

Transcript for Podcast

Intolerance at UF & the Silencing of Others: Episode one

These are your hosts Donovan Carter, Krystin Anderson, and Sophia De La Cruz and on behalf of the Samuel Proctor Oral History Program, or SPOHP, we would like to welcome you back to our podcast, the SPOHP-cast!, and to the first episode of our new series called *drumroll* “Challenging Racism at UF”! This is the first of several episodes that will examine how the University of Florida has challenged racism. The goal of this podcast series is to bring awareness to UF’s History and shine a light on the legacy of exclusion and racism on and around UF campus. The series will focus on select events and focus on leaders at the forefront of efforts to combat racism, address exclusionary practices, and create an equitable environment for all.

The “Challenging Racism at UF” series will provide an understanding of the culture of whiteness and the lack of support that minorities dealt with. For this first episode, three events will be discussed that remain hidden by the institution and the city of Gainesville. We will begin with 1917 and the shooting of Anthony Goins by J.K. Fuller. Following this, we will discuss the hatred of the Ku Klux Klan and the kidnapping and mutilation of Catholic priest Father John Connelly, and lastly, the Florida vs Boston College Football Game, where star running-back Lou Montgomery was forcefully benched. The common thread between these events is that no perpetrator ever faced repercussions by law enforcement or UF administration. To understand the culture of exclusion at UF, one must go back and study the foundations of the institution and the core policies that made it inherently racist.

Before diving into these 3 events, it is helpful to put UF’s physical establishment and political foundations into context. On July 2 of 1862, the United States’ Morrill Land-Grant College Act enacted the U.S.’ sale of land both legally ceded by and illegally seized from Native Americans. These areas of land were called “land grants.” The act made it possible for states to establish public colleges funded by the development or sale of those federal land grants, if sold the proceeds would go to fund higher education or land itself to be used for development. Over 10 million acres provided by these grants were expropriated from tribal lands of Native communities, furthering settler colonial expansion. The sale of 90,000 acres from 120 tribes across 9 states funded the creation of many colleges like The Florida Agricultural College in Lakeland in 1884, one of UF’s primary predecessors.

By June 5th of 1905, UF signed the Buckman Act which reorganized public higher education in the state. The goal of Buckman’s bill was threefold: it intended to 1) condense the number of state funded institutions of higher learning, 2) place the consolidated institutions under the authority of the governor-appointed Board of Control, and 3) create gender-segregated schools for white students. Through this, the University of Florida inherited and maintained systemic racial inequality in education, politics, and the economy that was designed to keep Floridians of color in a position as second-class citizens. This inequality was enforced by a degree of anti-

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Black violence in northern Florida, particularly Alachua County, that stood out even by the gruesome standards of the rest of the South, with Florida having the highest per-capita lynching rate in the nation.

The first event we will discuss is the UF vs. Boston game in the late 1930s. I don't know about you all, but when I think of the University of Florida, I immediately think of the Florida Gators. *woo! Go gators!* Football definitely has a pretty big impact on campus life and culture here on campus, and in this story, we'll be taking a glimpse into what this culture looked like in the mid 20th century.

According to Fransisco Bernard, a student writer with the Boston College Gavel, Joanne Montgomery, the daughter of Lou Montgomery, lives in Los Angeles. On her desk she keeps a plaque that Boston College gifted to her as an honor to her father. In the 1939 and 1940 football seasons, star running back Lou Montgomery of Boston College represented a low point in the history of college football. A Jim Crow clause in southern schools caused Montgomery, who was Black and arguably the best football player at his high school, to be benched a total of six times, including two bowl games and three games taking place in Boston. The spectacular running back helped lead BC to a 9-2 season in 1939 and an undefeated season in 1940, yet when it was time to play against certain schools in the South, Montgomery would have to sit on the bench. One of the six schools who refused to play against Boston College if they started Montgomery, or any Black player for that matter, was-- you guessed it-- the University of Florida. *go gators?* On October 12, 1939 at Fenway Park in Boston, MA, in front of a crowd of over 20,000 ppl, the University of Florida Gators played against the Boston College Eagles. UF managed to win the game 7-0, but keep in mind that Boston College was not able to play one of its best players. Talk about sportsmanship.

This is just one example of the legacy of exclusion and racism that existed here at the University of Florida in the mid 20th century. Intolerance and hatred permeated this University as it was steeping in white supremacy and the preservation of the Old south. This event was not reported in the NY Times, Boston Globe, Gainesville Sun or any major white newspapers. One would have to take a look through the pages of a Black newspaper to find reporting of this event.

