

## CHAPTER IV

### THE AGE OF J. T. WILLIAMS

For the twenty three years that Dr. John T. Williams was president of Maryland State College, the institution in Princess Anne experienced changes touching every aspect of the school's life. (Dr. Williams ably guided Maryland State from a struggling, four year college beset with academic, financial, and political problems to that of being an integral part of the University of Maryland.) Dr. Williams' tenure as president was marked by a leap in enrollments, a great building boom on campus, an increase in faculty, and academic recognition for the school at Princess Anne. The combination of a dynamic president with the change in educational philosophy after the Brown vs. the Board of Education Supreme Court decision in 1954, and the expansion of higher education in general in the 1960's, formed the backdrop for the emergence of Maryland State College as a viable institution.

J. T. Williams came to Princess Anne as its first and only president in 1947. Born in Minden, Louisiana, in 1904, Dr. Williams received a Bachelor of Science degree from Langston University in 1928 and a Master of Arts degree

from the University of Cincinnati in 1932. He completed the doctorate of education in school administration and educational psychology at Indiana University in one year, 1935-1936, and worked at Kentucky State College in various capacities as professor, football and basketball coach, dean, and registrar before he was appointed by the Board of Regents of the University of Maryland.<sup>1</sup>

When Dr. Williams arrived at Princess Anne, he found the institution in sad shape. Maryland State College was poorly equipped, had low enrollments, an understaffed faculty, and a minute budget. It was J. T. Williams' job to reorganize the school completely. The school was streamlined and set up under four divisions--Agriculture, Home Economics, Mechanic Arts, and Arts and Sciences, with those students meeting the requirements for graduation at Maryland State College receiving their Bachelors degrees from the University of Maryland.

Williams' first success was the dramatic increase in enrollments at the college. For the academic year 1947-1948, students numbered 163. By the next year the student population nearly doubled increasing 98% to 323. In addition, Dr. Williams reported that 147 applicants were denied admission due to the lack of dormitory space. "In the dormitories for both men and women, from four to six persons are sleeping in rooms designed to accommodate two students."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Baltimore Sun, July 14, 1971.

<sup>2</sup>Biennial Report Issue, 1946-1948. University of Maryland and State Board of Agriculture, II, No. 5, (October 1949), pp. 136-137.

the beginning of the 1947 academic year, there were only eleven instructors on the faculty. J. T. Williams increased the faculty to twenty four by the end of the spring semester, and by the next year there were thirty three <sup>full time</sup> and three part time teachers. Furthermore, his staff had nine doctorates and twenty one Masters' degrees. Those faculty members with only bachelor's degrees taught building construction and machine shop. As a result of the growth of the staff, their ranks were reassigned. Maryland State College now had nine professors, six associate professors, and seventeen with the rank of instructor.<sup>3</sup>

By far J. T. Williams' biggest complaint and dilemma was "the important fact...that the reorganized program of Maryland State College is beginning almost from scratch." Throughout the entire school there were few buildings, little equipment, "limited facilities for laboratory and practice work," and a lack of classroom space. To sum up, J. T. Williams' challenge with Maryland State was "a heroic effort to do something under circumstances and with facilities which are woefully inadequate."<sup>4</sup>

In order to understand the problems confronting the new president of the college, an examination of the prevailing conditions at Maryland State in 1948-1949 is necessary. Despite the optimistic rhetoric of Curly Byrd

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 137.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 138.

concerning the improvement of Princess Anne College, College Park remained indifferent to its "stepchild" on the Eastern Shore. Although community and educational leaders were in frequent disagreement over the future of Princess Anne College, they nevertheless were united in their condemnation of College Park's shabby treatment of the Eastern Shore institution. From 1938 through 1947, College Park received over six million dollars in federal funds. Of this amount, Princess Anne College received on the average a mere \$15,000 annually. Specifically, while College Park's federal funding was \$672,943, Princess Anne's share amounted to \$15,161. Yet the rural population was 82.1% white and 17.9% colored. Princess Anne should have received nearly one-fifth of the total amount of funding distributed.<sup>5</sup> These expenditures met the minimum requirement of the second Morrill Land Grant Act. Ironically, the vast bulk of federal funds was spent on teaching and research at College Park from which blacks were excluded. Even such militant critics of Princess Anne College as Judge Morris A. Soper of Baltimore, a member of the Board of Trustees of Morgan State College, were incredulous over the fact that College Park had controlled Princess Anne from 1937 to 1947 without having bothered to install a president.<sup>6</sup> College Park was equally inattentive, critics pointed out, to enrollment problems at

<sup>5</sup>Baltimore Afro-American, October 28, 1947.

