

# *An Invitation to Contribute!*

The next thematic issue of *Spiritus* will be  
“Spirit-Empowered Leadership”  
(Fall 2020)

Guest-edited by Dr. John Paul Thompson

If you are interested in contributing, please write  
to [jthompson@oru.edu](mailto:jthompson@oru.edu).

For general submission,  
<https://digitalshowcase.oru.edu/>

# HEALING FOR ALL RACES

## ORAL ROBERTS' LEGACY OF RACIAL RECONCILIATION IN A DIVIDED CITY

DANIEL D. ISGRIGG

*Spiritus* 4.2 (2019) 227–256

<http://digitalshowcase.oru.edu/spiritus/>

© The Author(s) 2019

Reprints and Permissions: [Spiritus@oru.edu](mailto:Spiritus@oru.edu)

**Keywords** *Oral Roberts, racial integration, civil rights, Pentecostalism, Charismatic Renewal, Jesse Jackson, Tulsa Race Massacre*

### Abstract

This article explores Oral Roberts' legacy of racial reconciliation in the backdrop of the racial history of Tulsa, Oklahoma. Oral Roberts was a pioneer of racial integration of his meetings during the Healing Revival of the 1950s. But his racial vision came to maturity as Oral Roberts University became a center for social uplift for African Americans in the Spirit-empowered movement. Today, that legacy continues to shape Oral Roberts University as a shining example of racial diversity among Christian universities in America.

### Introduction

On February 7, 2018, Oral Roberts University (ORU) President, Dr. William M. Wilson, announced that the Spirit-empowered university in South Tulsa had reached a milestone. He declared proudly, “For the first time in ORU history, white students are in the minority.” This announcement may be surprising to those outside the ORU community, but it came as no surprise to those on campus who have watched ORU become a bright spot of diversity

in Tulsa, a city that has struggled to overcome its legacy stemming from the infamous 1921 Race Massacre. This article will explore the legacy of racial inclusion and integration in the ministry of Oral Roberts and ORU against the backdrop of Tulsa's racial history.

## It Happened in Tulsa

Tulsa is a beautiful city with a dark history. In its earliest days as an Indian territory, Tulsa was the home of the Creek Council Oak Tree that marked the end of the Trail of Tears for the Creek Nation prior to Oklahoma's statehood. Members of the Five Civilized Tribes, uprooted by American expansion, were moved to the area and named the settlement *Tallasi* or Tulsa (which meant "old town"). Some of the Civilized Tribes adopted European values and owned black slaves, who were emancipated as "freedmen" following the Civil War and settled in the Tulsa area.<sup>1</sup> Because of the new opportunities for freedmen settlements, African Americans from other parts of the South migrated to Oklahoma to establish all black towns where "Negros could find freedom from lynching, burning at the stake and other lawlessness."<sup>2</sup> But that vision was short lived when the government opened the lands to white settlers. The first whites came to Tulsa in the 1880s. In 1907, Oklahoma applied for statehood and Tulsa was blossoming as an oil boomtown. Despite its diversity, the new whites in Oklahoma were anything but tolerant of Native Americans or African Americans. The constitutional convention, led by the racial extremist president William H. Murray, set out to "out-Jim Crow the other southern states."<sup>3</sup> In a short time, Oklahoma went from a haven of racial diversity to one of the most segregated states in the union.

The oil boom in Tulsa in the early 1900s brought a new prosperity to the young city of Tulsa. The economic opportunities also benefited black citizens who were building their own "colored town" on the north side of the railroad tracks. Black entrepreneurs were building churches, hotels, entertainment establishments, and businesses in Black Tulsa. By 1920, the Greenwood District was one of the most successful black commercial

districts in the U.S.—known to the whites as “Little Africa” and by its citizens as “Black Wall Street.”<sup>4</sup> But the prosperity of Black Tulsa drew criticism and even jealousy from some white citizens of Tulsa. Tensions between blacks and whites in Tulsa came to a head on June 1, 1921, when a young black man was accused of assaulting a young white woman in a Tulsa hotel elevator. Incited by a headline in the *Tulsa Tribune*, a large group of whites in Tulsa demanded authorities to deliver the young man to a lynch mob.<sup>5</sup> Fearing that the Tulsa authorities would not protect the young man, a mob of young armed black men raced from Black Tulsa to defend him. Then “all Hell broke loose,” as what started as a skirmish at the courthouse turned into a race riot that moved from White Tulsa to Black Tulsa.<sup>6</sup>

Over the next twenty-four hours, the riot turned into a massacre as Tulsa became the site for the worst acts of racial violence in American history. Mobs of whites and blacks exchanged fire in the streets. Firebombs were dropped from planes on businesses and homes while bullets rained down on black citizens from machine gun installments on top of Standpipe Hill. For their safety, authorities forcibly removed blacks from their homes and businesses as white mobs looted and torched the black community. By the end of the day, an estimated 200–250 people were killed (with an estimated 80% being black), 10,000 black Tulsans were left homeless, over 2,000 businesses were destroyed, and virtually the whole thirty blocks of Black Tulsa was burnt to the ground.<sup>7</sup> James Hirsh comments, “The ruins of Greenwood were a grim display of racial hatred . . . . The riot was not only an expression of hostility between two groups but also a reflection of the isolation and mistrust each community felt for each other.”<sup>8</sup>

Until recently, the memory of this tragic event had all but receded from the minds of the Tulsa community, being virtually ignored for over fifty years by the city and the press. But the effects of this horrific event have persisted in the minds of African Americans in Tulsa. Even with the recent recognition by the city and state of the Tulsa Race Massacre as one of the nation’s greatest tragedies and the movements toward reconciliation by the

city, Tulsa is still a divided town, with the north side of downtown still being predominantly black and the south predominately white.

There is little information on how aware Oral Roberts was about Tulsa's race riot history. But we do know that from the very first days of Roberts' presence in Tulsa, he would become part of the story of Tulsa's racial history. One of Roberts' first crusades in 1947 was held in Tulsa in a tent set up by a Pentecostal Holiness minister named Steve Pringle located in Greenwood on a vacant lot at 601 N. Main upon the ashes of an upper class neighborhood that once was home to the elites of Black Wall Street. Just one block south of Pringle's tent was a large white building called Beno Hall where 3,000 members of Tulsa's KKK kalvern had terrorized blacks in Greenwood until it closed in 1929.<sup>9</sup> Enthusiasm over Roberts' popular miracle ministry had succeeded in adding new members to the fledgling church, so much so that Pringle decided to purchase Beno Hall to house the hundreds of new Pentecostal believers. Pringle named the church *Evangelistic Temple* and it became the Roberts family's home church.<sup>10</sup> Little did Roberts know that this would be the beginning of a lifetime of ministry that would reclaim spaces of racial segregation within the Christian community.

## **Oral Roberts' Racial Vision**

Like most white Pentecostals in his era, Roberts' ministry began primarily among the white members of his own denomination, the Pentecostal Holiness Church.<sup>11</sup> Yet, Pentecostalism began as a multi-racial movement when William Seymour, the son of former slaves, started a world-wide movement in Los Angeles, California, in 1906.<sup>12</sup> But years of separation between blacks and whites in Pentecostal circles had left the movement segregated on Sunday mornings. Despite the racial climate in his era, Roberts was able to escape racial biases and throughout his ministry shared the same inclusive vision as early Pentecostals who believed "the color line was washed away in the blood."

