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Blackboard Unions

The AFT and the NEA, 1900–1980

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CHAPTER TEN /

Civil Rights: The Contest for Leadership

Collective bargaining and civil rights dominated the minds of both NEA and AFT leaders in the period from 1954 to 1968. As collective bargaining threatened to eclipse the hegemony of the NEA, the issue of civil rights became a weapon in its battle for the sympathies of urban teachers. Although it is difficult, therefore, to separate the histories of the two sets of issues, the issues embodied in both civil rights and collective bargaining deserve separate attention. The union and the association approached these questions with varying degrees of urgency.

In the early years of civil rights activism the AFT took the lead, demonstrating far more resolve with a greater willingness to take risks to achieve integrationist goals than the NEA. But by the close of the sixties it would appear that the NEA had philosophically come to terms with the militancy of the black-power movement and expressed willingness to translate community demands into professional concerns. The AFT, on the other hand, held its strength in urban schools where racial conflict had become explosive and where union ideals met with ugly realities in the streets and in the classroom. The different responses of the union and the association to the civil rights movement reflected the difference in style and structure of the two organizations.

The AFT and Civil Rights

The AFT participation in the cause of civil rights was long and intense. In 1920 the AFT formally asked Congress to support a bill that would give Howard University $1,580,000, thus establishing a long relationship with Howard faculty that led to black leadership on the union's Executive Council in the thirties. The contest between socialists and Communists in the AFT in the thirties led to a series of incidents in which the AFT asserted in no uncertain terms that it would not tolerate various forms of discrimination. Still the union had its own segregated locals, a point that became a hot issue at the 1947 AFT convention. Layle Lane, who continued to head the union's Human Rights Committee, pressed for a program of both integrating the union and working closely with the NAACP on the issue of school integration. By the 1950 convention the issue of segregated union locals was raised again, and in 1951 the AFT Executive Council voted not to charter new locals that were segregated; the following year the successful integration of the Washington, D.C., locals was announced, at the same time that the delegates voted to enter an amicus curiae brief in the case of *Briggs v. Elliott*, a forerunner of the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. By the time Layle Lane was ready to retire in 1952 the AFT was committed to a fairly extensive program on civil rights.[1]

Prepared to participate in the historic *Brown* decision, the union had no qualms about its role in the push for civil rights. The old socialists like Layle Lane had taken their liberal mandate seriously; they meant to show that the union could be just as reliable (and, they thought, more responsible) in fostering black education as the Communist community organizers had been. The *American Teacher* prominently and regularly reported the progress of the Human Rights Committee, and when the young Dick Parrish replaced Layle Lane it was not hard to imagine that the push for integrated locals would intensify under his leadership. Parrish, a New York City schoolteacher, organized the AFT's summer school in Prince Edward County, where school officials defied the Supreme Court ruling and closed public schools, thus denying black children access to public education. Later, Parrish organized Mississippi Freedom schools which recruited young, well-educated northerners to teach black children in the South. A member of the Socialist party, Parrish became an AFT vice-president.[2]

The AFT's largest southern local, the Atlanta Federation of Teachers, was important to the AFT in a number of ways. The national AFT's first president had been Mary Barker, the Atlanta Local's president who led the union through its darkest hours in the late twenties and early thirties. Second, the Atlanta local was a dual organization of union and association members; it was one of the few locals in the AFT that could claim a majority of teachers in its school district. However, just as the Atlanta schools were strictly segregated, so was the union. The issue in the AFT was whether the local could integrate before the school system without jeopardizing teachers' jobs. Parrish focused on the Atlanta local, and in 1955 proposed an ultimatum that the local either integrate or leave the AFT.[3]

1. Layle Lane Collection, Box 4, the AFT brief on *Brown v. Board of Education;* see also files on civil rights under Series 1, Box 6, AFT Collection.

2. *AFT Proceedings*, 1952, AFT Collection, Series 13.

