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EL REWIND: Historic East Lansing Battles Over Racist Housing Discrimination ^[1]

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By:

Bill Castanier

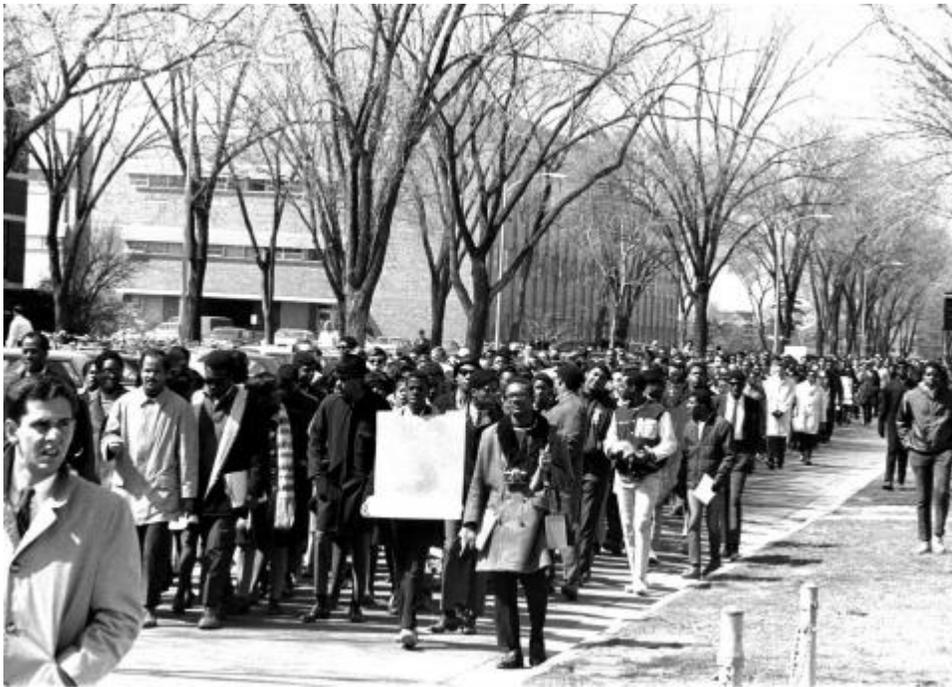


Image: A civil rights demonstration on the MSU campus, courtesy of MSU Archives

Note: A modified version of this work originally appeared under the title "A House Divided" ^[2] in the Lansing City Pulse. We are grateful to Bill Castanier, the author, and Berl Schwartz, publisher of the Lansing City Pulse ^[3], for allowing us to bring this historical research to ELi's readers as part of our East Lansing Rewind ^[4] series.

Clarence Underwood knew when he left Fayetteville, North Carolina, in 1955 with his wife Noreese and their newborn baby Jacqueline for the overnight train trip to Lansing he was cutting it close; orientation at Michigan State University started in two days and he still had to find housing.

They arrived in the early afternoon and Clarence immediately bought a Lansing State Journal,

turned to the classifieds and began calling apartments for rent in East Lansing. The answer was always the same: "We don't rent to Negroes."

Even before classes started Underwood learned his first lesson: The long arm of Jim Crow extended far beyond the Mason-Dixon Line.

Due to problems with his Army discharge, Underwood had waited too long to get into married housing and now he was desperate. He began walking the streets of Lansing looking for where blacks lived. He was thinking, "I should just get back on that train and go home."

Some four hours later, just south and west of the State Capitol, he ran into a man on Butler Street with a room to rent.

More than anything, Underwood was mad at himself; he had watched MSU play in the 1955 Rose Bowl and saw black athletes playing and assumed that things were different "Up North." He writes in his autobiography *Green Pastures*, "I had deceived myself by believing that the numerous black athletes on Michigan State's football team represented openness and acceptance in a university setting based on the character of the person rather than the skin color."

Underwood was not alone in mistakenly believing Northern cities offered salvation from oppressive racism. It became common for southern blacks to refer to these cities as "Up South."

After graduating in 1961 from MSU, Underwood, who would receive two advanced degrees from MSU, (he would become the University's Athletic Director in 1999) was hired as the first black teacher in the East Lansing School District. Teaching was one thing, but living in East Lansing was another matter.

He said when he began looking for a house to rent in East Lansing the answer was the same: "We don't rent to Negroes."

