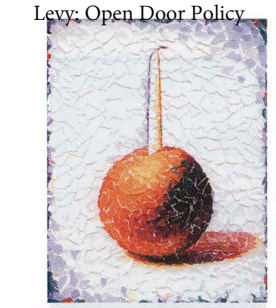


In many quarters, diversity is simply an empty buzzword of the politically correct nineties. But at Syracuse University, it's part of the heritage of an institution that has long adhered to an

OPEN DOOR POLICY

Trying to reach the president of La Casa Latinoamericana isn't easy. Her name is Maria Mercado. She should be able to tell all about her organization, a hub for international and American-born Latino students at Syracuse University. The problem is, there are two Maria Mercados at the University, and even some students confuse them. Plus, there are three other students with the same last name.

It's worth noting because Latinos are the fastest-growing population group at SU, and among the most active. La Casa is the oldest of several organizations targeted toward Latino students. And after several years of heavy lobbying, a Latino-Latin American studies program will be added to the curriculum next fall.

"Since the mid- to late seventies, the people in admissions have made a concerted and intensified effort to ensure SU's enrollment represents society at large," says David C. Smith, dean of admissions and financial aid.

They've done a good job. Nearly 20 percent of the student body comes from traditionally under-

By Renée Gearhart Levy

represented groups, giving SU one of the most diverse student populations of any private university in the United States, according to Smith. But admissions won't take all the credit. SU, says Smith, also has perhaps the most diverse alumni population of any American private university. The reason is simple: While most universities once had formal barriers against women and people of various racial, ethnic, and religious groups, SU, for the most part, did not.

Although laws eliminated admissions barriers, many universities only began focusing on diversity in the late eighties, forced to by the reality of the nation's changing demographics. But at Syracuse, diversity is not just the focus of the current administration, it's part of the institution's heritage. "Many schools have had to start virtually from ground zero in trying to recruit a more diverse student body," says Chancellor Kenneth A. Shaw. "Although we're always seeking to improve, we're fortunate that diversity truly is a core value of Syracuse University."

SU's history of diversity dates back to 1870, the year the University was founded. Seven of the original 41 students were women. Mary Lydia Huntley Matthews, SU's first female graduate, earned her teaching degree in 1872 and became the first woman to earn a master's degree from SU three years later.

SU was the first co-educational college or university in New York and among the first in the nation. (Cornell limited its enrollment of women to 25 percent until the sixties; Yale College, the university's undergraduate division, admitted no women until 1969). Although Huntley was the only woman in her graduating class, by 1876 the University had 52 women among its 86 graduates. And in 1880, Rena A. Michaels became SU's first female doctoral recipient.

José Custudio Alves De Lima of Brazil became SU's first Latin American graduate, earning a bachelor's degree in civil engineering in 1878. The class of 1879, which had 36 graduates, included seven more Brazilian men, most likely the result of a Methodist missionary effort.

Because few early class photos exist, it is unknown when the first African American graduated from SU. Doris Madison Pollard, who earned a bachelor's degree in music in 1925, is SU's oldest known living African-American graduate. She came from Albany, New York, and rented a room with five other African-American female students. Pollard describes her college experience as positive, but says participation in campus-wide activities was limited for African-American students.

"THERE HAS BEEN DISCRIMINATION IN THE UNIVERSITY'S HISTORY. BUT THERE ARE ALSO MANY, MANY EXAMPLES OF THE UNIVERSITY REACHING OUT."

At the time, fraternities and sororities were closed to African Americans, who were also not allowed to eat on campus or live in campus housing. Until the forties, African Americans were segregated from most campus organizations and activities except athletics, although even that was tainted—SU entered into "gentlemen's agreements" with institutions that objected to competing against players of a different race. When SU played teams from such colleges, African-American athletes rarely participated.

Certainly there were exceptions when it came to campus involvement for African Americans. Conrad Lynn, who graduated from the College of Arts and Sciences in 1930 and the College of Law in 1932, received a scholarship to compete on the debate team. And, according to an article in the *Daily Orange*, the secretary of the College of Applied Science in 1932 was also an African American.

But the same article also mentioned a campus dance "open to all University students" at which two African Americans were denied admittance. "Our social life was with ourselves," says Pollard. "We didn't have interracial social contacts. The [African-American] men were very protective of us. They had parties and made punch for us, though they often disappeared into the kitchen—I think they had something stronger for themselves."