3. Michael John Schultz, *The NEA and the Black Teacher: The Integration of a Professional*

The problems of local integration, whether for the AFT or for the NEA, should not be minimized in the history of integration. Members of southern locals often faced dismissal from their positions if they belonged to integrated groups or were even thought to sympathize with integration. Pressure for conformity on this issue intensified in the post-*Brown* years as segregationist forces pressed for solidarity behind their states' rights position. In Georgia, for example, a 1955 law required all teachers to swear loyalty to both the state and federal constitutions; the legislature also provided that a teacher could be dismissed for supporting the *Brown* decision or for belonging to the NAACP. In Louisiana teachers were specifically forbidden to belong to integrated organizations, including the NEA, although the state eventually backed down on the association issue. Black teachers suffered job layoffs when the courts forced desegregation, and white teachers were threatened with similarly dire consequences should they defy their state's segregation practices. Southern teachers in both the association and the union strongly resisted attempts to press them into integration in their respective organizations before their schools integrated.[4]

In the AFT, however, Dick Parrish was able to gain support of a resolution for immediate integration in 1955. In part the 1955 AFL-CIO merger was responsible for Parrish's success, for in the year of labor's big merger the UAW's Walter Reuther had made it clear that the CIO would press for union integration as he reentered the official house of labor. President Carl Megel and other AFT leaders supported Reuther's integrationist stance. Unable to comply with the action of the national, the Atlanta Federation of Teachers faced expulsion in 1956. As one teacher argued: "We are just speaking about our Supreme Court decision. I will say this, as I have said previously, that if we do not take a step forward, we are going to have to jump on the bandwagon, because, as it is, they are trying to integrate the schools; and as you know, the NAACP and other organizations are moving in that direction. Frankly speaking, as a teacher I would like to see teachers take a lead in this thing rather than follow."[5]

Megel called upon segregated locals to report their progress on integration, but only five of twenty-five locals answered his call. Parrish as chair of

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Organization (Coral Gables, Fla., 1970); Ronald Lloyd Dewing, "Teachers' Organizations and Desegregation, 1954–64" (Ph.D diss., Ball State University, 1967), pp. 63–91. For a general history of desegregation, see Don Shoemaker, *With All Deliberate Speed: Segregation and Desegregation in Southern Schools* (New York, 1957).

4. For more on desegregation, see A. Lee Coleman, "Desegregation of the Public Schools in Kentucky: The Second Year after the Supreme Court Decision," *Journal of Negro Education*, 25 (Summer 1956), pp. 254–61; Albert P. Marshall, "Racial Integration in Education in Missouri," *Journal of Negro Education*, 25 (Summer 1956), pp. 289–98; W. E. Solomon, "The Problem of Desegregation in South Carolina," *Journal of Negro Education*, 25 (Summer 1956), pp. 321–23; Hurley H. Doddy, "Desegregation and the Employment of Negro Teachers," *Journal of Negro Education*, 24 (Fall 1955), pp. 405–8. See also Shoemaker, *With All Deliberate Speed*, p. 29.

5. *AFT Proceedings*, 1955, "Report of the Human Rights Committee," and discussion, p. 852, AFT Collection, Series 13, Box 33/2.

AFT's Committee on Democratic Human Relations submitted a resolution on suspending charters of locals not in compliance with the union's stand on integration by 1 April 1956. In response Megel appointed a committee to visit Atlanta, New Orleans, and Chattanooga, the oldest of the segregated locals. He also sent out a questionnaire to all locals in states where segregation laws applied. In the questionnaire both white and black locals reported the state of the integration issue in their school districts. One white local responded, "Our union hasn't taken a stand on it. If it should there won't be any local to worry about. The NAACP will probably take care of it." A black local in Louisiana said it had not sent invitations to white teachers because "customs of this area are such that racial groups do not meet together." In Atlanta, both the tactics of intimidation and the attitudes of white teachers made integration appear hopeless, whereas in New Orleans the black and white locals worked closely together but were unwilling to step ahead of the school district on integration. Meanwhile in the Atlanta local, AFT stalwarts were unable to pass a resolution to change the segregationist position of the local in the constitution. The AFT Executive Council subsequently voted fourteen to two to recommend expulsion of the Atlanta local. After a long debate the AFT convention voted to insist that locals conform with national policy and integrate. Each local then had to vote on whether to stay in the AFT. On 10 December 1956 the Atlanta local of 1,855 members, finding it "impossible to comply and cooperate with said convention action, mandates, directives and procedures relative to the practice of local's jurisdiction on the basis of race and color," voted to leave the AFT. On 21 December 1956 Carl Megel called a press conference announcing the Atlanta local's failure to comply with the AFT constitution and making public his plans to form an integrated local.[6]

