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Marion Dennis Thorpe
(1932-1983)
Papers, 1968-1983

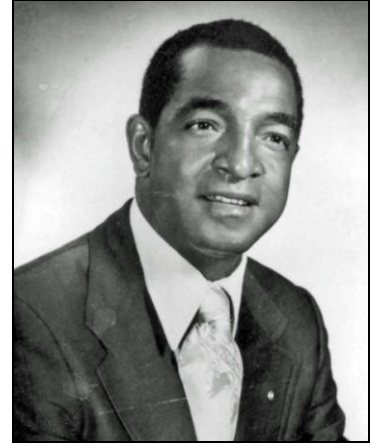
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Biographical Note:

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Chapter VIII

MEETING THE CHALLENGES

OF A NEW DAY

1968- 1974

Upon the resignation of Dr. Ridley, the committee chosen by the board of trustees to select the sixth president of Elizabeth City State College was chaired by Trustee Maceo Sloan. The committee was charged to keep before them the importance of “past high purposes of college responsibility to students, community, state, and nation.” After interviewing and reviewing the credentials of all qualified candidates, they appointed Marion Dennis Thorpe, vice-president of Central State University in Wilberforce, Ohio, to become the sixth president of Elizabeth City State College and to take office on July 1, 1968. The offer was accepted by Dr. Thorpe. Before taking office he was invited to visit the campus and meet with the board of trustees on June 25, 1968, where he made his speech of acceptance in which he stated: “I will enter this work with humility but with vigor and loyalty to move forward in these trying times.”

On July 1, 1968, Dr. Marion Dennis Thorpe, at age thirty-six, officially assumed the position of sixth president of Elizabeth City State College. He was one of the youngest presidents of a four-year college in America.

Dr. Thorpe was born in Durham, North Carolina, September 25, 1932, to Ulysses and Minnie B. Thorpe. His early education was received in the elementary, junior-high and secondary schools of Durham, North Carolina. He enrolled at North Carolina College in Durham in 1950 but left in 1952 to serve in the United States Air Force Band, where he was military drum major from June 1952, to June 1956. In 1958, he re-enrolled at North Carolina College, concentrating in psychology and education. He graduated in June 1958, with both bachelor's and master's degrees in psychology. He immediately enrolled at Michigan State University in September 1958, where in 1961, he was graduated with the Ph.D. degree in administrative and educational services. In order to prepare himself for executive positions, he did post graduate study at the United States Merchant Marine Academy and the United States Department of Defense Staff College, Battle Creek, Michigan.

Dr. Thorpe's experiences were numerous and varied. While studying at Michigan State University, he was graduate assistant and assistant instructor in educational psychology from 1959 to 1961. He was first an assistant professor, and later, an associate professor of psychology at North Carolina College in Durham, 1961-1965. He served the United States Department of Labor as a national assistant and director of Neighborhood Youth Corps, from April 1965 to September 1966, and also was a national leader of the Job Development Task Force until September 1966. In 1967, he became assistant director of the North Carolina State Board of Higher Education. He was vice-president of Central State University, Wilberforce, Ohio, from September 1967 through June 30, 1968.

Dr. Thorpe's list of publications was extensive and of interest, particularly those pertinent to publicly-supported, traditionally black colleges in North Carolina. Among them were the following reports: "Desegregation of North Carolina Colleges and Universities," fall 1966; "Significant Contributions to the North Carolina Board of Higher Education Newsletter," 1967; "North Carolina Board of Higher Education Biennial Reports, 1965- 1967"; "North Carolina Board of Higher Education Interim Report and Recommendations," 1967 (joint publication), and "One State's Program for Traditionally Negro Colleges," 1967.