Finally, in 1940 students in the north began to take a stand against this kind of exclusion. Students from NYU took to the streets to protest the benching of Black athletes. Students threatened to boycott the games if Black players were not allowed to play. The case of Lou Montgomery is not a unique one or an isolated event, many schools in the south had Jim Crow clauses and would not play against Black players. Unfortunately, the University of Florida was one of those schools on the wrong side of history.

Gator football isn't the only UF institution with a history of racial bias, nor is it the first. Montgomery's benching only scratches the surface of the actions taken by the university that they'd prefer to have hushed.

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Years after the Buckman act, UF was still feeling its impacts. The University remained segregated across racial and gendered lines, and was still at the whims of Tallahassee. This meant that UF would receive the sons of wealthy families who had some serious political clout. Now, it's hard to imagine how much this privilege could cover up, but 20th century Florida was a particularly violent place. This is most evident in the killing of Anthony Goins, a young Black boy who worked with his mother collecting laundry. On April 17, 1917, the ten-year-old Goins was shot and killed by J.K Fuller, son of a prominent Orlando family, after knocking on his door to collect laundry-- for doing his job. The story goes like this: Goins had knocked on Fuller's door, and Fuller's roommate responded that he was asleep, and to come back later. After 10 or 20 minutes, Goins came back and was greeted instead by a gunshot, allegedly intended to frighten young Anthony. Instead of a warning shot, Fuller's cruel prank hit young Anthony's head, "just above his ear" a wound he died from hours later.

Now, at this point in time, it was reported that many students had firearms and were carrying them in their rooms on campus. Then president, A. A. Murphree was under serious pressure to keep the situation under control from then FL governor Sidney J. Catts, who did not want to upset his powerful Orlando allies. The Fuller family, who contacted governor Catts, blamed the school for not restricting handguns effectively. Governor Catts requested he do his own investigation, and that the underclassman J.K Fuller was not reprimanded or prosecuted. In a letter written to president Murphree, Catts warned that causing "any trouble" with the Fuller family would lead to the "Board of Control will also have something to say about what you do about the matter... the less you agitate... and the more careful you are in regard to discipline in your University it seems to me the better it will be for you."

This threat was serious, because if you remember, the Buckman Act placed the governor's agents, the Board of Control, as overseers of the University. Murphree didn't want the Board to retaliate against him, and wrote to state representatives calling the shooting, "an unfortunate affair", "unavoidable" and an "impulsive moment". President Murphree was likely confident that Florida courts would not be too brutal towards a prominent white youth shooting and killing a Black boy, and Fuller remained mostly unpunished, apart from expulsion. All this goes to show that elites, no matter what century, will have a certain priority when it comes to what gets done on campus, and that the administration is well aware of this privilege. Murphree's letter expresses this as well with the quote "I hope that this matter will cause you no embarrassment when any legislation affecting our institutions is under consideration."

Murphree would show up in yet another story from this era. Gov. Catts and president Murphree were working together to cover up a later issue.

Two groups of people come to mind for the average American when we think of white robes and crosses: The Catholic church, or the Ku Klux Klan. These two organizations had a violent clash in Gainesville in the 1920's. The Klan, while not a powerful state-ruling organization in Florida like it was in some other states, had some influential chapters throughout