In Louisiana a state law threatened dismissal of public employees who advocated integration or belonged to organizations that were integrated. New Orleans teachers in both black and white unions sent a request to the national for exemption from the convention rule. New York's Rebecca Simonson visited Chattanooga and New Orleans locals, the Executive Council remained firmly behind the integrationist order. The Chattanooga local claimed that it was under the same pressures as the Atlanta local and even requested that the AFT leaders not come to visit the local because a visit would only further polarize a situation that needed to be solved locally.

In 1957 the union further demanded that locals institute civil rights committees to deal with problems of desegregation in their schools, and a national integration committee declared the Chattanooga charter void for noncompliance with the integration order. Black locals that had stayed in good standing through the crisis were allowed to stay in the AFT and reform

6. Dewing, "Teachers' Organizations," pp. 91–92; desegregation files, AFT Collection, Series 5, Secretary-Treasurer's Papers, Box 10–11.

as integrated locals. By the beginning of 1958 the AFT claimed it had lost close to seven thousand members or 14 percent of its membership because of its stand on integration. In actuality the AFT had lost four thousand members because of the desegregation order, but Megel estimated that the entire process, including the integration of some locals as in the Washington area, had led to a significant decline in membership.[7]

NEA organizers have argued that the AFT exaggerated its claims of membership losses and took the dramatic action to attract new members, especially in the South. But the AFT gained nothing by the move. Observers have noted that most rural black administrators belonged to the American Association of Colored Teachers—later known as the American Teachers' Association (ATA)—which held teaching to be a status position in the community. The AFT's militant stand on integration would hardly appeal to this status-oriented group, nor would union affiliation appeal to black teachers anxious to achieve status in the community. The most compelling reason for the AFT action on the issue is the same old reason that Jennie McKeon used in the Chicago Teachers' Federation: it was "the right thing to do." No matter how crassly the AFT would later use its reputation in the field of civil rights, there was no rational organizational advantage that the AFT could have foreseen from this action.[8]

NEA Structure and Style

William Carr's inauguration as executive director of the NEA in 1952 had all the trappings of a college president's inaugural. Reporters pressed the newly installed executive director for his vision of education, his views on the problem of communism in the schools, and his hopes for federal funds for education. Carr brought to office the air of the old NEA, when Nicholas Murray Butler and George D. Strayer had graced the association with their wit and keen intelligence. A student of William Cubberly at Stanford University, Carr had caught the eye of James Crabtree, the NEA's first executive director, after Carr as a young graduate student published his first book on the problems of education. Carr came into the NEA as a protege of Crabtree, but he quickly became William Givens's prime assistant, making his first appearance on the question of school finance before the U.S. Congress in 1935. Allan West, an NEA staff member, remarked that Carr had a great flair for formality and brought with him the airs of the professoriate. He never

7. Megel, Press Conference, December 1957, desegregation files, AFT Collection, Secretary-Treasurer's Papers, Box 10–11.

8. Megel's actions went further than mere pronouncement in favor of desegregation: in 1956 he wrote to John L. Lewis of the United Mine Workers, saying, "I . . . suggest you investigate whether [obstructionists to desegregation] were UMW members." Megel to Lewis, 7 September 1956, AFT Collection, Series 1, Box 6.

failed to address his fellow doctoral colleagues formally as "Dr." and expected as much from others. His leadership of the NEA was shared unequally with the NEA president, whose one-year term of office limited the effectiveness of the elective office. Furthermore, Carr was paid much more than the president, whose equivalent teacher's salary was little over twenty thousand dollars, while Carr's was close to fifty thousand.