Dr. Thorpe held membership in many civic, fraternal, and religious organizations. Among these were the Durham Planning Council, 1962; Trustee, White Rock Baptist Church, Durham, North Carolina, 1961; Durham Committee on Negro Affairs, 1961; National Omega Psi Phi Fraternity Committee, 1962; Project, Wilberforce, Ohio, 1967; member, Martin Luther King Scholarship Committee of the Woodrow Wilson Foundation; division chairman, United Fund, 1969; North Carolina Articulation Committee on College Transfer Students, Junior and Senior Colleges, 1969; Southern Regional Education Board, 1969; member, Human Relations Council, Elizabeth City, North Carolina, 1970; and president-elect, North Carolina Association of Colleges and Universities; 1971; and National Committee on Dyslexia and Related Reading Disorders, 1968-69.

The honors bestowed upon him were numerous. He was chosen as an honorary member of the Officers Club, United States Merchant Marine Academy; Honorary Citizen, Hazard, Kentucky, and member of Psi Chi National Psychology Honorary Society. He was also a member of the Alpha Kappa Mu National Honor Society, 1957, a White House Fellow, through which he was invited to participate in the regional finals. He was elected to Who's Who in American College and University Administration, Who's Who in American Education, and "Today's Outstanding North Carolina Citizen," March 1, 1968.

The decision to come to Elizabeth City was made by Dr. Thorpe after contemplation of the needs of Elizabeth City State College in comparison with other similar colleges. As the first black assistant director of the state board of higher education, he seemed to be aware of the needs of black colleges in North Carolina. The opportunity to head one of these institutions was a challenge. He saw this as a chance to continue the labors of his predecessors and to make an impression in education in the state of his birth.

Dr. Thorpe brought with him to Elizabeth City, his wife, Lula Glenn Thorpe, and his two children, Pamela and Marion Dennis. Many alumni, faculty members, students, and friends were elated over the selection of this young man, for they felt that he could relate to today's youth. He and his family were received with warmth by the campus family. To officially welcome the Thorpes, a program and reception were held in the Lighthouse Student Union Building (presently the administration building) at which time faculty, students, and townsmen pledged their support to help him carry out a program for educational growth at the college.

Dr. Thorpe, who served as chairman of the National Association for Equal Opportunities Research and Publication Committee, was among the members who visited Washington in 1970 to urge the administration to redirect more of its funds to support the education of the black youth of America.¹¹ The successful NAEO efforts helped to open the door for Elizabeth City State University to get what seemed to be "a lion's share" of the new budget, which was sent to Congress to aid low-income, undergraduate students and black institutions. The year 1970-71 found faculty and administrators writing proposals to secure funds to advance and enhance the quality of teaching and learning at Elizabeth City State University. During this time, twenty-six proposals were written by nineteen different faculty members. Fourteen of the projects were immediately funded; nine were listed as pending but were eventually funded. Only three were not funded. The "green light" for growth had appeared.

On July 1, 1972, Elizabeth City State University was made one of the sixteen senior institutions of The University of North Carolina. President Thorpe became its first chancellor. He now found even greater challenges confronting him. New assessments had to be made of the total institution in order for it to become a university, not only in name but in fact. Much planning for academic and physical improvement was needed. Realizing the importance of adding special programs to the curriculum, he had already appointed a committee of faculty and students to study and evaluate the many special activities that were assumed to play an important role in the development of the educational programs for reaccreditation by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools.

Chancellor Thorpe strove to bring the university and local community together in many ways. Lyceum programs, convocations, campus, and off-campus programs gained in interest and attendance by local and nearby communities. One of the results of this concept was the creation and completion of the Herrington Village Apartments, Incorporated (non-profit foundation) for providing low to moderate income housing for families of the university and community. Chancellor Thorpe is its board chairman and president.

Dr. Thorpe's interests in community and regional growth was reflected in his membership in the following civic and professional organizations: Boy Scouts of America; Executive Board, Boys Club, Elizabeth City; Human Relations and Manpower Committee, North Carolina Manpower Development Corporation; Mayor's Committee on Jobs for Veterans,

Elizabeth City; Board of Trustees for the North Carolina Symphony; Pasquotank Rural Development Panel; ECSU Foundation; Improved Benevolent Protective Order of Elks; and the Elizabeth City Kiwanis Club. He was also a member of the American Academy of Political Science, the College Entrance Examination Board, the Southern Regional Education Board, and the National Laboratory Board of Directors for Higher Education.