Oral Roberts' racial vision can be traced back to several formative experiences from his childhood in Oklahoma that insulated him from the prejudice that surrounded him. The first was Roberts' awareness that he himself was not white. Oral Roberts' father was white, but his mother was part Cherokee.<sup>13</sup> The fact that he was non-white was essential to his origin story because, like many Native Americans, he contracted tuberculosis as a teenager.<sup>14</sup> As Tim Hatcher has pointed out, Roberts incorporated his Native American ancestry as a ministry tool to minister to disadvantaged people throughout his ministry.<sup>15</sup> Roberts notes, "I am part Cherokee Indian myself. I am neither white nor black. I often say, I am in between."<sup>16</sup> Roberts' appropriation of his Native American identity helped him develop what he believed was a biblical theology of race. He says, "God has made only two things different about all the people of the world: (1) They are of different colors; (2) and they live in different places."<sup>17</sup> In his mind, biological differences between races did not separate humanity, for "all nations of the earth were made of one blood." For Roberts, race was little more than simply the color of one's skin, but underneath humanity is the same.

The second formative experience came from his early exposure to black Pentecostal churches through his father's ministry.<sup>18</sup> Roberts recalls living "across the street from colored town" as a child in Southwest Oklahoma, where his father, the pastor of the Pentecostal Holiness Church, often exchanged pulpits with the pastor of the black Church of God in Christ in Ada.<sup>19</sup> He recalls, "My father loved black people. And black people loved my father." Oral loved attending these services with his father and these experiences fostered a deep love and appreciation for African American spirituality. Worshiping with black believers exposed him to the way their journey as an oppressed people was expressed in their spiritual ethos. For example, when one African American ORU student sang "Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child" at a crusade, Roberts reflected that she "sang her songs with the feeling of a race that felt the last of bitterness of the white man, yet with the hope of Jesus in her soul."<sup>20</sup>

Roberts' connection to his own racial identity not only helped him to identify with minorities, but also created in him empathy for the experience of minorities in America. As Tim Hatcher has noted, "His navigation of these different ethnicities reveals a hybridized identity that sprang up from his early experiences and his family's approaches to these issues."<sup>21</sup> During the 1950s, his heritage compelled him to draw attention to Native Americans and their suffering. He considered himself to be a missionary to the "Forgotten Peoples."<sup>22</sup> Roberts was ashamed of the history of the white man's behavior of neglect, broken promises, and genocide of Native Americans.<sup>23</sup> His compassion for Native Americans led him to conduct special Native American crusades to meet the needs of this community. His advocacy on behalf of this neglected community resulted in his being awarded as the "Outstanding Native American of the Year" in 1963.

Perhaps the most formative experience came from touching human needs as a healing evangelist. The healing ministry changed him because he saw firsthand how suffering was not limited to race or color; it was a human condition that a loving God wanted to heal. The ministry of healing embodied the compassion of Jesus who sees people through God's love and is not afraid to touch the hurting. He said, "I don't have the kind of love that makes me suddenly love all the Negroes and hate the Whites, or love all the Whites and hate all the Negroes. I just love people. Jesus put that in me. I love people because the Lover is inside of me."<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, Roberts believed the Gospel did not discriminate according to race. He said, "Jesus sees people as they are and not as some bigots or racists say they are."<sup>25</sup> He was once asked if he would pray for a Jewish man for healing. He responded, "Is he a human being? Then I will pray for him."<sup>26</sup>

## **Challenging the Boundaries of Race**

David Harrell, Roberts' notable biographer, questions how committed Roberts was to racial justice. He quips that Roberts, like other southern evangelical evangelists, openly "courted black followers," but comments that Roberts was "no social crusader."<sup>27</sup> While Roberts' approach to racial

integration was modest in the beginning, Harrell's analysis fails to recognize the gradual development of Roberts' increasingly public challenge to America's racial boundaries.

In the first years of his crusade ministry, Roberts was sympathetic to the plight of "colored people" who in several locations "were forbidden to enter for my prayer" or were confined to "a certain section reserved for them."<sup>28</sup> Despite these restrictions, Roberts did his best to minister to black attendees and several were healed. Where laws allowed, Roberts had open seating and integrated altar calls.<sup>29</sup> A report from his 1949 crusade boasted, "Negro, Mexican, Indian, and White all sat together. So did the rich with the poor and the cultured with the unlearned."<sup>30</sup> Another report in the same year in Tacoma, Washington, recorded that when Roberts gave the altar call, "they came, old and young, white and colored, from all portions of the tent."<sup>31</sup>

During these early years Roberts preferred quietly to integrate his own meetings rather than making a public statement on the political side of the issue. Later he recalled, "We didn't talk about it. We just did it."<sup>32</sup> However, his reputation of integration was beginning to draw criticism by some in Christian circles. Roberts noted, "In many places, misguided Christians picketed and paraded outside our tent because I refused to segregate the altar of God."<sup>33</sup> In 1953, Roberts was informed during a crusade that a group of whites was going to kill him if he desegregated seating in his meetings.<sup>34</sup> After discussing the threats with his team, he decided he would not allow racists to determine who could receive ministry in his meetings. In spite of the threats, he announced to the crowd, "Anyone who comes to our tent can sit where you want to sit." After he made the announcement, the rest of the crusade meetings proceeded without incident.

As his popularity increased by the mid-1950s, Roberts became more vocal about the integration of his meetings. For example, in 1956, a reader questioned Roberts, "How do you stand on the question of segregation or integration of races?" He replied, "I am a minister of the gospel, not a politician. . . . My ministry is for all people of all churches and all races."<sup>35</sup>



By 1959, Roberts' meetings and altar calls were fully integrated and he made it clear that "all races are welcome at our Crusades."<sup>36</sup>

## A Healing University

Beginning in 1965 with the opening of ORU, Oral Roberts' efforts to work for racial justice began to blossom. The early 1960s was a time of tremendous social upheaval in American culture and the university campuses became ground zero for conversations and conflicts about race in America. Roberts was deeply distressed at what he perceived as anarchy that other universities experienced. His strict standard to the school's honor code earned ORU the label "The School for Squares" in the local paper.<sup>37</sup> But Roberts wanted more from his university than to simply produce good Christian men and women. He dreamed of a university where students, regardless of color or background, were truly equal and had equal opportunities to succeed. In fact, a governmental official in charge of federal funding called him to ask his policy on black people and integration. Roberts replied, his three priorities for ORU were that it would be international, interdenominational, and interracial.<sup>38</sup> Roberts' interracial admissions policy was long before the days of affirmative action and the 1978 Supreme Court decision that permitted race to be a factor in college admissions.<sup>39</sup> When it came to integration, ORU was ahead of the curve for conservative evangelical campuses.<sup>40</sup>