Although Syracuse was founded as a Methodist institution, it changed to a nonsectarian university under the administration of Chancellor James Roscoe Day, who served from 1894 to 1922. "We welcome Jew, Gentile, Protestant, and Catholic," Day said at the time. Day hoped increased Jewish (and Catholic) enrollment would help expand the University by appealing to a broader spectrum of prospective students. While other high-profile institutions were cut-

ting their Jewish enrollments, Syracuse was increasing its percentage of Jewish students from 6 percent in 1918 to 15 percent in 1923.

Day's welcome was a bit of an exaggeration, however. Just because SU allowed African Americans, Jews, and other groups to attend didn't necessarily mean they were looked upon favorably by their professors or peers, whose attitudes generally mirrored the prejudices of the day. In addition to discriminatory practices toward African Americans, Jews and Catholics were barred from honorary societies, fraternities, sororities, and law and medical student associations.

The mere presence of religious and ethnic minorities was openly protested by the Ku Klux Klan, which formed a campus chapter in 1923 and recruited more than 200 students. White-robed rallies were held and at least one cross was burned near University property.

In addition, the rampant anti-Jewish prejudice in the United States following World War I also surfaced at Syracuse. During the twenties and thirties, many colleges imposed quotas to restrict Jewish admission to undergraduate and professional schools. In 1923, the year after Charles W. Flint succeeded Day as Chancellor, SU's student government made a formal request for the University to restrict admission of Jews to 10 percent of the student population. Flint publicly denounced the request and its anti-Semitic sentiment, a response that made the front page of *The New York Times*.

Privately, however, it seems SU was beginning to succumb to pressure from Protestant students and alumni. Between 1927 and 1935, the University alternated between segregating Jewish women in separate housing and allowing them to live with other students. By 1939, Jewish enrollment had dropped to 7.5 percent. (African-American enrollment dropped during the thirties as well, possibly because of the added requirement of a photograph in admissions application forms for students "other than native white American citizens." In 1942, only three African Americans attended SU, down from an average of 25 a year during the twenties.)

SU in the thirties: Page 116 of the 1931 *Onondagan*.

MANY RACIAL, RELIGIOUS, AND GENDER BARRIERS WERE ELIMINATED BY CHANCELLOR TOLLEY.

Despite evidence that anti-Semitic policies and practices persisted at SU, they seemed to have gone largely unnoticed by the Jewish students who attended the University during the twenties and thirties.

As a high school senior in 1934, football and track star Marty Glickman recalls being recruited to SU by five New York City-area alumni who graduated in the mid-twenties. These alumni, all successful Jewish professionals, wanted Glickman to attend SU as a way of repaying Syracuse for allowing them to attend the University at a time when Jewish students were not welcome at many institutions. In turn, they hoped Glickman's exposure and success at Syracuse would widen SU's doors for other Jewish students.

Coming to college was the first time Glickman lived among Gentiles, and he says he was the first Jew many of his friends ever encountered. "It was a tremendous learning experience on both sides," he says.

Glickman, who graduated with a bachelor's degree in political science in 1939, recalls only one anti-Semitic experience during his SU career. "My junior year I was starting halfback on the football team," he says. "In October, I told the coach I wouldn't be at practice for two days because of the Jewish holidays. When I got back, I found myself on the third team. I wasn't too happy about that."

Such policies, official or unwritten, began to change with William Pearson Tolley's arrival as Chancellor in 1942. His commitment to diversity helped eliminate many racial, religious, and gender barriers, as did the 1948 Fair Educational Practices Act, which banned discrimination in admissions based on race, religion, or national origin in New York. By 1945, the percentage of Jewish students had risen to 18 percent. By 1950, racial barriers in housing and honor societies had been eradicated and African-American enrollment had increased to an average of 30 students per year.

Campus discrimination didn't disappear, of course. In 1960, the *Daily Orange* revealed a University policy that

discouraged dating between students of different religions and races. At the time, Marjorie C. Smith, dean of women, threatened to call the parents of two female students if they continued to date men of a different race.

