blacks continued to accept and practice a sense of *de facto* segregation and

[212] "Jimmy Stewart's Autobiographical Papers," folder 1, box 1, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma History Center.
[213] "Jimmy Stewart's Autobiographical Papers," folder 1, box 1, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma History Center.
[214] The National Episcopal Church cultivated deeps roots within the black religious community beginning in the eighteenth century. As it evolved from a non-denominational mutual aid society called the "Free African Society," its founder, Richard Allen, a former slave, sought more independence from white supervision. By 1816, he and four additional congregations in the mid-Atlantic region established the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) as the first fully independent black denomination.

believed it was in the best interests of blacks to keep their concerns separate from white institutions.[215]

Additionally, some believed that white assistance or involvement in black cultural development, monetary or otherwise, represented a societal clash with detrimental repercussions to black education, religion, and overall social and political standing. A letter from Deacon Gottwald exclaimed the congregation and its leaders had no business with worldly concerns and refused to support the cause for a black history archive with funding of any sort; he even detractingly referenced Stewart's attempt to create the collection. The members of the church also refused to participate in any talks regarding monetary aid for the collection.[216] Nowhere in the correspondence is the motive for their stance clear. Perhaps they, unlike Stewart, did not wish to jeopardize current white and black relations, and so recommended he approach local oil companies to match funds for the history collection. Many church leaders, probably a majority, simply had no interest in helping Stewart with this particular mission.

According to the experiences of Senator Porter, some local black churches did offer rather limited support though.[217] Generally speaking, church officials around Oklahoma City would allow activists like Stewart, and later Senator Porter, to conduct controversial meetings at their facilities. But frequently, the congregation did not want to portray a strong association with progressive groups. Even though church leaders offered

[215] E. Melvin Porter, interview by author, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, December 7, 2010.
[216] "Deacon Gottwald to Jimmy Stewart, February 4, 1968," folder 2, box 2, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma History Center.
[217] E. Melvin Porter, interview by author, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, December 7, 2010.

their institutions as a meeting place, they rarely contributed any monetary or ideological assistance.[218]

The lack of support from an institution Stewart respected must have been disheartening. The situation with the religious community may have been a setback to his equality movement, but it did not stop him. Even in the face of black opposition and disinterest, he did not falter when it came to pushing for justice for black Oklahomans and Americans. Therefore, he sought refuge for his ideas in the various other contacts that he had carefully built and could rely on for advancements.

Disappointed, but undeterred by the conservative black religious community, and much in the style of Ida B. Wells, Stewart publically and privately upheld his belief that with the right type and amount of pressure the American system would accommodate change.[219] Throughout his life he continued to show a belief in the goodness of humanity and willingly persevered and never give up the struggle for civil rights, finding opportunities for blacks to uplift themselves and transcend the deeply ingrained discrimination.

The lack of support from the religious community notwithstanding, Stewart's seventeen year reign as President of the Oklahoma City Branch for the NAACP, his forty-year career at ONG, and his far reaching network allowed him unprecedented access to a number of useful sources to promote his equalizing movements across the nation. All this melded with his "Jimmy Says" column in the *Black Dispatch,* and his other prominent activities. Together, it epitomized his legacy as a man committed to doing everything in his power to break down the barriers between blacks and whites.

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[218] E. Melvin Porter, interview by author, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, December 7, 2010.
[219] Dennis Brindell Fradin and Judith Bloom Fradin, *Ida B. Wells: Mother of the Civil Rights Movement*, (New York: Clarion Books, 2000), 14.

Upon Stewart's passing on April 17, 1997, Roosevelt Milton, NAACP Oklahoma City branch president at the time, validated the importance of Stewart's relationship with Roscoe Dunjee and the *Black Dispatch* as a role that implemented a stylized approach for long-lasting changes in civil rights issues.[220] From the beginning, Stewart was not satisfied limiting his aspirations to a single community, nor hesitate to take countless opportunities pursue his ultimate goal. No issue regarding the civil rights of blacks escaped his scrutiny. With support from the people around him, Stewart solidified his mission for ongoing resolution of discrimination.

In fact, Stewart joined a myriad of recognized people when he made the "100 Influential Black Oklahomans" list in the latter part of the twentieth century.[221] Accompanying him on the list were many persons vital to his network and overall success in civil rights. Among these were Roscoe Dunjee, Ralph Ellison, Ada Lois Sipuel Fisher, F.D. Moon, and E. Melvin Porter.

To be selected as the 100 Influential Black Oklahomans represented a milestone for Stewart and his colleagues. It was reaffirming when a committee of thirty, along with their personal recommendations, as well as the recommendations from civic and community leaders and media from across the state, selected Stewart from among the starting list of 600. The committee based its decision on who it believed best demonstrated the historical value, impact, and influence to the state of Oklahoma and the citizens.

On November 15, 1986, at the pinnacle of public recognition of his lifetime of efforts and as an example of the importance of his career and relationships founded at

[220] "NAACP Resolution, April 17, 1997," folder 10, box 2, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma History Center.
[221] "Influential Oklahomans," folder 10, box 2, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma History Center.