In recruiting black students, he became aware that many students did not have the same academic opportunities as white students. Whereas white students at ORU "achieved a certain position because of their parents or the culture of America," he recognized that black students did not have the same educational opportunities because "for three hundred years the white man had decided that black people would have to stay at a certain point in history."<sup>41</sup> To address the academic inequality, Roberts told the faculty that ORU had an obligation to be a place where black students could receive support and encouragement for the disadvantages created by the inequitable American educational system. Roberts believed part of ORU's mission

would be to prove to America that “no black person is inferior.”<sup>42</sup> Over the next few years, he saw struggling black students become 4.0 students as faculty helped to give them equal opportunities to succeed. He declared, “We have demonstrated to our constituency and our city what is so obvious all along if you had eyes to see. We are the same people, all we need is the same opportunity. Give us the same opportunity, folks and I am telling you, there is no color.”<sup>43</sup> It should be noted that despite his inclusive attitudes towards his students, Roberts was much slower in integrating African Americans into the leadership of ORU. When the university started, the entire faculty and board of regents were white.<sup>44</sup>

The realization that true racial justice was related to opportunity was further reinforced when it came to black students being treated with equality in South Tulsa. In the 1970s, whites in Tulsa were still discriminating against blacks, particularly in housing. When his black students needed housing outside the campus Roberts found out that the surrounding apartment complex owners would not rent to blacks.<sup>45</sup> Troubled by this reality, he decided to do what Roberts does best. He went out and raised money to buy one of the apartment complexes for his graduate students so black students could have equal access. To further make his point, he appointed Clifton Taulbert, a notable black alumnus who had also been rejected for an apartment because of his race, to be one of the administrators of ORU’s housing complexes.<sup>46</sup>

## **An Agent of Racial Healing**

Roberts’ ministry career was paralleled by the development of the Civil Rights Movement. During the mid-1960s, the Civil Rights Movement was entering a stage where black Americans were actively confronting the systems of racial injustice in America. The civil unrest and riots around the United States in 1967 earned the famous branding, “The Long Hot Summer of 1967.”<sup>47</sup> As leaders confronted racism in America, Roberts began openly to confront racial attitudes in his crusades. Just a week before the Detroit riot in July of 1967, Roberts held a crusade at the Detroit

Convention Center. The convention hall was packed as “white sat beside Negro and Negro beside white” and were only separated by “different needs.” The crusade team could already sense that there was “unrest in the city and foreboding of the riots to come.” Prophetically, Roberts focused his message on the racial unrest, particularly focusing on “the second worst riot in the history of the nation” that had just taken place in Newark, New Jersey.<sup>48</sup> Roberts told the Detroit audience, “Why is the white man manipulating the black man? To cover up his sin of enslaving that man, of violating his human rights, his dignity and the image of God upon his soul.”<sup>49</sup> Roberts focused his meeting on calling America to repentance and led the attendees in prayer for God to heal the nation from bitterness and hatred between races.

A few months later, Roberts was again calling for racial healing in a crusade that took place just days before Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., was assassinated. With racial tensions growing and hope for unity in question, Roberts addressed the problem of “racial bias” in America. Roberts declared, “[Negros] have been the victims of more mistreatment and racial bias than any other peoples in modern history.”<sup>50</sup> He reminded supporters that the hateful rhetoric in America was affecting “dear black people who suffer, have needs and are human beings with God-given rights.” Roberts pleaded with the Christian community that harboring hate and fear toward race was no longer an option. “God wants you to do something about this!” he exclaimed. He encouraged Christians to face the darkness in their own hearts, which was just as sinful as the violence against blacks. He comments, “There are other ways to kill people than with guns. You can do it with prejudice, hate, ridicule, name calling, or separating yourself from them.”<sup>51</sup> In Roberts’ understanding, those who refused to accept black people refused Jesus himself.<sup>52</sup> He was convinced that the Gospel was the antidote to the problem of hate and true healing for America would only occur “when we come face-to-face with Christ.”<sup>53</sup>

Another important moment that shaped Roberts’ stance was when he was invited to meet with a group of African American pastors in Harlem in

1968. As he listened to these leaders of the black community share their experiences he began to understand better the “militant” rhetoric of movement.<sup>54</sup> Although he did not agree with all of it, he came out of that meeting more committed to listening to the black community and their needs for justice and equality. Roberts believed that the answer for racial strife was not militancy in pursuit of gaining equality; it was the “touch of compassion” that was needed on both sides of the racial issues. For whites, compassion is needed in order for blacks to be seen as human beings who have real needs that Jesus died to heal. For blacks, compassion is needed to look upon their oppressors with compassion and forgiveness, which was the ultimate act of healing.

For this famous healing evangelist, the move from healing evangelist to advocate for racial healing was a natural one since racial healing and physical healing are rooted in the same principle.

If you think of sickness as disharmony, as I think of it, then everybody is sick. The only difference is in degree, because everybody is in disharmony. He may be in disharmony with himself, he may be in disharmony with people . . . Jesus saw people in disharmony with themselves, with society, and with God; and He touched them at their point of need.<sup>55</sup>

Just as physical healing was provided for in Christ, so too healing was part of the ministry of Jesus, even for racial strife. He declared, “Yes! There’s a healing for our nation. . . . A healing for bitter people, the frustrated, the violent. There is a healing in Christ for the nations.”<sup>56</sup> The key was that both blacks and whites needed to see people as people, and like Jesus, be willing to touch people with compassion.

## **Racial Healing in Prime Time**

Oral Roberts was a pioneer and perhaps the father of what we know today as Christian television.<sup>57</sup> In the 1950s, Roberts used television to

mainstream the healing ministry as God performed miracles of physical healing in prime time. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Roberts once again turned to television ministry to expose the American public to his increasing emphasis on racial healing and reconciliation. Roberts knew the power television had to shape the narrative of his generation and was not afraid to feature African Americans in his TV programs. His first primetime show in 1969 featured gospel legend Mahalia Jackson.<sup>58</sup> Roberts' inclusion of black religious icons like Jackson was novel in a time when blacks were "invisible" in American religious broadcasting.<sup>59</sup> The special featured a powerfully subversive moment in which Roberts and Jackson joined hand-in-hand in prayer for God to heal the nation. By featuring images of reconciliation in prime time, Roberts was strategically trying to show the American public that Jesus was the answer to the problems of race.<sup>60</sup>

Oral Roberts' popularity on television in the 1970s meant he also became an important religious figure for politicians to associate with. As a lifelong Democrat, Roberts had an open invitation to consort with many of the political voices in America.<sup>61</sup> But his most visible overture toward the civil rights movement was in 1978 when Oral Roberts invited Rev. Jesse Jackson to receive an honorary doctorate from ORU for his "untiring endeavors for the understanding and cooperation among all races of this country."<sup>62</sup> Jackson admired Roberts for his stand on integration because he "would not allow the cross to be beneath the flag or the culture." Jackson was impressed by the number of black students that were in the graduating class.<sup>63</sup> Jackson commented during his commencement address that ORU embodied the dream of Martin Luther King, Jr., and had "overcome the tension of race."<sup>64</sup> He encouraged,

If ORU accepts this challenge of equity and parity for itself, it will then have earned the moral authority to challenge others to get like us. ORU has the opportunity to be the *first* University in America to establish an educational community where people from around the world can come here and say that you will be

judged totally by the content of your character rather than the color of your skin.<sup>65</sup>