Out of the blue, a local attorney, John Brattin, called and said he had a home on 1403 Beech Street in East Lansing that he would sell to him on land contract.

Mary Jane and Cyril McGuire had a similar experience looking for housing after their home on West St. Joseph in Lansing was demolished for the construction of I-496 in the 1960s displacing hundreds of black families and virtually cutting Lansing in half. Mary Jane had come to the area in 1949 to attend MSU and met her future husband Cyril, who was a lifelong resident of Lansing and a childhood friend of Malcom X. Cyril would later become a labor leader in the United Auto Workers, rising to president of Local UAW 652.

She recalls being the first black family owning a house on Lansing's St. Joseph Street and watching white flight. While looking for a home, Mary Jane said she looked at a house in Lansing Township adjacent to East Lansing.

"I was very interested in it, but when I went back with Cyril there was suddenly an addendum that said to not rent to blacks," Mary Jane said.

Real estate covenants of this type became very common in real estate transactions in the early

twentieth century following U.S. Supreme Court Decisions, which disallowed community-wide restrictions against minorities. "Negros," Jews, and "Mongoloids" were often specifically excluded in covenants, but typically the simple catch-phrase "non-Caucasians" was used. It was thought that a covenant, enforced by the homeowner and the real estate agent, was a way of getting around the court decision. The basic concept was that a homeowner had the right to sell or not sell to whomever he or she wished.

Things had not changed much for Underwood since one of Lansing's most famous black families, the Earl Little family, had faced a similar situation in 1928 when Little, a minister and Garveyite, moved to Lansing from Milwaukee.

Little bought a home in the northwest Lansing subdivision of Westmont, but in 1929 he was ordered by the court to move from that home since it was in a white neighborhood. The court order stated, "this land shall never be rented leased sold or occupied by any other race other than those of the Caucasian race." Before the Littles could move, the house was burned to the ground, sending a message to other blacks who might think about crossing the color line.

One of the Little boys, Malcolm, who was four at the time, would spend some of his formative years in Lansing and Mason, and later would become known as Malcolm X.

Malcolm X, at one time an ardent separatist, would have vigorously disagreed with Underwood's decision to find a home in East Lansing. In his 1963 speech at MSU, Malcolm X, a nine-year member of the Nation of Islam, reiterated their belief of "neither integration or segregation but separation."

It was no coincidence that the Underwoods' first home in the all-white East Lansing neighborhood was directly across the street from Edgewood United Church and that the "guardian angel" attorney John Brattin was a member of that church. The church was then led by Pastor Truman Morrison, the founding pastor of the Edgewood. Prior to the Underwoods moving in, the black professor Edwin Brimmer—who would become the first black Governor of the Federal Reserve—had lived there.

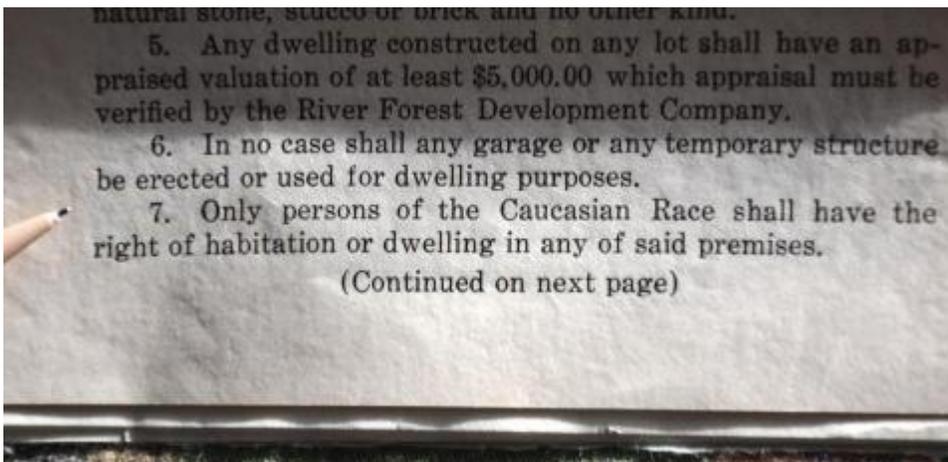
Pastor Morrison and his spouse Eleanor both had had Southern upbringings, so they were no strangers to racism, according to their daughter Melanie Morrison. The Morrisons "lived the life of social justice," said their daughter Melanie, who now lives in Okemos and has dedicated her own life and career to social justice issues. An author and a former pastor (Yale Divinity School), Melanie Morrison is the founder and the executive director of Allies for Change. She also has run an intensive anti-racism program for white people. [Image below of Truman and Eleanor Morrison, courtesy of their daughter Melanie; story continues after photo.]