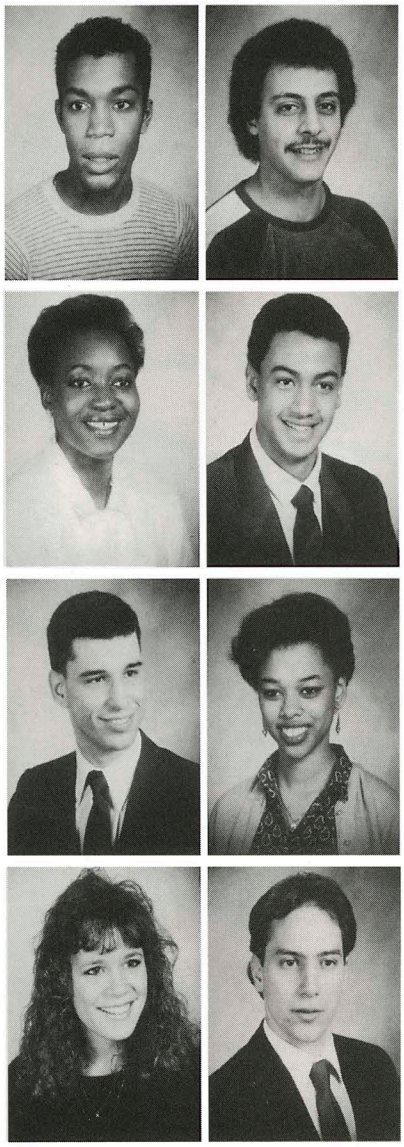
Soon after, Sylvia Mackey, a 1963 graduate of the College of Arts and Sciences, received a bid to join Iota Alpha Pi. Pledging an African American to a traditionally white sorority was rare, and the sorority, hoping to avoid public humiliation if it was turned down, delivered Mackey's invitation in her dormitory room late at night.

Mackey, who accepted the bid, isn't bitter. She says that's simply the way life was at that time. She was just glad that her daughter Laura, a 1990 graduate of the College of Arts and Sciences, received her pledge bid from Delta Gamma alongside hundreds of other new sorority pledges.

By the time Frank Carmona was a senior during the 1977-78 academic year, it was an accepted fact that the University was a diverse mixture of cultures, religions, and nationalities, maybe nowhere more so than in his own apartment. "There were five of us," says Carmona. "I was a Hispanic from Brooklyn. Reginald Watkins was a black from Washington, D.C., who had grown up in the south. Carl Lammers was a WASP from San Francisco. Peter Perrotta was a Jewish Italian from Philadelphia. And Charles Bergey was Canadian."

For the most part, they were just a bunch of guys. "It went relatively smoothly, considering," says Carmona. "There were bad times too, but we all learned about each other's ways."

In an effort to improve relations with students *after* graduation, SU created the Program Development Office in 1983. It runs Coming Back Together, SU's triennial reunion of African-American and Latino alumni, and the Our Time Has Come minority scholarship program, which has raised nearly $1.3 million in eight years. Initiatives such as these, says Larry Martin, executive director of Program Development, have helped to increase alumni involvement and make this "a better University in all ways, shapes, and forms."



SU in the eighties: Page 229 of the 1987 *Onondagan*.

SU BECAME MORE DIVERSE IN RESPONSE TO THE RACIAL TENSIONS OF THE SIXTIES AND SEVENTIES.

For many alumni from underrepresented groups, stories of trial and acceptance go hand in hand. Charles Willie, who earned a doctoral degree in sociology from SU in 1957, recalls that when his file was reviewed for application to graduate school in 1949, one professor wrote across the top, "Looks like a pretty good student, but I'd advise caution. We've already had one student from that school [historically black Atlanta University] and he didn't do so well."

"I was being introduced as a representative of a category," Willie says. Yet within a semester, he was given a teaching assistantship and lent an office by the chair of his department. "Progress doesn't always happen in a linear, evolutionary fashion," he says. "I think many of us experienced both warmth and exclusion simultaneously."

Willie, a Harvard professor since 1974, spent 25 years at SU as a student, faculty member, and administrator. "By the late sixties and early seventies, there were racial demonstrations and tensions on campus, but that was progress," says Willie. "That allowed for negotiating with one another."

As the University increased its diversity, students from traditionally underrepresented groups—racial and religious—gained more power. Instead of having to adapt to the institution, the institution began adapting to them. That's why there is an African American studies department and a women's studies program today, why more than 22 religions are represented in the student body, and why there are no classes on Yom Kippur, Good Friday, or Eid Ul-Fitr, the Islamic holy day. And while no informed person could honestly deny that discrimination is still an issue on campus—and throughout society—it's also clear that SU has continuously taken steps to diminish its presence.

"There certainly has been discrimination in Syracuse University's history," says Willie. "But there are also many, many examples of the University reaching out, and I think that probably goes back to the University's Methodist missionary roots." ■

Renée Gearhart Levy is a free-lance writer and former editor of this magazine.