

The 1960's can most accurately be described as a time of revolution for places all over the world. Events that occurred in different places around the country persuaded small towns in the United States to take sides on many debatable topics. Many of these topics were taboo during the time, leading individuals to voice their opinions about social change. Despite its rural status, Huntington, West Virginia, specifically Marshall University's campus, was no different during this period. The racial climate of the town, along with a series of dramatic racial events eventually led to the formation of a student Civil Rights group in the winter of 1963. Through a series of articles published in *The Parthenon*, Marshall students demonstrated a strong advocacy for improving the racial climate on campus during the early 1960's. Overall, this storyline of bravery and a yearning for equality was able to establish a more welcoming atmosphere on campus.

Starting in a February 1963 edition of campus newspaper, *The Parthenon*, a seemingly vague, yet important headline declared the planning of an "anti-discrimination group". In the article, author Gary Kerns explained that a new student organization was being formed with the goal of "preventing racial discrimination on and off campus" (Kearns). William Caldwell, a freshmen member of the group, reported that the focus of the organization was to "attempt to do something concerning the discrimination in the establishments

which university students frequent in town" (Kearns). At the time it was known that racial discrimination was a problem in Huntington, yet Caldwell went on to explain that the planned organization wouldn't work well with a great number of members. Though this may have seemed counterintuitive, this was crucial to the establishment of this anti-discrimination group; the group would be small yet mighty. Caldwell concluded the article by making certain to explain that the group wanted to work towards a more accepting campus by saying "demonstrations should be of non-violent nature to achieve best results".

Following the initial article in February, March of 1963 brought about the official standings of the anti-discrimination group. Flagged by another bold headline, the Civil Interest Progressives were finally introduced to Marshall's campus along with a description of the organization and their plans for the future. An eight member executive committee led by William Caldwell, previously interviewed in the first article, would focus on three main goals: "to remove restrictions limiting the social life of students... to obtain equal job opportunities... to eliminate discriminatory practices limiting housing for minority groups" ("Committee"). The article explained a few of the practices the group planned to use so they could achieve their goals in a non-violent matter. Later, the article concluded by saying that most of the discriminatory practices the group would be working to address were off campus, reporting that there were "no discriminatory practices on campus" ("Committee"). It may have seem odd that even though racial tensions were at a high, the group couldn't find anything

discriminatory on campus, but according to Blake Gumprecht in his book *The American College Town*, many college campuses during the 1960's were more liberal than the surrounding cities. "College towns are unusually political because faculty and students tend to be more liberal than the rest of the population... even comparatively conservative college towns tend to be more progressive than nearby places" (Gumprecht). The author's theory is that students and faculty who attended college after the Vietnam War era began a political culture shift in the 1960's such as the Civil Interest Progressives on Marshall's campus. Moments such as these help us understand the ongoing progression of education for all students.

As time progressed, so did the Civil Interest Progressives and their actions to better the racial climate around Huntington. In a May 1963 edition of *The Parthenon*, Campus Editor William Calderwood reported on a 10 student "Share-In" at Bailey's Cafeteria, a local restaurant that was segregated at the time. Declaring the local business as a "Target" in the headline, the article discussed how the student organization performed a non-violent protest at the restaurant. The "Share-In" involved five white students who invited five black students to come and share a table with them inside the restaurant. Tom Stafford, a white senior at Marshall described the protest by saying it was "derived from the principles or ideals of justice, brotherhood and love" (Calderwood). The article didn't mention any problems that accompanied the "Share-In", and concluded with another quote from Stafford that said, "the brothers who will have

participated in the share-in experience will have become strengthened by the act of sharing" (Calderwood). Along with the article was a short questionnaire that asked varying students how they felt about student demonstrations aimed at discrimination. Many of the students agreed that these demonstrations helped the fight against discrimination, and while there were the few who disagreed with the idea, the overall message being sent by this page of *The Parthenon* was that through their nonviolent practices, the Civil Interest Progressives were actually making a difference in their local town.

Shortly following the article involving Bailey's Cafeteria was a follow-up story in another edition of *The Parthenon*. A bold headline proclaimed that the Civic Interest organization "Gains Goal After Negotiating With Bailey's". After a simple protest that only involved ten students, the article described how the Civil Interest Progressives achieved one of its objectives by negotiating with the owners of Bailey's Cafeteria into allowing people of color access to the restaurant. Over a two week period following the "share-in", service was "gradually offered to Negro customers" ("Civic Interest"). Along with the celebratory subject of the article, the Civil Interest Progressives' attorney, Herbert H. Henderson, was also introduced in this article. Following a relevantly short rise to action, we're able to see that the group was actually gaining positive results from its work towards local Civil Rights.

During this time it would seem as though Marshall's very own Civil Rights group was accomplishing everything it had planned. With a successful protest

under their belt, the Civil Interest Progressives were doing exactly the things they had intended. All was seemingly going well until a strange headline showed up in *The Parthenon*. "Four Arrested At Restaurant" didn't seem to align with the other articles discussing the current Greek life and Enrollment process at Marshall. In the article, four member of the Civil Interest Progressives were arrested on charges of "trespassing in a demonstration at the White Pantry Restaurant" ("Four"). The restaurant involved in the article could most easily be described by its name. The White Pantry Restaurant, more commonly known as The White Pantry, was a local establishment in Huntington with a notorious reputation for only serving white locals and students of Marshall. Owner of the establishment, Roba Quesenberry, swore out warrants against four members of the group after they started a demonstration where "a substance which produced sulphurous fumes was burned" ("Four"). In the article, it was also discussed that other members of the Civil Interest Progressives fled during the demonstration, meaning that the four who were arrested didn't act alone.

Though this was a pivotal moment in the Civil Interest Progressive's storyline, the actions described in that article didn't align with the stories that readers were accustomed to. After the group advertised a strong advocacy for non-violent acts, having four members arrested for a violent protest not far from campus was a strange twist in an ongoing story. Of course, to try and understand why something like this would happen, it's important to look at the racial climate

in many places during this time while also recognizing the fact that this wasn't the first, or last, time someone held a protest at The White Pantry.

The year 1963 can easily be seen as one of the most pivotal time periods during the Civil Rights Era. With many different protests happening in places such as Birmingham, Gadsden, and Tuscaloosa, inspiration to fight for what students thought was right could be found anywhere. After seeing students across the country fight against injustice, many students on Marshall's campus wanted to find ways to help bring equality to their African American peers. According to William Henry Chafe in his book *Civilities and Civil Rights: Greensboro, North Carolina and the Black Struggle for Freedom* he describes the harsh reality that many African Americans faced while waiting for civil rights as "a continuing reality, year in and year out" (Chafe). Overall, it's important to understand that even though there seemed to be little to no severe racial discrimination on campus the students of Marshall University still wanted to find ways to help their peers in the fight for equality.

Today, the racial climate on Huntington's campus of Marshall University is deeply rich with diversity. Due to a strong urge for change, students such as the Civil Interest Progressives sought out ways to help better the racial climate for students during the early 1960's. Through standards that brought about peaceful protest, along with a disruptive demonstration that left four arrested, this group helped bring many local issues to light while starting discussions about racism and discrimination. Usually, college towns are seen as more progressive due to the

liberal politics of the campus, and Marshall was no different. In a time where many stood up and voiced their opinions, a few members of The Thundering Herd did what they thought was right to help progress not only the college, but the town into a more accepting future.