Melanie said her parents were attracted to each other for their zeal for racial justice, unlikely in the 1940s south. It was a marriage made in heaven and a marriage that would help drive the 1960s open-housing debate in East Lansing. Through his church, Morrison established the East Lansing Citizens for Human Rights which asked the East Lansing City Council in June 1963 to establish a Human Relations Commission (HRC).

Formally established by East Lansing City Council in September of 1963, there were high hopes for the nine-member Human Relations Commission. Its nine members would include David Berlo, an MSU communications professor; Mary Sharp, an East Lansing attorney and commissioner for the Fair Employment Practices Commission; Robert Green, a black MSU professor; and a local psychiatrist, H.C. Chien, who was Chinese. A likely ally was East Lansing Mayor Gordon Thomas, a member of Edgewood United Church. At one of the first meetings of the HRC, City officials reported to the Commission that it had no blacks among its 174 employees; this was not an uncommon situation among similar cities.

Covenants and byzantine sales practices of realtors were not only a way of life in East Lansing, but also in nearby Okemos and in outlying Lansing locations. My home current home, built by a Lansing State Journal editor in 1929, has the covenant "no Negroes" in the title. [Photo shows the author's racist title covenant; story continues after image.]



Robert Green recalls that, after finishing his PhD at MSU, when he first began looking for housing, he was directed by realtors to live in certain areas of Lansing. That did not suit him, and

he pressed to live in the city where he would become the director of the newly established College of Urban Affairs. (He would later be named the Dean of the College of Urban Development.)

Ultimately, Green would rent a home at 221 Durand Street in East Lansing, but he recalls being approached by MSU President John Hannah with an offer to buy a home for him on the sly. Green said he refused the offer, telling Hannah, "I appreciate the offer, but are you going to buy every black man who comes to MSU a home??"

Hannah was heralded at the time (and still is) for his efforts promoting civil rights, nationally and on campus. He desegregated dormitories in 1940s; his athletic program recruited and played black quarterbacks; he recruited black professors. (Dave Dickson was the first recruited by Hannah, in 1949, and later went on to become the president of Montclair State College.) Hannah also served as chair of the U.S. Civil Rights Commission, a position he held under three presidents, beginning with President Eisenhower.

In 1964, after a series of cordial meetings, the East Lansing Human Relations Commission got down to serious work. In a January 1964 meeting, the Greater Lansing Board of Realtors presented their 13-point plan for what they thought was a pragmatic approach to open housing. It was mostly based on the right of private ownership and the right of home owners to sell to whom they wished.

The East Lansing HRC chairperson H.C. Tien was outraged. He took the plan and ripped it up at the meeting, according to reports in the Lansing State Journal and the Lansing Towne Courier. The newspapers reported that he said, "It's not worth the paper it's printed on." Tien was censured by his own Commission members, was replaced by Berlo, slid into the background and was later replaced on the Commission. It was not a good start.

The Commission ultimately crafted a proposed open housing ordinance which in a close vote they passed on May 12, 1964. In June, the East Lansing City Council accepted the report. But there it sat, with no move toward passing an anti-discrimination ordinance.

In the meantime, local campus groups—including the Committee for Student Rights (CSR), the campus NAACP and other small splinter groups—began to actively agitate for an open housing ordinance. Two leaders of these groups would soon become controversial campus "radicals": Michael Price, son of the owners of Liebermann's gift shop in downtown Lansing, would go on to become President of the MSU SDS faction; and Paul Schiff leader of the CSR would become the target of the administration and was kicked out of school for his free speech activities. Schiff would later file a federal suit and be readmitted.

Minutes from the HRC commission meetings from that era were not preserved according to East Lansing City officials.

From appearances, an open housing ordinance should have had a chance of passing before Council in 1964. East Lansing's mayor was Gordon Thomas, a well-liked and progressive politician who was also a professor of Communication at MSU. (Thousands upon thousands of students would end up taking his "Introduction to Communication" class on closed-circuit television.)

According to his grandson Marc Thomas, who himself represented East Lansing on the Ingham County Board of Commissioners from 2003-2009, Gordon Thomas supported ending discrimination in East Lansing housing, but like most small city mayors he opted for incremental changes rather than revolutionary changes.