Several structural changes came with Carr's inauguration. First he worked with a group he called the cabinet, a small coterie of executive secretaries in various NEA departments with whom Carr consulted. Carr said he regretted the fact that members of the staff began to look upon the cabinet as an upper-level management group, but the fact was that the NEA grew more stratified as Carr fought to preserve the élan of the old professoriate in the NEA.[9]

The second change came with a unification movement and the creation of "dual" affiliates. Although Givens was largely responsible for pressing for members of various state associations to affiliate formally with the NEA national, it was Carr who paid particular attention to organizational growth. Not all local and professional associations were formally affiliated with the NEA, and Carr moved to remedy this situation. Part of this arrangement, however, included the creation of dual affiliates, that is, statewide organizations that were segregated into white and black associations. In 1952 seventeen states were represented by these dual affiliates at the national conventions.[10]

At the same moment that the NEA moved toward further segregation, it grew publicly more vocal in its opposition to racism. But it was only with difficulty that the organization could maintain a consistent position. In 1943 the convention had decided that it would no longer meet in segregated cities, but in 1950 the meeting in St. Louis seemed to break that arrangement. For several years the convention wrangled over the issue until 1953, when the NEA had its first integrated convention in the South in Miami. After that, all NEA conventions were held in cities with no Jim Crow laws. During the course of the war the NEA National Commission on the Defense of Democracy had called on teachers to address issues of racial tolerance in the classroom, but the NEA never moved to support the several legal challenges to school segregation that had begun in the courts.[11]

In 1954, when the Supreme Court decided that the "separate but equal" doctrine no longer applied to America's classrooms, the NEA did not have a defined national position on the decision. Executive Secretary Carr advised

9. Allen M. West, *The NEA: The Power Base for Education* (New York, 1980), pp. 65–93; William Carr, *The Education of William Carr* (Washington, D.C., 1978), p. 274.

10. Carr, *Education*, pp. 353–57.

11. *Defense Bulletin*, October 1945, p. 13; Thelma D. Perry, *History of the American Teachers Association* (Washington, D.C., 1975). The NEA actually met in segregated St. Louis in 1950, but agreed that meetings would be held where "dignity and rights of black members would not be denigrated or diminished." Perry, *History of the American Teachers Association*, p. 275.

the first convention held after the decision that it would be wrong to support or oppose the Supreme Court's ruling until the Court made clear its intentions. The convention passed a resolution that reaffirmed a belief in integration but did not take sides on the Court's decision:

> The principle embodied in the recent decision of the Supreme Court of the United States in regard to racial segregation is reflected in the long established provisions of the Platform of the National Education Association. The Association recognizes that integration of all groups in our public schools is more than an idea. It is a process which affects every state and territory in our nation. The Association urges that all citizens approach this matter of integration in our public schools with the spirit of fair play and good will which has always been the outstanding characteristic of the American people. It is the conviction of the Association that all problems of integration in our schools are capable of solution by citizens of intelligence, saneness, and reasonableness working together in the interests of national unity for the common good of all.[12]

By 1955 the Court had carefully spelled out the provisions of the decision; however, the NEA leadership was still unwilling to move beyond its original statement. Carr again counseled for more time, and the convention accepted his reluctance to act. In 1956 convention delegates were handed a fait accompli when the very large Department of Classroom Teachers, which met before the convention, endorsed the same 1954 resolution. This action closed off the possibility for more discussion on the convention floor. The following year it was difficult for teachers interested in supporting the *Brown* decision to oppose the sense of accomplishment, nostalgia, and unity at the 1957 meeting. Carr had just overseen the completion of the new NEA headquarters, a monumental building dedicated to housing the growing bureaucracy that he so happily served.[13]

Politics in the schools partially shook the NEA out of its complacency. In the three years following the *Brown* decision, teachers had become pawns in the battle over school integration while segregationists rode roughshod over teacher tenure laws. Hundreds of black teachers were fired under a bewildering range of circumstances. In border states where some schools were integrated, black teachers often lost their jobs while white teachers with less experience were kept. Others were fired simply for opposing segregation. In those same years the NEA officially investigated only one case regarding racial discrimination, which charged that some teachers in Clay, Kentucky, had refused to meet with integrated classes. The National Commission on the

12. *NEA Proceedings*, 1954, pp. 124–25.

13. Schultz, *NEA and the Black Teacher*, pp. 71–87; Richard Lugar, *Simple Justice: The History of Brown v. Board of Education and Black Americans; Struggle for Equality* (New York, 1976).