Jackson's words of encouragement about ORU's racial reputation attest to the way in which Roberts' rhetoric of inclusion had reached an institutional level and set out ORU as a model among universities in the nation. While it would be easy to suspect that his efforts to feature black celebrities at ORU was simply "good business," Roberts' track record of racial justice certainly had the potential to alienate more white supporters than he could gain from the black community.<sup>66</sup>

## **Listening to the Black Voices in Tulsa**

Jesse Jackson's presence on campus in 1978 was not an isolated phenomenon; it was the culmination of a decade of ORU evolving from a welcoming place for African Americans to a space for racial understanding and dialog. The racial division in Tulsa was apparent to anyone who came to the city. Roberts recognized this reality and took a bold step in 1969 when he held a special "Racial Brotherhood" chapel for featuring women from the Tulsa community discussing their experiences of prejudice as members of the black, Jewish, and Catholic communities.<sup>67</sup> One of the black speakers, Katherine Copeland, recalled what it was like to grow up in Tulsa on "notorious Greenwood Street." She told the student body, "Tulsa has always been one of the most segregated cities in the United States and in my youth all of the Negroes lived in one area, except for those living in servant quarters, and many of us had very little contact with the white world." She told of how when she was born, her mother had to give birth to her in a room "between the emergency entrance and the boiler room" because she was not allowed with the whites. The students got to ask questions of the panel about issues of prejudice in Tulsa and how these women had responded. Even with Roberts' efforts to encourage inclusion, ORU students recognized that racial issues still existed on the campus, such as interracial dating.<sup>68</sup>

Roberts' initial racial conversations on race in 1968 eventually became an annual emphasis called "Black Awareness Week," which was established to "help ORU understand" the black experience. Through a series of services, several speakers addressed the ORU community on matters of racism, equality, and social justice. In 1971, Roberts preached a message on racial equality using Simon the Cyrene, the African man who helped Jesus carry his cross, as an example of the African American's place in God's kingdom.<sup>69</sup> Roberts also shared how members of the North Tulsa black community had gone to New York to solicit help from black businessmen to establish a new business in North Tulsa. The New York powerbrokers told them, "Call Oral Roberts. He is the one man in Tulsa who can help you."

In 1972, Mayor James Evers, who was at the time one of only four black mayors in America, gave a talk called "Racism is Wrong" and thanked God for Oral Roberts who "came along and represents all of us." He told the students they needed to be proud to tell people, "I went to Oral Roberts, a school where a man believed in change—not talk—who believed in doing something."<sup>70</sup>

In another chapel session, Campus Chaplain Bob Stamps led a forum where black students were allowed to share about how they felt about the racial climate of ORU and America. Some students admitted that ORU is not exempt from racial prejudice. One student commented, "I feel that this campus probably has less than any other campus in America, but I feel as Christian young people, we've really got to work hard."<sup>71</sup> Another student who grew up in Tulsa commented that he was proud to be black because it represented self-determination and human dignity. He said, "For the black man to respond to God's love in faith means that the black man has accepted the truth of the image of himself, which is revealed in Jesus Christ."<sup>72</sup> The evening was capped off with a "Soul Festival," which was a celebration of black culture put on by a student committee.<sup>73</sup>

The most radical event of "Black Awareness Week" in 1972 was a panel discussion in which students were encouraged to engage with several

black Tulsans about racism, poverty, and black-white relations.<sup>74</sup> One of the leaders was Don Ross, one of the most outspoken advocates for North Tulsa and who later served as the North Tulsa representative in the Oklahoma House from 1983–2000. During the 1960s, Ross sought to bring attention to the forgotten history of the Tulsa Race Massacre by publishing several articles in the *Oklahoma Eagle*.<sup>75</sup> His advocacy for blacks in Tulsa led him to be the lead lobbyist for the establishment of the commission to investigate the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre. Riot historian, James Hirsch, commented, “No one played a more crucial role in this endeavor than Don Ross, a black journalist-turned-politician who spent more than four decades trying to summon the event from history.”<sup>76</sup>

Known for his unapologetic and often cutting opinions about black equality and the need for white restitution in Tulsa, Ross introduced himself to the students by warning the students that his views were militant and declared, “I’m a racist.”<sup>77</sup> However, Ross was impressed that the university would allow him to share his controversial ideas and that the students were so willing to engage in these hard conversations. He commented, “It’s a symbol that maybe it’s not too late for you at least. I think it’s important that you understand some of the pressures and problems that we face just because we are black.”<sup>78</sup> Ross’ presence in this forum demonstrated that Oral Roberts did not just give lip service to support of his African American students; Roberts was willing to listen and learn from the experience of leaders of his own city. The emphasis on racial issues in these forums cemented ORU as one of the few places outside of North Tulsa where the experiences of African Americans could be expressed and heard.

The same year, Roberts showed his willingness speak out on issues involving racial issues in Tulsa. Although in 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* paved the way for the integration of public schools, it was not until 1973 that a first attempt at integration took place in Tulsa at Booker T. Washington High School. In response to this momentous move, Roberts issued a press release of support.



We here at Oral Roberts University are very interested about the future of Washington High School and about the voluntary efforts to integrate and to have students from various families in our entire city. We are trying to practice brotherhood here. We have both white and black and in fact, the students of many colors and races here at the university. We are getting along beautifully and we think that this thing at Washington High School has a great future and I just hope and pray, in fact, we all hope and pray that we can get together and that this will be more than an experiment, it will be something living in the midst of all of us that demonstrates our real sincere feelings of brotherhood.<sup>79</sup>

The fact that Roberts saw continuity between racial integration in Tulsa and the vision he had tried to implement at ORU once again demonstrated that Roberts was ahead of his time.

Several years later, another important voice from the Tulsa African American community took center stage for “Black Awareness Week.” This time it was Tulsa icon, Robert Goodwin, who was a recognized African American leader in Tulsa. Unlike the outside voices of previous years, Goodwin was a member of the first graduating class of ORU who, after earning his Ph.D. from the University of California-Berkeley, became editor of his father’s historic black Tulsa newspaper *The Oklahoma Eagle*.<sup>80</sup> While a student at ORU, Goodwin served as student body president and was a member of the World Action Team on several global crusades.<sup>81</sup> Goodwin was recognized in the Tulsa black community for bringing the story of Tulsa’s racial history to the forefront of the Tulsa memory. Goodwin talked to the ORU students about the history of America and the legacy that disenfranchisement has had on the black community. He explained, “The blacks of this country weren’t allowed any identity with his mother Africa, and at the same time he was prohibited from adopting the cultural values of this land, so he became literally a man without a country.”<sup>82</sup> Goodwin pointed out even in their day, racial bigotry is still present because black Americans were succeeding and were no longer “in their place.”<sup>83</sup> He told

the audience that true freedom was the human ability to be mobile in society, a luxury that whites enjoyed and black citizens were still trying to achieve. Goodwin's emphasis on "opportunity" was similar to Roberts' impulse to try to level the playing field for black students when the school first opened.