ONG, C.C. Ingram, the Chairman of the Board of ONG's working partner, ONEOK, made a herculean effort toward Stewart's induction into the Oklahoma Hall of Fame. Ingram felt strongly that Stewart's historic contributions to justice for black Oklahomans had national effects. He championed the campaign to acknowledge Stewart's contributions and formally elect him into state notoriety and national recognition.

Once Stewart was accepted for inclusion, J.W. McLean, President of the Oklahoma Heritage Association, reinforced the meaning behind Stewart's achievement when he said, "He has made exceptional contributions in civic affairs on the national and state levels. Jimmy Stewart created a true partnership with black Oklahomans."[222] As further validation of his seminal contributions to racial affairs, Thurgood Marshall, then a U.S. Supreme Court Justice, expressed how happy and proud he was for Stewart and that Stewart certainly deserved the recognition. Marshall struck at the heart of the sentiments of many others by also writing to Stewart, "You have put your life on the line fighting for civil and human rights way before it became a popular cause."[223]

Also of Stewart's accomplishment, Benjamin L. Hooks, CEO and Executive Director for the NAACP in 1986 stated, "You lived on the leading edge where only real men survive."[224] The overwhelming support for Stewart's induction not only underlined his activities for positive race progress at the state level but also the national effects his bold actions and his legacy had for the future of race progress.

Reflecting on Stewart's career, one takes count that as the twentieth century began to close, Stewart had remarkably nurtured his ability to influence people by

[222] "Hall of Fame Materials, November 15, 1986," folder 4, box 3, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma History Center.
[223] "Thurgood Marshall to Jimmy Stewart," folder 11, box 4, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma History Center.
[224] "Benjamin Hooks to Stewart," folder 11, box 4, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma History Center.

developing personalized methods of mediation and compromise. He had created and nurtured indispensable social, cultural, economic and political networks that, over time, not only contributed to a positive advancement of the black struggle for justice locally and nationally, but improved the lives of black Americans. His recognition for improving human equality verified his selfless commitment to reaching his goals. With his calm, mannerly, yet highly assertive approach, Stewart showed that he also understood that connections to more prominent and influential individuals were vital to his mission to move beyond past discrimination. He believed these were the people and associations holding the power to generate change.

Milton also described Stewart as, " A pioneer in the civil rights arena, having been instrumental in implementing the restructure of the NAACP regionally, into the national concept, thereby providing more detailed and specific approaches to civil rights issues."[225] He also said that Stewart, "Served as both an inspiration and example to those who have striven and will continue to strive toward the goals for which he had bravely contended."[226] Milton's words continued to show the extent of Stewart's success with an equal rights mission, despite the hardships throughout the decades.

Stewart believed in what his alliances could do for negotiating lasting change. He worked steadily and refined an effective network of professional and personal friends essential for the prolonged success of his mission. Because of his ability to balance his skills, connections, and leadership positions, Stewart achieved significant race progress, while promoting his individual brand of non-militant civil and human rights activism.

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[225] "Roosevelt Milton to Stewart Family, April 17, 1997," folder 10, box 2, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma History Center.
[226] "Roosevelt Milton to Stewart Family, April 17, 1997," folder 10, box 2, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma History Center.

His character and successful methods upheld a larger appeal and demonstrated a special quality of upliftment for blacks still struggling with the effects of long-term systematic discrimination. Stewart's commitment to a positive approach to race progress showed a significant and encouraging divergence from the methods activists in other states used to proclaim a renewed black voice in the twentieth century.

While some groups of blacks were reluctant to get involved, many others recognized the importance of Stewart's nature in race relations and worked alongside him with reliable support. Many people realized that his technique set precedence in areas resolutely against black involvement not only set Oklahoma apart from the violence occurring in nearby states, but also left a legacy of considerable race progress and personal respect.

Stewart acted as a determined minority citizen who was set on civil change for improved and equal treatment of blacks. He took a well-measured approach to achieving such liberal goals and transcended the negative and fiercely confrontational methods often exercised in other places in the region. Through his dedication and understanding of the power of a mannerly way of igniting black civil movement, Stewart raised his mission beyond the demeaning hostility and unsatisfactory results of belligerent approaches. As a result, he melded his persona and democratic prescriptions into a positive example of race progress inside and outside of Oklahoma.

As Benjamin L. Hooks noted, Stewart "Sacrificed when it was not popular, but what you do for yourself dies with you, while what you do for others lives on and on."[227] Stewart may have been born with this altruistic drive, but he learned what critical connections he needed to make in order to bring his desire for change to fruition.

[227] "NAACP Correspondence," folder 1, box 2, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma History Center.

Stewart worked steadfastly and selflessly to accomplish all he could for the local and national black communities, and he was able to do so largely because of those with whom he had built a profound connection. His passion lasted throughout his life and was felt even after his death. He accomplished so much and took personal credit for so little. Ernest L. Holloway, President of Langston University, as he celebrated Stewart's memory poignantly said that Stewart "Had given a lifetime in efforts to improve the quality of life for Oklahomans and blacks".[228] It is to this lasting legacy of civil rights and equality, and for those who followed him, regardless of race, culture, or class that this work is dedicated.

[228] "Letter from Ernest Holloway, April 17, 1997," folder 8, box 2, Stewart Collection, Oklahoma History Center.

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