Gordon Thomas' son David, who was Marc's father, would later write the weighty and detailed biography of President John Hannah, *Michigan State College: John Hannah and the Creation of a World University*. (Disclosure: In the 1970s I worked with Marc's mother and grandmother at the East Lansing Towne Courier, took Intro to Communication from his grandfather, and Marc was an intern in my office at the Department of Labor. I also helped edit the Hannah book section on the 1960s.)

Author David Thomas called to question both his father's style and John Hannah's role in the open housing debate and pulled no punches in reviewing and condensing the media reports of the time along with material in the John Hannah papers at the MSU Archives (which I reviewed for this article). David Thomas recounted an article in which Green said, "You could never call Hannah a racist, but there were times when I became perplexed by his unwillingness to tackle the racial problems with open housing in East Lansing."

Green went on: "John Hannah could deal with specific acts of racial discrimination, but he couldn't deal with broader policy issues."

David Thomas referred to his father, mayor Gordon Thomas, as "cautious" and said he was hoping to avoid the confrontation which faced other communities.

I found no smoking gun in the Hannah archives?no evidence to show any collusion with realtors which has been alleged?but revealingly there was also no evidence that John Hannah or Gordon Thomas or David Berlo ever talked about the open housing issue. There was also no evidence that Walter Neller, the leading realtor in the area at the time, or other realtors had conversations with Hannah about open housing. (I could find no daily appointment logs in the MSU Archives Collection.)

However, important leaders in the open housing debate have said Neller attempted to strong-arm them into dropping the open housing issue, and in 1963, Green sued an employee of Neller for housing discrimination. Green recalls Walter Neller visiting him at his house on Gunson Street. The visit was not friendly as Green described it at an August event last summer at Edgewood Community Center in East Lansing.

Green remembered, "He was very aggressive and wanted to know why I didn't want to live with my own kind." Green said he escorted Neller out because he thought there might be a physical confrontation.

Melanie Morrison remembers her father, the pastor of Edgewood United Church, telling the family that pressure was being put on him to back off. After Dr. Andrew Brimmer, an MSU professor, became the first black to occupy the Beech Street house in 1958, Melanie Morrison said her father received a phone call from realtor Walter Neller. Her father later wrote about what Neller said to him: "Morrison, you are no longer an asset to this community. You are destroying property values by renting to black residents."

Morrison wrote back to Neller, "A different tide was moving," and Neller replied, "Not in my day."

Later, Neller called again claiming that, "You, John Hannah, and John Brattin are three people we could do without in this community."

Dr. Mary Green, daughter of Mary Green, a lawyer who served both on the first Human Rights Commission and later was elected to the East Lansing City Council, said she remembers her father, a doctor in Lansing, telling her mother that he was approached after surgery and asked, "Can't you get your wife in line?" Mary also remembers picking up the phone several times and hearing heavy breathing on the other end. That was the most polite phone calls the family would have; others were framed with racial epithets.

While the open-housing debate was heating up in East Lansing, as head of the U.S. Civil Rights Commission John Hannah was holding hearings on similar civil rights issues in the Southern states. Following a two-week investigation of race relations in Mississippi in February of 1965, Hannah was quoted in an Associated Press story saying, "Many of Mississippi's Negro citizens continue to face extremely serious and unwarranted denials in voting and law enforcement." Hannah could've just as easily pointed his finger at East Lansing, where the open-housing debate, which had been smoldering all of 1964, would soon take to the streets.

Events on campus in 1965, including a rare appearance of Martin Luther King on February 11, 1965—where he spoke to more than 4,000 in the auditorium with hundreds standing outside—helped spur on local open housing advocates. King visited MSU for a fundraiser for the STEP Program, designed by the Rev. John Duley and Robert Green to send MSU students and faculty to Rust College in Mississippi to help the college maintain its accreditation. On the day of King's visit, Hannah was out of town holding a Civil Rights Commission hearing in Jackson, Mississippi.

[Image: John Duley and Robert Green in a recent photo by the author; story continues after photo.]



While on campus, Duley said Dr. King was noticeably exhausted. He said it was clear that what was about to happen in Selma, Alabama, weighed heavily on his mind. Later in the month, on February 21, 1965, Malcolm X would die under a stream of gunfire in New York City. Campus was somber.