Defense of Democracy found the accusations to be false. Still, times were changing. Congress passed a civil rights bill in 1957, the first since Reconstruction. President Eisenhower sent federal troops to Little Rock, Arkansas, the same year to enforce a desegregation order. It was only with difficulty that the NEA continued to stay the course for gradualism.[14]

In 1958 the NEA was called upon to do more than simply endorse desegregation in the abstract. Integrationists confidently predicted that the association would support the *Brown* decision. Yet, after a pro-*Brown* resolution reached the floor of the NEA Representative Assembly in 1958, hundreds of southern delegates poured out of the room, preventing a quorum. Angry integrationists in the NEA vowed to return the following year and win the issue. Meanwhile, Carr had his hands full with the cases of Little Rock teachers who had participated in the integrationist movement and were being fired for their participation. Quietly, the NEA set up a defense fund to help the teachers defend their tenured positions. Rather than make this part of the normal process of tenure protection, and thereby place the teachers' case under the DuShane fund, Carr preferred to see this as a special case and allocated special collections for the teachers' defense. Later, when the NEA embraced integration, the practice was reversed and the association loudly broadcast the effectiveness of the DuShane fund in bringing teachers legal protection. The point in 1958 was to avoid arousing the segregationist sentiments of white southern members who had bolted the assembly the year before.[15]

To avoid confrontation at the 1959 convention the Resolutions Committee proposed a three-point proposal that provided for the support of the original mild resolution, the support of teachers as citizens (their freedom to discuss political issues and the protection of tenure rights), and the support of public education. For two hours the delegates hotly debated the leadership's proposals. A rival resolution called for recognition of the Supreme Court decision and support for its implementation. In a dramatic speech from Little Rock teachers, members were advised to take this more moderate road, and after further debate the assembly agreed to support the status quo. No support for the *Brown* decision emerged in 1959.[16]

The Sixties

In the early sixties the NEA came under increasing pressure to take a stronger stand on desegregation. Although the Representative Assembly had

14. Schultz, *NEA and the Black Teacher*, pp. 72, 77, 81; Myron Lieberman, "Segregation's Challenge to the NEA," *School and Society*, 81 (28 May 1955), pp. 167–68; Doddy, "Desegregation," pp. 406–7.

15. Schultz, *NEA and the Black Teacher*, pp. 87–102; *NEA Proceedings*, 1958, pp. 182–201.

16. Schultz, *Nea and the Black Teacher*, pp. 95–103; *NEA Proceedings*, 1959, p. 225.

failed to vote for a study of integration, the Executive Board ordered such a study in 1960 over the objections of William Carr. Sit-ins in Greensboro, North Carolina, and the promise of civil rights activism at the federal level held out by John F. Kennedy's nomination for president failed to inspire the 1960 NEA convention to come out in support of the *Brown* decision.

The AFT added its criticism in this regard. In 1959 AFT delegates lambasted the NEA for "abdicating its claim to leadership and guidance of teachers in the nation" and reaffirmed the union's own commitment to the struggle for desegregation. Again in 1960 Edwin Irwin, an AFT vice-president, challenged the NEA to compare its civil rights record with the AFT's and pointedly remarked that segregated locals had been ousted from the AFT in 1956. Carr and NEA president William W. Eshelman countered that their dual affiliates allowed teachers to belong to the NEA where segregation was strictly enforced. The continuance of segregated organizations in the NEA, the AFT said, was a "shameful neglect of the principles of democracy." AFT members supported sit-ins and continued to encourage militancy in the cause of desegregation. At the same moment the AFT announced that it would challenge the NEA in a collective bargaining campaign in New York City, where desegregation had been an active and ongoing issue for some time. It was this latter threat that Carr took most seriously of all.[17]

Finally in 1961 the NEA mildly endorsed the Supreme Court decision on desegregation. It was a momentous decision. Southern delegates who for years had threatened to walk out of the convention had little to say, and for the first time major leaders in the Representative Assembly stood against the old gradualism arguments. Arguments for the morality of the decision mixed with arguments about the image of the NEA. Once the principle of support for the Supreme Court decision was adopted, the association had to turn its attention to the internal issue of segregated associations. This was the issue that Carr feared would lead to secession from the organization, but after 1961 confrontation over the issue appeared inevitable.[18]