By the late 1980s, ORU was still struggling to reach a 20 percent minority. But that was not good enough for Roberts. He declared, "God laid it on my heart to try to reach 30% black students."<sup>84</sup> To help with this goal, Roberts was intentional in recruiting African Americans to be part of the leadership of ORU. Among those serving on the board of Regents during this era was Bishop Charles E. Blake, who later became the presiding bishop of the Churches of God in Christ, the largest Pentecostal denomination in the U.S. Blake's oldest son attended ORU.<sup>85</sup> Another important person added to ORU's Board of Regents was Bishop John L. Mears of Evangel Temple in Washington D.C. John and his sons, Don and Virgil, became leaders in a racial reconciliation movement among Pentecostal and Charismatic ministers in the late 1980s. Mears' magazine, *Bridgebuilder*, featured many prominent ministers who were working for racial unity in the church. Among the regular ministers highlighted were John Gimenez, ORU's own Carlton Pearson, Kenneth Copeland, Charles Blake, and Oral Roberts. Mears' sons, Don and Virgil, were part of the first class of graduates from ORU. Mears chose ORU because of the "reconciling power of God's healing love was evident in that fact—that students from many different races, backgrounds, and denominations could come together in one school."<sup>86</sup>

In a very bold move toward racial reconciliation in 1986, Oral Roberts and new Dean of the ORU seminary, Larry Lea, announced that ORU was ready to go "beyond reconciliation to restitution."<sup>87</sup> Roberts announced the establishment of the "John L. Mears Restitution Fund" with the goal of raising funds for scholarships for African American students to attend seminary at ORU. Lea commented, "Our goal is to help bring a new vitality to black churches in America—to train new pastors who are filled with and

acquainted with the workings of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>88</sup> Roberts believed he had a responsibility to sow into the inner cities that were so hurt by racial prejudice. Roberts said, “We want to be part of this reconciliation movement that’s taking place.” The administration placed an emphasis on the recruitment of black students by hiring Bill Owens, who started a program called, “Give Them a Chance Ministries,” which recruited black students from the inner city to ORU. This initiative increased ORU’s enrollment of African Americans from 4.1 percent in 1980 to 24.3 percent in 1992. Even through the infamous financial difficulties that led to the closing of the City of Faith in 1989 and the eventual transition of Oral’s leadership to his son, Richard, in 1991, the African American population continued to be 15–20 percent throughout the 1990s.

Despite the emphasis on diversity among the student body, ORU had a more difficult time recruiting African American faculty until the 1980s. In 1983, ORU recruited Anita Hill, the longtime aid to Clarence Thomas, to be a Professor of Law in the O. W. Coburn School of Law until it closed in 1986.<sup>89</sup> The ORU seminary in particular took steps forward by recruiting noted African American Pentecostal scholar, Leonard Lovett, to serve as Professor of Religion and Ethics from 1990–1993. Others who joined during this time are current faculty members Trevor Grizzle, William V. MacDonald, and James Barber.

## **Oral’s “Black Son”**

The story of Oral Roberts’ efforts at racial reconciliation cannot be told without including the story of Carlton Pearson. Although currently an outcast of the evangelical community due to his controversial shift to the “gospel of inclusion,” during the 1970s–1990s, Pearson was one of Oral Roberts’ favorite protégés. Pearson grew up in a poor neighborhood in San Diego, California, where his family attended the Church of God in Christ. He and his mother watched Roberts on television. Pearson was called to preach at an early age and hoped he could attend ORU after high school, particularly because at the time there were no black Pentecostal

universities.<sup>90</sup> Roberts almost immediately recognized Pearson's gifts and within a year he was traveling in ministry with Roberts and became one of the most recognized black students at ORU.<sup>91</sup> Roberts believed Pearson was special. In fact, in 1973, Roberts shared with Pearson an idea that would change his outlook on his own ethnicity. He said, "Carlton, the last person to help Christ on earth was a black man." Roberts added, "I believe that the next great move of the Holy Spirit would be among black people . . . . And that you will have a leading part in it."<sup>92</sup> That year Pearson was the driving force behind instituting the "Black Awareness Week" and was regularly called upon to encourage black participation in campus life. Pearson also started an all-black choir on campus called "Souls-A-Fire" and was a regular singer with the ORU World Action Singers featured on Roberts' prime time specials.

After graduation, Pearson was appointed "Associate Evangelist" and chaplain for Oral Roberts Ministries and he ministered side by side with Richard Roberts at crusades around the world. Pearson's relationship with Oral was close and he claims that in 1974 Oral singled him out as his "black son."<sup>93</sup> After a few years of ministry success under Roberts' wing, in 1977 Pearson launched out on his own ministry. He eventually launched an interracial church in South Tulsa named Higher Dimensions, which he modeled after the diversity he experienced at ORU.<sup>94</sup> The initially majority white church quickly grew to over 1,000 people. Pearson remained connected to ORU as a member of the ORU Board of Regents.

The interracial vision of Pearson was shaped in part by the role he played in Roberts' vision of racial equality at ORU. On the one hand, Pearson embraced his African American identity, while at the same time was critical of his own community focusing too much on being black. On the other hand, Pearson was uncomfortable with the way white ministers tried to use popular black preachers like himself only to address racial integration in the church. He wanted to be recognized as minister, not a token black preacher for white audiences. Pearson commented, "they needed me as an

evangelist before the blacks came, because my ministry is just as effective to a nonblack audience as an integrated audience.”<sup>95</sup>

As a black minister in Tulsa, Pearson had become an important image both for ORU and for Tulsa race politics. Pearson’s church was integrated, but that was primarily achieved because it was planted in South Tulsa rather than North Tulsa. In fact, in the earliest days, his church was predominantly white.<sup>96</sup> Pearson provided ORU and the South Tulsa Christian community a version of blackness that whites could be comfortable with that was not “too black.”<sup>97</sup>

As Marla Frederick points out, Pearson represented a new face of black Pentecostalism, which had been historically “associated with those on the economic margins of society.” His notoriety in Pentecostal and Charismatic circles, interracial leadership, visibility in Christian media, and economic wealth expanded the perception of blackness to his generation and allowed black spirituality to become mainstream. Pearson shattered two presumptions about African Americans, that blacks were poor and that expressivity should be “marginal not mainstream.” Fredrick said, “The performance of religious dandyism among African American televangelists provided a means of aesthetically affirming black uplift and social mobility, while simultaneously critiquing perceived notions of black religious complacency to the economic status quo.”<sup>98</sup> Of course, Pearson “learned the ropes” of both aspects from his mentor Oral Roberts.<sup>99</sup>

Roberts’ mainstreaming of prosperity teaching and Pentecostal spirituality was now being used by a black minister to uplift himself and others in his community. Pearson had become the most recognizable black minister in America. Pearson’s popularity led to him being invited to be the “only African American” host of TBN’s *Praise the Lord* television show, which Pearson often hosted.<sup>100</sup> Pearson used his success to provide opportunities for other black ministers to break through similar visibility and economic barriers. The Azusa Conferences of the early 1990s gave a platform for a new wave of black ministers to be noticed by the larger church community. Most notably was T. D. Jakes, the megachurch pastor

who became a household name as America's favorite preacher.<sup>101</sup> Others, like Donnie McClurkin, Dion Sanders, and Marvin Winans, were elevated to visibility through his presence on predominantly white Christian television. In the end, Roberts used Pearson to show a new face of blacks in the media that most whites had not yet seen, one molded to white expectations as he performed familiar white aesthetics with the World Action Singers. On the other hand, Pearson used Oral Roberts and ORU as a platform to mainstream black aesthetics for white audiences.