As events in Selma got underway, Green, Truman and Duley responded to King's call for a showing of solidarity and went to Selma. They spent a week in Selma following the first Selma march on March 7, 1965, commonly referred to as "bloody Sunday," and before the third march on Thursday, March 25. Upon arriving in Selma, Morrison wrote they learned a white Boston minister James Reeb was mortally wounded.

Upon his return, Morrison would write a front-page article on the experience for the East Lansing Towne Courier. Morrison, clearly inspired by the visit, wrote that "freedom and brotherhood are in the air. Nothing is as powerful as an idea whose time has come." However, Morrison, who spent the first 20 years of his life in Birmingham, Alabama, understood what the marchers were facing.

"I have to confess to the real sense of fear that I experienced upon the night of arrival (the night of the beatings). In the first march, in which we walked toward the State Troopers? I experienced a real sense of trepidation," he wrote.

On March 25, 1965, more than 25,000 people marched into Selma, and later that day, Detroit's Viola Liuzzo was killed while driving protesters between Montgomery and Selma. As the result of the march, the Voting Rights Act of 1965 was signed into law on August 6.

The East Lansing open housing contingent seemed to draw power from the Selma marches. (Coincidentally, a one-time MSU student Noel Stookey as a member of Peter Paul and Mary would welcome the marchers to Montgomery with "If I Had a Hammer.")

"The one thing that people realized," said Green, who would become the Education Director for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and close friend of Martin Luther King, was that

?There were Selmas everywhere,? he said referring to the struggle in East Lansing.

Missives, meetings and mini-demonstrations dominated the campus and East Lansing in April of 1965, and archival records show Hannah and his league of Vice Presidents understood that they might have another Berkeley ?free speech? movement on their hands if everything wasn't handled carefully.

However, the demonstrations caught the eye of national civil rights organizers and on Thursday, May 13, 1965, James Farmer, the director of the Congress of Racial Equality and a major civil rights leader, made a special visit to campus for a civil rights teach-in. He blasted city officials, but especially the Lansing Board of Realtors, for wanting to ?keep the city lily white.?

As reported in the State News, Farmer told the 250 students and faculty members at the teach-in that the Lansing Board of Realtors ?are the staunchest supporters of segregation.?

He also told their group that their actions might include a form of civil disobedience.

According to newspaper accounts, Farmer responded to claims that outside agitators were inflaming the situation. He said, ?An agitator?you know what that is. It?s a thing that bangs around inside a washing machine and gets rid of all the dirt.?

On Monday, May 17, 1965, the open housing activists dramatically showed their resolve after marching from Beaumont Tower to the newly restored East Lansing City Hall in the 200 block of Abbott Road. There, approximately seventy of the activists went into Council meeting chambers, listened to some of the discussion, and then did a carefully orchestrated sit-in, echoing the Selma marchers? non-violent approach.

When it became obvious they were there for the duration, East Lansing Police, Lansing Police, and members of the State Police politely carried the demonstrators outside. Women were placed on stretchers and carried out. At that point, demonstrators walked back to campus, two-by-two, singing ?We shall overcome.?

The State News, East Lansing Towne Courier, and the Lansing State Journal, although supportive of open housing were not supportive of the student demonstrations and sit-ins. Yet the student demonstrators sent a clear message that if nothing was done they would be back. But another sit-in and rally set for the next week?s council was cancelled.

On Monday, May 24, 1965, 75 students staged a sit-in on the steps of Cowles House, the on-campus home of President Hannah. Although Hannah refused to sign a petition signed by 119 faculty members supporting open housing, he did make a strong statement in favor of open housing.

The next day, the students met with Mayor Gordon Thomas at Beaumont Tower at about 11 p.m., and on the spot decided to march to City Hall. This time, however, the student protest culminated with scores of students sitting down on Abbott Road in front of the City Hall. At 12:45 a.m., Mayor Thomas read them a city ordinance on trespassing and told the students that, if they did not leave, they would be arrested. One student left, and then 40 State police and 25 East Lansing police moved in, dragging the 36 male demonstrators and carrying 23 women on

stretchers to the police station where they were arraigned.

Since police "wagons" could not accommodate all the arrestees, MSU busses provided transport to the Ingham County Jail, which further infuriated activist leaders.