The Thorpe administration not only considered the community a component of its operations but the relationship between the institution and the community a wheel of coordinated activities stemming from a stream of responsibilities delegated to other administrators, faculty, staff, students, and alumni in conjunction with community representatives.

According to the organizational plan of operation, the board of trustees acted as the overseer of five divisional offices of operation. They are: (1) Central Administration, (2) Academic Affairs, (3) Student Affairs, (4) Fiscal Affairs, and (5) Development and Public Relations. The board of trustees, comprised of thirteen citizens, was delegated authority by the board of governors to advise the chancellor on the operation of the institution. The Chancellor, Dr. Marian D. Thorpe, Chief Executive Officer, carried out the policies of the board of governors under the direction and supervision of the General Administration of The University of North Carolina.

Scope and Content Note:

As a result of Chancellor Thorpe's untimely and unexpected death during the fourteenth year of his leadership at ECSU, this small number of collected papers appears to have been gathered from his incomplete files at the time of his passing. 2.5 linear feet of material contain information relating to Marion Thorpe's biography, correspondence, family, various honors and celebrations, printed matter, public papers, speeches, social events, and writings, and clippings. A much larger collection of Thorpe-era papers remains unprocessed to date in the ECSU Archives.

As a talented and effective communicator, Chancellor Thorpe's speeches contain much insight into both his educational philosophy and his immense love of students, colleagues, and of his career in teaching and college administration. Three important events occurred in higher education during the Thorpe administration. The University of North Carolina General Administration assumed control of the 16 state-supported colleges and universities, taking the place of the old Board of Higher Education. Racial integration within higher education in North Carolina was effected, and the U.S. Department of Health Education and Welfare vs. UNC lawsuit and consent decree stretched out over almost a decade of Chancellor Thorpe's tenure. Public papers reflect Thorpe's skills as a facilitator of change during this time, with a minimum of campus or civic disruption taking place under his watch. His speeches and writings also reveal his clear intent to pursue every opportunity afforded to HBCUs in the 1970s and early 1980s toward eliminating historic disparities in public education, especially at the small, historically Black ECSU.

Although the amount of business and personal correspondence in the Thorpe collection is small, the universal respect and affection others felt for him is documented in notes, letters and courtesy correspondence. Finally, the series of collected clippings displays the array of activities

in which Marion Thorpe was either the initiator, leader, or dedicated supporter at the local and nation levels.

Timeline:

- 1932 Born September 5th in Durham, North Carolina, youngest of 12 children of Minnie B. and Ulysses Thorpe
- 1950 Graduated from Hillside High School in Durham and enrolled in North Carolina College (became North Carolina Central in 1969)
- 1952 Joined U.S. Air Force and served as drum major in Air Force Band, June
- 1956 Re-enrolled in North Carolina College, June
- 1958 Completed Bachelor and Masters degrees in education and psychology from North Carolina College, June
- 1960 Daughter Pamela born
- 1961 Completed Ph.d. in administrative and educational services, Michigan State University, September
- 1961 Joined faculty of North Carolina College as assistant professor of Psychology
- 1964 Son Marion Jr. born
- 1965 Served as Field Director, Neighborhood Youth Corps Program, U.S. Department of Labor, in Lyndon B. Johnson administration
- 1967 Accepted post as Assistant Director, North Carolina Board of Higher Education
- 1967 Moved family to Wilberforce, Ohio in September after appointment as vice-president, Central State University
- 1968 Received appointment to Elizabeth City State College (NC) as youngest-ever, sixth President
- 1969 Appointed to Executive Committee of North Carolina Association of Colleges and Universities [NCACU], The U.S. HEW National Advisory Committee on Dyslexia and Related Reading Disorders, and the Martin Luther King, Jr. Fellowship Selection Committee of the Woodrow Wilson Foundation's National Fellowship Fund.
- 1969 Appointed first Chancellor of newly-renamed Elizabeth City State University