Because so many state associations were segregated, black delegates had participated in the NEA only as individuals since the twenties, whereas white teachers participated in the Representative Assembly as delegates recognized by their state associations. By recognizing dual affiliates in seventeen states in 1952, the NEA broadened black participation but only along segregationist lines. At the same time the organization was pledged to form a stronger alliance with the American Association of Colored Teachers, or the ATA, with which the NEA had operated in a loosely coordinated fashion since 1926. By the early sixties, the ATA was receiving overtures from the

17. Schultz, *NEA and the Black Teacher*, pp. 107–10; Carr, *Education*: "I never thought that the issue which occupied a substantial part of my time between 1960 and 1967 was whether the initials of the major national teachers' organization would be NEA or AFT," p. 272.

18. Schultz, *NEA and the Black Teacher*, pp. 117–29.

AFT for merger, thus propelling the NEA into its own merger discussions. The ATA, however, was quite adamant that it would join in the NEA only if segregated associations ended. There were eleven such associations remaining in the early sixties when William Carr advocated a program of gradualism and voluntarism in achieving integration. Patience with Carr's proposals was clearly running thin.[19]

The challenge to Carr's protection of the dual affiliates came at the 1964 convention, where a rump caucus, the National Committee of Educators for Human Rights (NCEHR), came into meetings of the Department of Classroom Teachers (DCTA) prepared to set an agenda for the larger NEA meeting that followed. The DCTA set a firm deadline for the elimination of membership restrictions in 1965 and the integration of state and local associations in 1966. It also made Elizabeth Koontz its president elect. She was the first African-American classroom teacher honored with such a high position. Carr faced the challenge of the NCEHR by again warning against an integration-or-else resolution. The actual resolution on integration, which passed within hours of Congress's historic Civil Rights Bill of 1964, did not provide sanctions against associations that failed to comply with the integration order and furthermore left to the Executive Board the enforcement of the deadline provisions.[20]

In 1965 Carr had little to report on the progress of voluntary integration. The merger of the ATA and NEA, he announced, was slated for 1966; however, his report on voluntary action listed endless meetings and the end of membership restrictions in key segregationist associations, but merger of these white associations with black associations was still far off. Meanwhile, ATA leaders faced questions in their own ranks about the merger. Many members worried that the white leaders of integrated statewide associations would ignore the special problems that black educators continually faced in southern schools. ATA president R. J. Martin had to assure his constituents that black executive secretaries and other black organizational leaders would assume leadership positions in the new state associations.[21] The 1966 convention set merger deadlines within one year, after which the Executive Board could determine whether the affiliates had made sufficient progress in the direction of merger. As delegates sang the "Battle Hymn of the Republic," the ATA came into the NEA.

Two other changes took place that promised the end of segregation in the NEA. First, Carr resigned from office in 1966 and was replaced by Sam

19. Perry, *History of the American Teachers Association*, p. 28. At the time of the NEA-ATA merger the NEA had two black professional employees, and none at the managerial or executive level out of over five hundred employees. West, *NEA: The Power Base*, pp. 101–7.

20. Schultz, *NEA and the Black Teacher*, pp. 151–57; Dewing, "Teachers' Organizations," pp. 62–83.

21. West, *NEA: The Power Base*, pp. 120–25; Schultz, *NEA and the Black Teacher*, pp. 125–32; Perry, *History of the American Teachers Association*, p. 374; Dewing, "Teachers' Organizations," p. 32.

Lambert, a staff member far more committed to desegregation. Carr's focus on the AFT rivalry and his concern over membership growth had often led him to neglect civil rights issues in his addresses to the association. He had, however, implemented policy once his advice was overridden. His retirement opened opportunities for the now powerful integrationist group within the NEA. In the same year Mrs. Irvamae Applegate became president of the association. Applegate continued to work for merger of dual affiliates all through the late sixties and early seventies. In 1974 the NEA still had a stubborn segregated Louisiana association, but all other locals and state associations had merged.[22]

The NEA's response to the civil rights movement from 1952 to 1967 can only be described as slow and unenthusiastic. Carr, however, cannot be dismissed as an anomaly, an anti-integrationist crank. It was the survival of the organization that most obsessed Carr, and any threat to the organization's strength he regarded as destructive. He had a tendency to see the history of the organization as a series of crises that had been overcome, from the beginning of Crabtree's reign with the challenge of Margaret Haley to the end of his own with civil rights. These crises were not issues of principles in Carr's thinking, but challenges to organizational survival.