## Conclusion

Today ORU is reaping the benefits of the past five decades of emphasis on racial healing. But that vision has been taken to a whole new level under Dr. William M. Wilson, the fourth president of ORU. Wilson's vision of globalization through Whole Person Education at ORU has had a tremendous impact on the global diversity of the student population, which today represents 114 nations of the world. Currently the student population consists of 45 percent white, 14 percent African American, 14 percent Hispanics, and 16 percent international students.<sup>102</sup> The inclusive atmosphere created for African Americans is benefiting other ethnicities in this new era of a global society. Under the longtime Vice President of Student Affairs and African American graduate of ORU, Dr. Clarence Boyd, "Black Heritage Week" has continued to expand to what is now a number of Multi-cultural Committee celebrations including "MLK and Diversity Week," "International Emphasis Week," and the annual "CultureFest."<sup>103</sup> While Tulsa has continued to struggle to integrate, ORU has become a model for diversity representing Christ's ability to bring healing to all races through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Oral Roberts was a healing evangelist who did not limit his vision to physical healing. Roberts' healing theology naturally led to the belief that he could play a role in healing the racial divisions in the United States. Roberts' own racial identity was a seed that continued to grow until his belief in racial healing manifested in a university that would elevate the lives of

African Americans in Tulsa and throughout America. He was not afraid of hard conversations about race. Nor was he content to sit on the sidelines. In the deeply racially divided city of Tulsa, Oral Roberts was a voice for healing and reconciliation at a time when the black church needed a champion and the white church needed a prophetic voice.



**Daniel D. Isgrigg** (disgrigg@oru.edu) is Director of the Holy Spirit Research Center at Oral Roberts University, Tulsa, Oklahoma, USA.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Scott Ellsworth, *Death in a Promise Land: The Tulsa Race Riot of 1921* (Baton Rouge: University of Louisiana Press, 1982), 12.

<sup>2</sup> James S. Hirsch, *Riot and Remembrance* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2002), 34–35.

<sup>3</sup> Hirsch, *Riot and Remembrance*, 34–35.

<sup>4</sup> Mary E. Jones Parrish, *Events of the Tulsa Disaster: An Eye-witness Account of the 1921 Tulsa Race Riot* (Mary E. Jones Parrish, 1923; reprint, Tulsa, OK: Out on a Limb Publishing, 1998). This work contains the personal reflections of Ms. Parrish and others who witnessed the 1921 race riot.

<sup>5</sup> The *Tulsa Tribune* article written by the editor, Richard Lloyd Jones, read “To Lynch a Negro Tonight.” According to Hirsch, *Riot and Remembrance*, 81, the editorial was permanently “excised from the record” of newspaper archives. The only existing copies of that paper have the “entire editorial page cut out.”

<sup>6</sup> Jones Parish, *Events of the Tulsa Disaster*, 8; Hirsch, *Riot and Remembrance*, 79.

<sup>7</sup> Hirsch, *Riot and Remembrance*, 118–119, notes that reports on the amount of dead varied but the director of the Red Cross estimated the number killed could be “as high as 300.” They also noted that 1,256 homes were destroyed, 215 additional

homes were looted, and total damages were estimated at \$1.8 million. A detailed list of property losses are listed in Jones Parish, *Events of the Tulsa Disaster*, 98–112.

<sup>8</sup> Hirsch, *Riot and Remembrance*, 118–19.

<sup>9</sup> Steve Gerkin, “Beno Hall: Tulsa’s Den of Terror,” *This Land Press*, 3 September 2011, n.p., <http://thislandpress.com/2011/09/03/beno-hall-tulas-den-of-terror/> (18 January 2019).

<sup>10</sup> Dan Beller, “Evangelistic Temple Church, Tulsa, Oklahoma,” a paper presented to Church Growth I, Fuller Theological Seminary, 1981, Holy Spirit Research Center, Oral Roberts University. Evangelistic Temple became the home church for the Roberts family until Roberts joined the Methodist church in 1968.

<sup>11</sup> Vinson Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 176, points out that the Pentecostal Holiness Church (PHC) had an African American branch in the early years. However, the black Fire Baptized Holiness and other black branches separated from the PHC in 1930.

<sup>12</sup> For the best source of the African American roots of Pentecostalism see, Estrelida Alexander, *Black Fire: One Hundred Years of African American Pentecostalism* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2005).

<sup>13</sup> Timothy Hatcher, “The Spirit of Immense Struggle: Oral Roberts’ Native American Ancestry,” *Spiritus: ORU Journal of Theology* 3:2 (2018), 177–98.

<sup>14</sup> Oral Roberts, *Expect a Miracle: My Life and My Ministry* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 32. See also, Daniel D. Isgrigg and Vinson Synan, “An Early Account of Oral Roberts’ Healing Testimony,” *Spiritus: ORU Journal of Theology* 3:2 (Fall 2018), 169–76.

<sup>15</sup> Hatcher, “The Spirit of Immense Struggle,” 193.

<sup>16</sup> Oral Roberts, “The Drumbeat of Racial Bias,” *Abundant Life*, August 1968, 2.

<sup>17</sup> G. H. Montgomery, “Deliverance Is Brought to Crow Indian Reservation,” *Abundant Life*, November 1955, 6.

<sup>18</sup> Oral Roberts, “Oral Roberts Meets with Bishops,” Holy Spirit Research Center, Oral Roberts University, Tulsa, OK, 1989, audio cassette.

<sup>19</sup> Oral Roberts, “With God There Is No Color Line,” *Charisma and Christian Life*, September 1990, 132–35.

<sup>20</sup> Oral Roberts, “God Opened the Doors for World Action in London and Israel,” *Abundant Life*, November 1968, 7, 11.



- <sup>21</sup> Hatcher, “The Spirit of Immense Struggle,” 179.
- <sup>22</sup> Hilliard Griffin, “Missionary to American Indians,” *Abundant Life*, November 1959, 7–9.
- <sup>23</sup> Hatcher, “The Spirit of Immense Struggle,” 184.
- <sup>24</sup> Oral Roberts, “How to Lift Your Level of Living,” *Abundant Life*, July 1967, 5.
- <sup>25</sup> Roberts, “The Drumbeat of Racial Bias,” 2.
- <sup>26</sup> Oral Roberts, “A Message to Pastors,” audio recording, 3 December 1968, Oral Roberts University, Holy Spirit Research Center, [https://digitalshowcase.oru.edu/or\\_collection/3/](https://digitalshowcase.oru.edu/or_collection/3/).
- <sup>27</sup> David E. Harrell, Jr., *White Sects and Black Men in the Recent South* (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 1971), 101–3. Harrell notes that evangelists such as Jack Coe and LeRoy Jenkins were much more integrated than Roberts. Yet his examples of integration were documented in the 1960s, long after Roberts had championed integration.
- <sup>28</sup> Oral Roberts, “Highlights of Healing,” *Healing Waters*, January-February 1948, 1, 7.
- <sup>29</sup> “Oral Roberts in the Nation’s Capital,” *Healing Waters*, August 1953, 6–7, 10, reports that the Washington DC crusade was integrated because of “Washington’s policy of integration” and “many colored people attended and responded alongside whites at the altar.”
- <sup>30</sup> C. M. Ward, “I Attended the Oral Roberts Healing Campaign,” *Abundant Life*, December 1949, 5.
- <sup>31</sup> J. M. MacLean, “Oral Roberts Campaign in Tacoma,” *Pentecostal Holiness Advocate*, 15 September 1949, 4.
- <sup>32</sup> Oral Roberts, “Oral Roberts Meets with Bishops,” Holy Spirit Research Center, Oral Roberts University, Tulsa, OK, audio cassette.
- <sup>33</sup> Oral Roberts, “Hate, Love and the Christian,” *Abundant Life*, March 1968, 11.
- <sup>34</sup> Roberts, “Oral Roberts Meets with Bishops.” Roberts does not indicate which crusade in the south, but he held meetings in Mobile, Alabama, and Raleigh, North Carolina, in 1953.
- <sup>35</sup> “Oral Roberts Answers Your Questions,” *Healing Waters*, December 1956, 11.
- <sup>36</sup> *Abundant Life*, April 1959, 10.

