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Christian Langer

Tennessee State University, clanger@tnstate.edu

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Andrew P. Torrence

Andrew Pumphrey Torrence was born November 20, 1920 in Little Rock Tennessee. He died June 11, 1980 at age 59 at Tuskegee, Alabama.

Torrence began his teaching career as an agriculture teacher in Almyra, Arkansas in 1948. He then graduated from Tennessee State University. He moved to take his Master's and PhD at the University of Wisconsin. He was co-author of several books.

After graduation, he became an associate professor and department head at Tuskegee University, which was a Historically Black College and University at Tuskegee, AL. By 1967 he had become full professor and Dean of Academic Affairs.

His next move was to Tennessee State University's president from 1968 to 1974. At this time the university's name was changed from Tennessee Agricultural and Industrial College. to Tennessee State University.

He took part in the first years of the Geier lawsuit, which was aimed at eliminating segregation from the Tennessee educational system. The suit lasted 40 years, from 1968 to 2001. The suit resulted in the court ordered merger of the University of Tennessee-Nashville into Tennessee State University.

During the early years of the suit, a major problem perceived by Judge Gray was the extreme amount of segregation at both schools. At the time TSU had a black enrollment. 99.7 %. During negotiations with the judge and UT, UT lawyers suggested that TSU could not attract non-black students. Torrence declared his confidence that TSU could attain a 50/50 level of integration.

Another critique raised by the UTN side was that TSU had low academic standards, and thus whites would not find it desirable. Torrence replied with the statement that TSU had “low standards” missed the point. He said that TSU

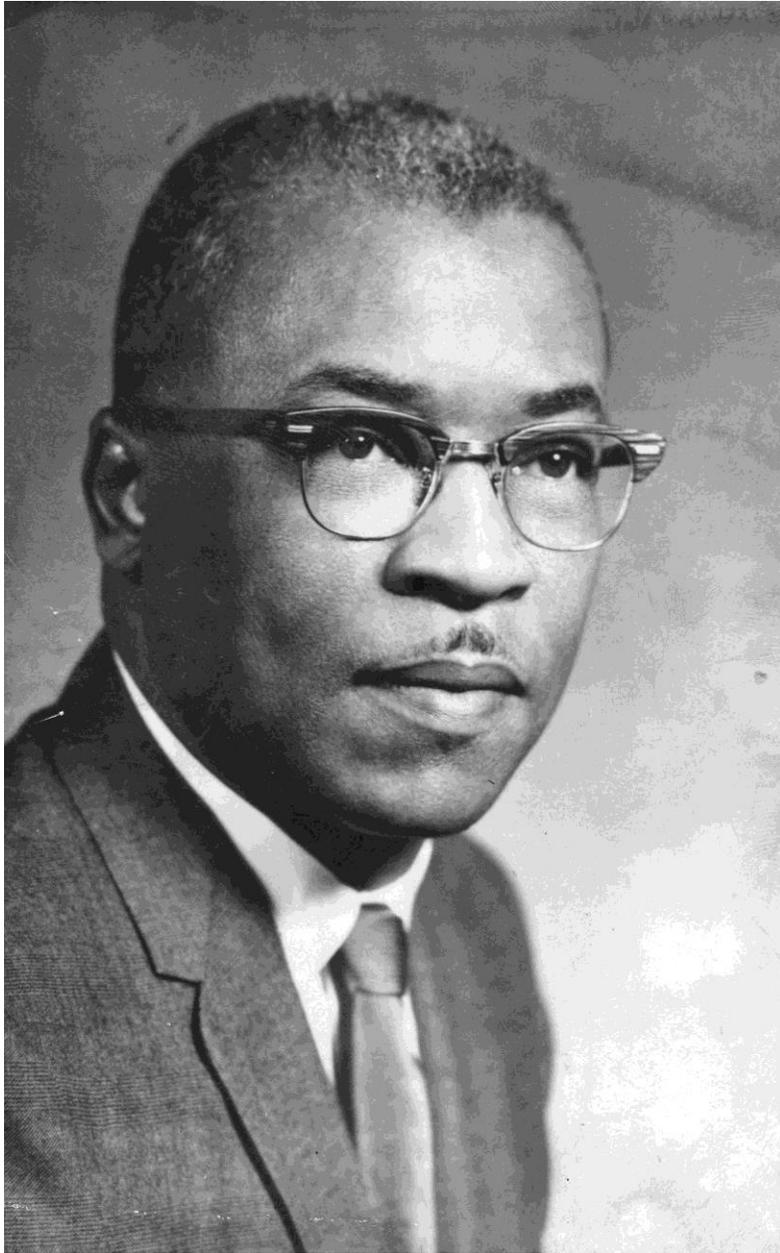
“takes the disadvantaged student, from lower income families, and, with costly extra help, brings him or her to the level of the better prepared.”

But of course, TSU’s academic problems were numerous. Racial prejudice was a factor. Another was that the state required TSU to offer graduate and teacher programs which were identical to those of the white schools close to TSU. These were UT Nashville, Austin Peay, and Middle Tennessee State University (MTSU). Further, the state did not allow TSU to create any new graduate or teaching programs. Thus, TSU was unable to respond to new interests in society and academe. The physical campus had been so starved of funds that buildings were at times dangerous to work in, and utilities like water and heating were not reliable.

This was the state of things when Torrence left TSU in 1974.

His final years were spent at Tuskegee as Provost. Death came on June 11, 1980 at age 59. He is buried in Oakwood Cemetery, Little Rock, Arkansas.

The Andrew P. Torrence Engineering Building on the TSU campus bears his name.



Additional Reading

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