When the NEA nominated Elizabeth Koontz to be its first black president in 1967, it not only moved away from Carr's vision of the organization but it also hoped to assert that the change was genuine and deep. Koontz was a special education teacher from North Carolina who became head of the Department of Classroom Teachers and then of the NEA itself. She became so prominent that President Nixon later appointed her head of the Women's Bureau in the Department of Labor. The president of the NEA, however, still served a one-year term, while the executive directors, of which Carr was the third, seemed to serve for a lifetime. It would take more substantial changes in the NEA before the Koontz election could be seen as more than tokenism.[23]

The AFT in the Sixties

No longer hampered by the issue of internal cleansing, the AFT turned its evangelical mood outward to the civil rights movement. In 1960 the union went on record in support of sit-in demonstrations and, more important, cast its eye on the situation in Prince Edward County in Virginia, where officials had closed public schools in 1959 to avoid desegregation. First the union sent its desegregation message to the governor of Virginia in 1961, but in

22. West, *NEA: The Power Base*, pp. 120–25; *NEA Reporter*, 28 February 1969; AFT Collection, Series 1, Box 21.

23. Schultz, *NEA and the Black Teacher*, pp. 191–202; *NEA Reporter*, 29 January 1969. Koontz became "the symbolic spokesman in government for all working women."

1962 teachers began to protest the fact that seventeen hundred black children were being denied an education. The NEA hesitated to get involved in the Prince Edward County dispute in 1961, but the vocal outrage by most educational groups soon forced it to join the AFT in protest. In the summer of 1963 both the AFT and the NEA moved to take action. The union sent a peace corps of teachers to teach six hundred students in Prince Edward County while the association sent two thousand dollars to the Prince Edward County Free School Association. The different response of the organizations is indicative of their differences in style. The NEA could give money, the AFT could send activists. Teachers in the union pressed the AFT for resolutions supporting the Freedom Riders in the South. In the summer of 1963 the union put its full weight behind the 26 August march on Washington. Providing buses for many groups, the union lent its resources to the organizers of the march, helping to make it a success.[24]

By the early sixties, however, the work of the AFT in civil rights had come under the influence of organizational rivalry. In 1961 the Virginia Education Association suspended the Arlington Education Association when it voted to integrate its membership. In response Carl Megel denounced the all-white Virginia Education Association for its "prejudicial and un-American resolution" and invited the Arlington local to cross over into the union. The national NEA promised an investigation and eventually decided that the Arlington association had a right to its own membership standards, thus mildly chastening the statewide body. In 1963 Virginia's Fairfax County Association one of the largest NEA local affiliates, followed the Arlington route and forced the statewide association closer to desegregation. It would seem that the NEA appeared cornered by the activities of the AFT in Prince Edward County and its intervention in the Arlington affair. In 1965 the NEA was contacted by member Fred Reese in Selma, Alabama, when plans for the famous civil rights march led to Reese's dismissal. The NEA responded quickly to the media-drawing event, and instead of keeping its support of fired teachers in integration cases quiet as it had done in the case of Little Rock teachers in 1958, the association was now willing to have its help publicized. Indeed, by the midsixties the separate voluntary fund for helping teachers in the desegregation wars had been merged with the DuShane fund and became the association's public relations arm in the costly legal battles facing teacher integrationists. In contrast the union had no such fund of resources, but it had the support of major civil rights groups in urban areas, especially the NAACP, the Urban League, and Congress of Racial Equality (CORE). The more activist approach of the AFT was not only cheaper but it was more in keeping with the style and activities of the union. The civil rights movement used all the tactics and organizing skills of the trade union

24. AFT Collection, Series 1, Box 5, Prince Edward County Files; Schultz, *NEA and the Black Teacher*, pp. 135, 157.

movement, and the AFT felt quite at home in its style of activism. All of these activities were decidedly nonviolent, they were part of the integrationism of the early civil rights movement, and they focused on desegregation in the South. The real difficulties in desegregation, however, were yet to be solved in large cities where the civil rights movement would mature into the black power movement.