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the state. Though the founding of the Gainesville chapter is a secret, the Klan had a public parade down University avenue in 1923 with over 100 hooded and robed klansmen. Keep that year in mind! At the same time as the Klan was growing in Florida, anti-catholic sentiments were spreading across the country. Poor public opinion of Catholicism and catholic people had gone from a northern phenomenon in the early 1900s to a national string of hatred and prejudice in the 1910s and 20s. In 1916, Florida's governor Sidney J. Catts-- the very same man who wanted to cover-up Anthony Goins' killing-- was known for exploiting widespread fear of Catholicism, as a failed minister himself. A young Jacksonville-born bishop's chancellor in St. Augustine wrote an article entitled "The Present Position of Catholics in Florida " which ran in the June 1917, issue of The Catholic Mind, a national Catholic periodical. This author's name was John Conoley. Conoley's highly sarcastic article included obvious volleys at Gov. Catts, as well as a condemnation of the treatment of catholics by Protestants, many of whom supported the KKK and were members themselves. Conoley got to avoid klan backlash in this instance, because the next year he was called to serve as a chaplain in World War I. On his return as a veteran in 1919, he asked to be assigned to St. Patrick's in Gainesville to establish a catholic ministry for the students of the University of Florida. Major Conoley himself was a UF alumni who graduated the year of the transition from Florida Agricultural and Mechanical College in Lake City to UF in Gainesville, FL. (buckman ties) Major Conoley quickly became loved and known through campus and Gainesville and he built a great relationship and rapport with university President Murphree. With Murphree's approval, and the generous donation of Mary Crane, Conoley spearheaded the building and fundraising of Crane Hall, a catholic student center and dormitory which also served as a retreat center for nuns during the summer. Conoley became the pastor of Crane Hall, which was located on the site of the present St. Augustine Catholic Church and Student Center (1738 West University Avenue). As students moved in fall of 1923, Father Conoley was growing more known and loved on campus, and as a talented actor, singer, and storyteller he was the organizing director of the student drama club, the Masqueraders, the forerunner to the Florida Players which are still active today! But at this same time, incidents began to become common which showed the growing public distrust of catholics, ranging from parents un-enrolling their children due to catholic interests at UF and nasty letters being written to Conoley and Murphree. On his 39th birthday Sep 12, 1923, father Conoley gave a speech at the luncheon for the Kiwanis Club of which he was a charter member for the local chapter, in which he urged the businessmen and members to give students jobs so they could afford to support themselves in school. The Gainesville Daily Sun warmly reported the speech, and shared it in a 2-page editorial entitled "Eleven Minutes of Fact" where they praised the speech and reported on importance for quote "town and gown cooperation". The local Klan, who were right then in the middle of a campaign against anything disloyal to American values, distributed leaflets to homes and restaurants throughout town accusing Conoley of trying to convert people to catholicism and subvert the faith of protestant students. The Alachua Klan No.46 would accuse Father Conoley of using Crane Hall to seduce the students into Roman Catholicism and spread rumors and allegations of Conoley's homosexual seduction. The klan leaflet was picked

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up by newspapers, and the story of Father Conoley got blown out of proportion in newspapers until President Murphree had to address the 4 main rumors: 1. “A Catholic priest dominates the president,” 2. The priest controls the drama club, 3. the priest was proselytizing boys to the Catholic faith, and 4. courses in the Catholic religion were required to earn a degree from the University of Florida. Public conflict began to rise, and letters and articles about Conoley, Murphree and Catholics at UF broke out. Though Conoley faced harsh action from the university, had been removed from the Masqueraders, and exiled from campus, the Klan hadn’t had enough. The conflict ended in February 1924, only a year after the Klan’s parade of proud membership, with the kidnapping and mutilation of Father Conoley by three Klansmen including two important city officials, who were also a part of the most socially prominent families in the Alachua community: Mayor George Seldon Waldo and his father-in-law, Police Chief Lewis Washington Fennell. Father Conoley lying beaten, severely injured, and castrated on the steps of the Palatka Catholic church. Immediately after being released from the hospital, Father Conoley left Gainesville and moved to Maine, where he would be a priest until he retired and eventually died (add the year he died). The Archbishop Curley in Gainesville decided the matter must be “hushed up” and never supported Conoley. There was no police investigation and Mayor Waldo and Chief Fennell were never charged— and UF stayed silent about the attack.

So coming out of the 1920s UF did not have a great history of addressing racial activity and still doesn't address these issues today. Our hope for this project is to bring awareness to historical events and have people listen to the stories that affect the university where they attend today.

The sources we used are as follows:

For the Boston vs UF portion: ESPN.com, Florida Gators website, and the Lou Montgomery Legacy website

For the Anthony Goins portion: Special collections at UF library -

For the Father Conoley portion: Stephen R. Prescott’s publication in the Florida Historical Quarterly **WHITE ROBES AND CROSSES: FATHER JOHN CONOLEY, THE KU KLUX KLAN, AND THE UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA**

Special thanks to: Montray Love for writing portion of this podcast, and SPOHP staff Deborah Hendrix and Adolfo Romero for all of their help

Please keep on the lookout for the next edition in our challenging racism series. You can find more from the Sam Proctor Oral History Program on Facebook, at our website oral.history.ufl.edu, on our Instagram @spohp, our YouTube SPOHP111 AND on campus at Pugh Hall! Come see us anytime.

It is our hope that this podcast series will help amplify the often-ignored stories of minority communities at UF, in Florida, and across the nation. If you have any suggestions or comments, please feel free to utilize the email or social media given in the show notes to connect with us!