- <sup>37</sup> *Tulsa Tribune*, 4 April 1967, reproduced in *ORU Outreach*, Spring 1967, 32, [https://digitalshowcase.oru.edu/oru\\_outreach/3/](https://digitalshowcase.oru.edu/oru_outreach/3/) (1 January 2019).
- <sup>38</sup> Oral Roberts, “God Doesn’t Look at Skin Color,” ORU Chapel Transcript, 26 September 1989, <https://digitalshowcase.oru.edu/chapel/8/> (28 December 2018).
- <sup>39</sup> Mark Yudof and Rachel F Moran, “Now More Than Ever, We Need Diversity in Admissions,” *Chronicle of Higher Education* 64:38 (20 July 2018), 15.
- <sup>40</sup> The University of Tulsa (TU) officially integrated in 1958, seven years before ORU was established. The first black person admitted to the Law School in 1958 was Kenneth Dones, the son-in-law of Edwin Goodwin, publisher of the *Oklahoma Eagle* whose son Robert was a member of the first class of graduates at ORU. See Steve Gerkin, *Hidden History of Tulsa* (Charleston, SC: History Press, 2014). However, the campus is still dealing with the racial history that TU shared with the city. In 2016, the Law School was named after John Rogers, the controversial attorney who had ties to the Klu Klux Klan and was part of the unjust Tulsa Benevolent Association, which was instituted after the Race Riot in 1921.
- <sup>41</sup> Roberts, “Oral Roberts Meets with Bishops.”
- <sup>42</sup> Roberts, “Oral Roberts Meets with Bishops.”
- <sup>43</sup> Roberts, “Oral Roberts Meets with Bishops.”
- <sup>44</sup> For a full list of ORU faculty see *ORU Outreach* (Fall 1965), Oral Roberts University, Holy Spirit Research Center, [https://digitalshowcase.oru.edu/oru\\_outreach/10/](https://digitalshowcase.oru.edu/oru_outreach/10/)
- <sup>45</sup> Oral Roberts and Larry Lea, “Going Beyond Reconciliation to Restitution,” *Kingdom Lifeline*, January/February 1987, 9.
- <sup>46</sup> *Abundant Life*, October 1974, 8. The housing included apartments for students, graduate students, and a retirement home called University Village. Taulbert managed the University Village apartments during the mid-1970s.
- <sup>47</sup> For an account of the tumultuous summer of 1967 see Malcolm McLaughlin, *The Long, Hot Summer of 1967: Urban Rebellion in America* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).
- <sup>48</sup> “Before the Storm: The Story of the Detroit Crusade,” *Abundant Life*, November 1967, 26–28. Roberts likely thought that the Watts riot of 1965 was probably the worst, in that thirty-four were killed in Watts and twenty-six died in Newark. Ironically, what Roberts did not know was his own home town was the site of the

greatest race riot in history, with casualties five times that of Newark and Watts combined.

<sup>49</sup> “Before the Storm: The Story of the Detroit Crusade,” 26.

<sup>50</sup> Roberts, “Drumbeat of Racial Bias,” 2–3.

<sup>51</sup> Roberts, “Drumbeat of Racial Bias,” 3.

<sup>52</sup> Roberts, “Hate, Love and the Christian,” 11, comments, “Jesus calls to each man by name and says, ‘Why are you persecuting me?’ And we reply, ‘*We’re not persecuting You, Lord. We just don’t accept these black people.*’ Then you don’t accept Jesus!”

<sup>53</sup> Roberts, “Hate, Love and the Christian,” 12.

<sup>54</sup> Oral Roberts, “A Message to Pastors.”

<sup>55</sup> Oral Roberts, “In the Touch of Compassion There’s Healing . . . For a Nation, a Family, and You,” *Abundant Life*, February 1969, 19.

<sup>56</sup> Oral Roberts, “In the Touch of Compassion There’s Healing,” 19.

<sup>57</sup> Jim E. Hunter, Jr., “‘Where My Voice is Heard Small’: The Development of Oral Roberts’ Television Ministry,” *Spiritus: ORU Journal of Theology* 3:2 (Fall 2018), 239–57, <https://digitalshowcase.oru.edu/spiritus/vol3/iss2/9/>.

<sup>58</sup> Oral Roberts, “Yes, We’re Back on Television,” *Abundant Life*, March 1969, 1–3. Jackson was featured on the cover of this issue of *Abundant Life* and the February issue. Other African Americans featured on the show include Clara Ward and the Ward Sisters, Della Reese, Johnny Mathis, Lou Rawls, and Natalie Cole.

<sup>59</sup> Jonathan L. Walton, *Watch This!: The Ethics and Aesthetics of Black Televangelism* (New York: NYU Press, 2009), 25–26, recognizes that prior to Roberts, Jim Bakker, and TBN, black religious figures were not featured in religious television. Televangelism worked to bring prominent pastors and evangelists to the forefront, which led to the expansion of black religious televangelism in the 1990s and led to the popularity of Reverend Ike, T. D. Jakes, and Creflow Dollar.

<sup>60</sup> Roberts, “Yes, We’re Back on Television,” 1, notes that racial tensions in America were one of the primary reasons for his return to primetime television.

<sup>61</sup> Oral Roberts, “Reaching Out to Souls in a Ministry of Total Evangelism,” *Abundant Life*, August 1966, 20, discusses his invitation to meet with President John F. Kennedy. David E. Harrell, *Oral Roberts: An American Life* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 309, mistakenly places this meeting in 1963, just 252 | *Spiritus* Vol 4, No 2

before the assassination. Roberts was also invited to give the invocation at the Democratic National Convention in 1972.

<sup>62</sup> “Commencement 1978,” Transcript, 30 April 1978, Oral Roberts University, Holy Spirit Research Center, Oral Roberts University Vertical File; “Equity, Ethics and Excellence,” *Abundant Life*, July-August 1978, 24. Roberts considered Jackson to be a “dear, dear friend” and was requested by black students to be a speaker on campus.

<sup>63</sup> Roberts, “Oral Roberts Meets with Bishops.” Roberts claims in this talk that Jackson declared “ORU is the best place for blacks in America” from the microphone, but transcripts of the graduation do not confirm this.