<sup>6</sup>Morris A. Soper. Commission to Study the Question of Negro Higher Education in Maryland. December 6, 1949. American Call, p. 10. Agers, Office of Education Mss, National

Princess Anne College. In order to attract students, the Eastern Shore land grant college advertised in out-of-state newspapers. At this time more than 50% of the student body came from out-of-state. This was the college that Dr. Byrd was going to establish as a graduate school equal to that of College Park.<sup>7</sup> Yet according to an article in the Baltimore Sun, the institution on the Eastern Shore of Maryland was one in which no student had ever flunked out. The college was characterized as having simple requirements "low enough for all to hurdle."<sup>8</sup>

The result of all this criticism levelled against College Park and its branch campus was that the Senate of Maryland commissioned another statewide study on higher education for Negroes. Claiming that it was "financially impossible for the State to maintain two colleges for Negroes," and difficult enough to maintain even one school, Senator Ellison of Baltimore called for the study to come up with a definite policy of appropriating money for Negro education.<sup>9</sup> Once again Morgan State College in Baltimore was pitted against its enemy on the Eastern Shore, Maryland State.

Morgan State officials naturally urged that Morgan be designated as the state land grant college and that the programs in agriculture and mechanic arts be shifted from Maryland State to Morgan and out of the administration of the

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>8</sup>Baltimore Sun, February 27, 1949.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., April 2, 1949.

University of Maryland. Judge Soper "denounced the pretense that colored students at Maryland State receive an education equivalent to that available for whites at College Park."<sup>10</sup> Senator Ellison pointed out that past surveys and commissions recommended that the institution at Princess Anne could be maintained as a school but as either a junior college or a vocational school, not a full four year college.<sup>11</sup>

Howard E. Murphey, Chairman of the Maryland Commission for Equal Educational Opportunities, attacked the University of Maryland and the state's system of awarding out-of-state scholarships to colored students. He called for abolishing the scholarships and making use of the white state-supported institutions for study. Murphey commented that the current system "places a stigma on Negro students and says to them you are not fit to attend the University of Maryland."<sup>12</sup> The State Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Thomas G. Pullen, advocated the complete separation of white and colored students on the undergraduate level, and urged that all of the schools be operated as parts of the University of Maryland.<sup>13</sup>

President Byrd of the University of Maryland had his say, too. He naturally favored placing all the state facilities for Negro education under the aegis of the University of Maryland.<sup>14</sup> He also argued that it would be an

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<sup>10</sup>Norfolk Sun and Gazette, April 2, 1949.

<sup>11</sup>Baltimore Sun, April 2, 1949.

<sup>12</sup>Norfolk Sun and Gazette, op. cit.

<sup>13</sup>Baltimore Afro-American, October 29, 1949.

<sup>14</sup>Philadelphia Tribune, November 22, 1949.

extravagance to transfer the land grant program to Morgan because "it would cost probably \$1,500,000 to duplicate the plant at Princess Anne."<sup>15</sup> The president of Morgan College, Dr. Martin D. Jenkins, opposed Byrd's view and recommended that his institution be operated as the state land grant college.<sup>16</sup> And Ambrose Caliver, a specialist in Negro higher education, said that one undergraduate institution, Morgan, could serve the Negroes of Maryland. To build up the school at Princess Anne would be a "waste of money," Caliver declared.<sup>17</sup>

Finally, the Report and Recommendations of the Commission to Study the Question of Negro Higher Education to the Governor and Legislative Council and the General Assembly of Maryland became public. As usual the institution at Princess Anne fared badly in comparison with Morgan, especially since the commission relied heavily on the data and recommendations of the Marbury Report of 1947.

In describing Maryland State College, the current commission noted that despite the recent building program at the school, "the physical plant at Princess Anne was woefully inadequate." For example, one men's dormitory with a capacity of ninety two houses 176. The girl's dormitory houses twice its normal capacity of fifty six. Also, the library with "its 6,000 volumes (4,000 of which

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<sup>15</sup>Baltimore Sun, March 10, 1950.

<sup>16</sup>Baltimore Afro-American, October 25, 1949.

<sup>17</sup>Baltimore Sun, April 7, 1950.