John Hannah had walked over from Cowles House to watch to the demonstration along with several hundred other onlookers. When a State News reporter asked him his opinion of the sit in, Hannah responded, "I think the city has been patient. At this point I'd say they have taken more than I would've. I'm going home to bed."

The next morning, the demonstrators were bussed to East Lansing and arraigned. Three plead guilty and paid \$10 fines; the remaining 56 stood mute and paid bonds ranging from \$25-\$100. The students and eight local residents were represented by Stuart Dunnings, Jr., a black Lansing attorney and father of the current prosecuting attorney. He had been retained during the early morning by Rev. John Duley, Rev. Robert Gardner and MSU professor and activist Dr. Harris F. (Frank) Beeman, an East Lansing resident. Bail for the students was paid through donations from professors and community leaders.

The State News, in a tepid editorial of support, did not agree with the demonstrators' tactics, writing, "If they would stop to think, those who were arrested might realize they are doing more harm than good."

One student demonstrator originally from Ionia, Richard Houghton, who would later become an Episcopal priest, recalled, "I am intensely grateful I was involved and I came away with a different understanding of liturgy acting out an inner belief."

He said that quite a few of those arrested were members of the Canterbury Club, an Episcopal student group which was energized when two young women, one black and one white, were denied a housing rental off campus.

"Harry Voit, one Martin Luther King's staff, spoke to organizers of the marches about the mechanics of the demonstrations in the South and it was sobering," Houghton recalled.

One line Voit said about the Southern demonstrations has stuck with Houghton all this time. He said, "Eventually one of us gets killed."

At the time of the demonstrations, Houghton was in graduate school at MSU and had just returned from Capetown, South Africa, where he had witnessed Apartheid first hand. He said that after his arrest, he ended up in a jail cell with Michael Price and they penned a letter along the lines of Martin Luther King's "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" that ended up in the State News. He also was one of those who watched Martin Luther King speak on campus in 1965, and he would join MSU's STEP program and go south for the summer and fall of 1965.

Houghton recalls the criminal case against the demonstrators dragging out for years, with the charges ultimately being dropped because of the many delays in trying the demonstrators.

According to John Duley, he and a number of other faculty members were called by John Hannah to a meeting to review the situation. Duley said that when he arrived there was a stack of

file folders on the table holding the student demonstrators' records. He said as faculty members were questioned by Hannah, they went through the records discovering that many of the students were National Merit Scholars or in the Honors College. Arrest records show that the vast majority of students demonstrating were from out-of-state. At the time, MSU boasted more Merit Scholars than any university in the country.

In John Hannah's records in the MSU Archives, there are many letters in favor of a tough stance against the demonstrators, many advocating kicking the students out. After the first sit-in, an East Lansing home owner wrote, "Why aren't these sit-in students at East Lansing City Hall expelled? We own our home and have no intention to have beatnik civil rights group dictate as to how we shall dispose of our property."

Hannah wrote back, "The university is not directly involved in this matter."

In addition to criminal charges, two women were suspended for curfew violations, or "hours" as the practice was called then. Ultimately, they were reinstated.

"The Movement," as it began to be called by the media, appeared to have picked up steam in the spring of 1965, but then the Memorial Day weekend intervened, and soon after students began studying for finals. The student-led demonstrations were over for the term and by the time students returned in the fall of 1965, activism had shifted to the anti-war and anti-draft movements led mostly by groups like Students for a Democratic Society (SDS).

The students who had been charged for demonstrating were left in a legal limbo all through the rest of 1965 and well into 1966 as legal challenges were presented. At some point, it was agreed that two persons would be tried representing the group and all the others would agree to the outcome. One demonstrator was found guilty of trespassing. Dunnings appealed that case to the Michigan Court of Appeals on the grounds that the student's freedom of speech had been violated. The decision was upheld. After that, everyone seemed to lose interest and it became increasingly difficult to even locate those who were arrested.

The East Lansing Human Rights Commission would continue to debate an Open Housing ordinance for three more years. In April of 1968, the federal Fair Housing Act was passed and became the law of the land. In what may be considered a symbolic act, the East Lansing City Council finally passed an ordinance guaranteeing open housing on April 8, 1968. It came just four days after the death of Martin Luther King.

The open housing demonstration was the first major student uprising faced by John Hannah (although it was eclipsed with a riot on campus in June of 1966, which started as the result of a panty raid and food fight.) In April 1966, Ramparts magazine also would publish a scathing article on MSU's secret role in Vietnam; about the same time local Democratic officials would write the President asking that Hannah be removed from the Civil Rights Commission for his inaction on the Open Housing Ordinance.