<sup>64</sup> “Equity, Ethics and Excellence,” 23; “Commencement 1978,” 11.

<sup>65</sup> “Commencement 1978,” 10. Jackson further comments, “If you can demonstrate equity in numbers, ethics and values, and excellence in quality, you will be the vanguard organization to lead America's schools out of the mire of mediocrity and out of its calm, passive, institutional offerings” (14).

<sup>66</sup> Walton, *Watch This!*, 85, calls Roberts’ appeal to black audiences “good business” and notes that other evangelical televangelists followed suit.

<sup>67</sup> “Racial Brotherhood Chapel – 10-15-1969,” Transcript, 15 October 1969, Oral Roberts University, Holy Spirit Research Center, Oral Roberts University Vertical File. The chapel featured local Jewish civil rights leader, Maynard Ungerman, and panel guests of “ordinary” women who experienced prejudice in Tulsa. The guests included Finney Att, a Jewish woman, Betty Hopkins, a Catholic woman, Katherine Copeland, a black woman, and Jeanie Sinclair, a white woman.

<sup>68</sup> “Racial Brotherhood Chapel 10-15-1969,” 13. One student even shared disappointment that after a white woman who had dated a black man broke up with him, no white men would date her. There are also accounts in interviews by the author of black students during this era that some members of the ORU administration were not as open to Roberts’ racial inclusion and less than enthusiastic about interracial dating. The general sentiment was that while Roberts was inclusive, his administration was often slower to adopt his vision.

<sup>69</sup> “Black Heritage Week 2-17-1971,” Transcript, 17 February 1971, Oral Roberts University, <https://digitalshowcase.oru.edu/chapel/14/> (3 February 2019).

<sup>70</sup> James Evers, “Racism is Wrong,” Chapel Transcript, 27 September 1972, <https://digitalshowcase.oru.edu/chapel/9/> (25 December 2018).

<sup>71</sup> ORU Chapel Transcript, 18 February 1972, 5, <https://digitalshowcase.oru.edu/chapel/1/> (31 December 2018).

<sup>72</sup> ORU Chapel Transcript, 18 February 1972, 6, <https://digitalshowcase.oru.edu/chapel/1/> (31 December 2018).

<sup>73</sup> The tradition of a festival celebrating diverse cultures continues today although now emphasizes the global cultures on the ORU campus rather than focusing solely on black culture.

<sup>74</sup> “Black Awareness Chapel,” ORU Chapel Transcript, 16 February 1972, <https://digitalshowcase.oru.edu/chapel/6/> (28 December 2018).

<sup>75</sup> Curiously, despite Ross’ unrestrained discussion of racial issues, he never mentioned Tulsa’s Race Massacre and history in his responses.

<sup>76</sup> Hirsch, *Riot and Remembrance*, 187

<sup>77</sup> “Black Awareness Chapel,” 11. Ross declares, “I hope that if that day comes when blacks can be considered equal, I hope I’m dead, because the whole meaning of my life, I’d be out of a job, no, the whole meaning of my life would be over . . . I’m rather vindictive, because I think the only way blacks can become equal is to control the power mechanisms of this country . . . I’m going to get even with some of them, really, and I would think that I wouldn’t mind giving you all a turn at slavery.”

<sup>78</sup> “Black Awareness Chapel,” 25.

<sup>79</sup> Oral Roberts, “Washington High School Announcement,” 10 April 1973, Oral Roberts University, Holy Spirit Research Center, [https://digitalshowcase.oru.edu/or\\_collection/15/](https://digitalshowcase.oru.edu/or_collection/15/) (31 December 2018).

<sup>80</sup> Goodwin was born in Tulsa, was in the first graduating class of ORU, received a masters from Tulsa University, and a Ph.D. from University of California at Berkeley.

<sup>81</sup> Oral Roberts, “God Opened the Doors for World Action in London and Israel,” 9, 14; “Trinidad,” *Abundant Life*, April 1969, 10–11, 13.

<sup>82</sup> Robert Goodwin, “Black Heritage Chapel,” ORU Chapel Transcript, 20 February 1974, 7, <https://digitalshowcase.oru.edu/chapel/4/> (28 December 2018).

<sup>83</sup> Goodwin, “Black Heritage Chapel,” 11. Consequently, this was the same narrative that was held by many African Americans who survived the Race Riot in Tulsa. A great number believed that “Black Wall Street” was invaded, citizens were

forcibly removed and their homes were looted and burned to the ground because of the jealousy of poor whites in Tulsa. See examples of this in testimonies gathered in Jones Parrish, *Events of the Tulsa Disaster*, 24–62.

<sup>84</sup> This goal is truly remarkable considering the average percentage of non-white students as a whole for evangelical universities in 2016 was 28%. Beth McMurtrie, “Evangelical Colleges’ Diversity Problem,” *Chronicle of Higher Education* 62:21 (5 February 2016), 23–26.

<sup>85</sup> “Look Who’s Choosing ORU,” *Abundant Life*, May-June 1989, 29.

<sup>86</sup> “Look Who’s Choosing ORU,” 30.

<sup>87</sup> Roberts and Lea, “Going Beyond Reconciliation to Restitution,” 10.

<sup>88</sup> Roberts and Lea, “Going Beyond Reconciliation to Restitution,” 10.

<sup>89</sup> *Abundant Life*, April 1985, 12. Hill asserts that one of the reasons she left Thomas to come to ORU was because of the sexual harassment by the soon to be Supreme Court Justice. Thomas claimed that he was the one who recommended she come to ORU and claimed he was unaware of any inappropriate behavior on his part. Anita Miller, ed., *The Clarence Thomas—Anita Hill Hearings* (Chicago: Academy Chicago Publishers, 1994), 24–25.

<sup>90</sup> “I’m On My Way to Becoming a World Changer,” *Abundant Life*, September 1972, 16.

<sup>91</sup> “Hell and High Water,” *Reform*, May 2013, 15

<sup>92</sup> Carlton D. Pearson, “Oral Roberts’ Prophetic Word at Azusa 1996 with Carlton Pearson,” <https://youtu.be/vdXRuValkFU> (31 December 2018).

<sup>93</sup> “Hell and High Water,” 15. Pearson claims Oral said to him, “I need a black son, you are my black son.” Although, Roberts never made this specific claim.

<sup>94</sup> Walton, *Watch This!*, 84. Pearson commented, “I wanted my church to have ORU.”

<sup>95</sup> “Interview with Carlton Pearson,” *Bridgebuilder*, March/April 1987, 11–12.

<sup>96</sup> “Hell and High Water,” 16.

<sup>97</sup> Marla F. Fredrick, *Colored Television: American Religion Gone Global* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2015), 47.

<sup>98</sup> Fredrick, *Colored Television*, 36.

<sup>99</sup> Fredrick, *Colored Television*, 44.

<sup>100</sup> Fredrick, *Colored Television*, 46.

<sup>101</sup> Shayne Lee, *T. D. Jakes: America's New Preacher* (New York: New York University Press, 2005).

<sup>102</sup> "Quick Facts 2018: Enrollment at Census Date," Oral Roberts University Registrars office.

<sup>103</sup> Clarence Boyd, "Historical Account of the Multi-Cultural Committee," n.d., Office of Student Affairs, Oral Roberts University.