
Covering the years from 1947 to the aftermath of the Supreme Court’s Brown vs. Board of Education decision, Anderson details the bitter struggle among Catholic New Orleanians over a basic question: Should the Crescent City’s main Catholic institutions remain racially segregated?

Anderson shows how this struggle unfolded on various fronts, ranging from debates over scripture and papal encyclicals to conflicts within key local Catholic institutions such as Loyola University. He brings the key figures in this drama to life. We see Fr. Joseph Fichter campaigning to integrate Loyola and other local Catholic institutions. We see Archbishop Joseph Francis Rummel gradually embracing a clear opposition to segregation. We see Catholic laypeople like Emile Wagner defying Rummel and courting excommunication. We see Norman Francis (now president of Xavier University) and other young men applying to become the first black students at Loyola’s law school.

Anderson’s history ends in 1956, with the struggle over segregation still unresolved. His account shows, however, how that postwar decade helped New Orleans Catholics clarify issues, draw battle lines, and prepare for the big struggles still ahead.

*Vanderbilt University Press, 2005. Anderson is an assistant professor of history at St. Louis University and a Jesuit priest of the New Orleans Province.

High school students were encouraged to take part in SERNICO’S annual Interracial Sunday gathering by participating in a poster contest. Dorothy MacCandless of Mt. Carmel Academy won the contest in 1952.
SPECIAL COLLECTIONS

To advance the cause of interracialism, the Southeastern Regional Interracial Commission (SERINCO) members organized intercollegiate basketball games in the winter of 1952-1953 between member institutions. Xavier men played the men of Loyola, while Xavier women played a team comprised of Ursuline and Dominican students. The first integrated NCAA basketball game was played at Loyola University in December of 1954.

Officers of the southeastern region of the National Federation of Catholic College Students (NFCCS), the parent organization of SERINCO. (Left to Right) Claire Brechtel (Ursuline College), Anna May Kingsmill (St. Mary’s Dominican College), Daniel Quinn (Loyola University), Peter Duffy (Loyola University) c. 1948-1949. Daniel Quinn was the first chairperson of SERINCO. (Photo courtesy of Claire Brechtel.)
Interracial Sunday

Opposition to the Interracial Commission was evident by the defacing of a poster announcing the 1st Interracial Sunday gathering in 1949, Archbishop Rummel’s approval notwithstanding.

Benjamin Johnson (left) and Philip Ogilvie (right), both members of the Commission on Human Rights (CHR), were the main speakers at the 3rd annual Interracial Sunday gathering in 1951. Ben Johnson, along with Norman Francis, integrated Loyola University’s school of law in 1952.

At the 6th annual Interracial Sunday gathering held in March 1954, one panel discussed the legal aspects of racial segregation. (Left to right) Ernest “Dutch” Morial, who would serve as the first black mayor of New Orleans from 1978 to 1986; A.P. Tureaud, attorney for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) who successfully brought suit against Louisiana State University to desegregate in the 1950s; Janet Riley, the first woman on the faculty at Loyola university of the South; and attorney John P. Nelson, who sued to desegregate Tulane University in the mid-1960s.
THE CHURCH SPEAKS OUT

In a process that began in 1952 and culminated in 1954, the provincial of the New Orleans Province of the Society of Jesus produced a province policy letter regarding interracial relations. This letter was necessary to quell the openly hostile arguments taking place among Jesuits at Loyola University concerning race relations, which was the result of the college student’s interracial activities taking place on the campus.

Norman Francis of Xavier University (left) and Thomas Tierney of Loyola University (right) confer with SERINCO faculty moderator and chaplain Joseph Fichter (center). Norman Francis, along with Benjamin Johnson, would desegregate Loyola’s school of law in the fall of 1952. In 1968 Francis was appointed to the president of Xavier University; in 2006, he is still in office.

Rummel’s letter: In 1956 Archbishop Rummel issued a pastoral letter on racial segregation to combat the growing defiance by the Catholic laity to interracial justice. He based his statement, in part, on the New Orleans Province letter.

Rummel’s letter:

To the clergy, parishioners and laity, Archdiocese of New Orleans

Dearly beloved in Christ,

Difficult times are upon us because the world today is justifying the denial of equal rights to the negro. Many of these injustices are condoned in the name of tradition and custom. Until we face the reality and the facts in the situation, no real understanding can be reached.

Clarence L. Lockett's letter: The Church speaks out at a time of crisis.