The letter to the Commission said that Hannah's silence was "morally indefensible." The State News in an editorial quoted the letter from a presidential assistant saying that Hannah's involvement (in open housing) "could well compromise his position as chairman" resulting in embarrassment to the administration.

In a response to an editorial in the State News decrying Hannah's non-action in the East Lansing open housing issue, Warren Huff, chair of the MSU Board of Trustees, responded with an op-ed piece where he invoked the "towney" rule of not wanting to interfere in local issues.

MSU History Professor David Bailey, writing about MSU and John Hannah's role in Civil Rights movement for the MSU Alumni Magazine in 2014, said Hannah "preferred to work by changing the system or fixing abuses on a case by case basis."

Others like Maxie Jackson, who before retirement was an Assistant Dean of Graduate Education at MSU, posits that "John Hannah was a politician and he may have recognized that the legislature, which at that time consisted of representatives from mostly rural Michigan, may not have reacted kindly to him becoming embroiled or giving his sanction to open housing debate."

One letter to the State News in defense of Hannah came from MSU Vice President John Fuzak, who wrote "that Hannah avoided getting involved in the debate because he was Chairman of the U.S. Civil Rights Commission which was sent around the United States to hold hearings on many of the same issues that was plaguing East Lansing."

MSU geography professor Joseph T. Darden, who is a national expert of racial segregation and neighborhood inequality and author of several books on the issues, recently summarized many people's feelings about Hannah and open housing: "It was in his own back yard and he failed to stand up."

By 1967 and through the rest of the decade, student demonstrations would grow in number and proportion. Hannah would resign in 1969 to take a federal position at USAID. MSU's Acting President and economics professor Walter Adams would join other demonstrators in 1970, including Robert Green, in a massive and peaceful anti-war demonstration down Michigan Avenue.

In 1970, just five years after the open-housing debate erupted, Clifton Wharton would be named President of Michigan State University, becoming the first black president of a major university.

Today, about seven percent of East Lansing residents are black, and the city is recognized as one of the most progressive cities for diversity in the United States. This past fall and winter, Congressman John Lewis and one of the organizers of the historic Selma Marches visited the MSU campus bringing his message of hope and the plea to "organize, organize, organize." Campus activism had come full circle, and aging activists joined with school children from Lansing's El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz Academy wearing bright red t-shirts with Malcolm X's image joined in a standing ovation for Lewis.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Bill Castanier is a writer for Lansing City Pulse where parts of this article first appeared. He is a graduate of Michigan State University and was in high school in Essexville

Michigan when MSU's open housing debate took place. He extends his gratitude to the many individuals and institutions who helped with research and talked to him openly for this article, but especially to the staff at the MSU Archives and the Capital Area District Library Local History Collection for their efforts. The MSU Special Collections is also to be praised for their efforts in digitizing the Michigan State News from the 1960s. Without that resource, this article would have been nearly impossible to write.

Castanier writes about his interest in open housing: *"I was a junior at a small Catholic High School run by Dominican nuns. We didn't know it at the time but our nuns, from the Grand Rapids order, were committed to social justice (one alum is Sister Ardeth Platte who became a noted peace activist landing herself in federal prison). In the winter of 1965 the nuns organized an interracial sort of teach-in held at our high school with students from an all-black Catholic inner-city Saginaw school. I remember the first meeting especially because this type of thing just wasn't done.*

"At the first meeting we sat, mostly segregated, dressed in our Sunday best, in the library. After introductions everyone seemed tentative about who would say something when a kid from my high school stood up and asked "Why do you people (with emphasis on you people) drive such big cars?" The silence was palpable when one of the kids from Saginaw politely answered, "Because you won't let us buy houses."

"After that one tense moment, we settled in and some of the barriers began to fall. In late spring at an all-city chorale for Catholic high schools our class was asked to sit next to the black high school students because we "knew them." I guess that meant we weren't afraid of them.

"And at some point during the performance, with total spontaneity, but what seemed to be like on cue, both schools began to goof, singing not "We Shall Overcome" but "3-6-9, the monkey chewed tobacco on the street car line." The strict nuns called a quick end to that bit of civil disobedience, but for a short time we had come together."

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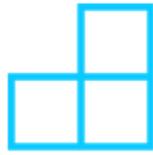
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