- 1970 Travelled to Washington, D.C. as chairman of the National Association for Equal Opportunity in Education's Research and publication Committee to urge President Richard M. Nixon to redirect more funds to education of Black youth.
- 1972 Leads ECSU into membership in UNC's 16-constituent school system under the authority of the UNC Board of Governors, replacing the North Carolina Board of Higher Education, July 1
- 1977 Travels to Washington with 200 Black leaders to meet with President Carter in support of HBCUs
- 1978 Named North Carolina's "Tar Heel of the Week" by *Raleigh News and Observer*, December 3
- 1979 Urged North Carolina Legislature to rename ECSU as UNC at Elizabeth City
- 1983 Dies in Albemarle Hospital on April 28th

Collection Inventory:

Box	Folder Title	Notes
1	ECSU & Thorpe Social Events	Publicity for campus and holiday gatherings
1	Inaugural (MDT) Accolades from other institutions, 1969	
1	Inaugural (MDT) Address by Alphonso Elder, 1969	North Carolina College (Central) President-Emeritus
1	Inaugural (MDT) Committee and Events, 1969	
1	Inaugural (MDT) Programs & Schedules, 1969	Calendar of Events; program; Compass supplement
1	Press Releases	
1	Recruitment/Retention Issues, 1980	Addressing issues to faculty
1	Re-naming ECSU, 1979	pitch to rename UNC at Elizabeth City
1	Speeches and Drafts by MDT	Inaugural through 1982
2	Advisory Budget Commission Requests	
2	ECSU Budget 1973-1975 (3 folders)	Change items, narratives, request for new programs
2	ECSU Budget 1979-1980	salaries and other
2	ECSU Budget 1980-1981	salaries and other
2	ECSU Budget 1981-1983	salaries and other
3	Academic Department Expansion, 1971	
3	Annual Reports, Assistant to Chancellor	Thomas Carter, Thorpe Assistant
3	Business Correspondence	Routine courtesy correspondence; signed TY from G.H.W. Bush, M.C.
3	Chatterjee Discrimination Lawsuit, 1981	Summary of legal case brought by faculty member

Box	Folder Title	Notes
3	Dr. Thorpe death, 1983	Memorials, Programs announcements
3	Faculty Salaries	Rank and salary
3	Family	Cards and announcements
3	Honors, memberships	Programs of NC Central
3	Organizational Chart, ECSU Administration & Departments	
3	Personal Correspondence	Routine courtesy correspondence
3	SACS report of Professional Affiliations of Faculty, 1971	ECSU Faculty Memberships
3	Staff Appointments, 1970s	Administrative appointments
3	Statement of Purpose, ECSU	"Philosophy, Purpose, Objectives, Aims and Goals"
3	Trustees' Memorial Resolution, MDT 1983	Oversized
4	Affirmative Action Plans, 1979-1986	Equal Employment Opportunity Plan
4	Annie Henry Estate Bequest, 1973	
4	Capital Improvements, 1983-1985 Budget	Proposed buildings and grounds updates
4	ECSU Personnel Issues, 1976	Travel, hiring, Safety, other issues
4	Faculty Appointments, 1972-1973	
4	OSHA Policies, 1974	Occupational Health and Safety Policy and Procedure Manual
4	Presentation (MDT) to Board of Governors, 1982	State of the University
4	Salary Increases, 1979-1981	Board of Governors Policies
4	Tuition and Fees Proposal, 1972-1973	
4	UNC-General Administration Issues, 1973-1982	Tenure and other policies; enrollment; academic freedom, due process, Privacy Act
4	Upward Bound Program Review, 1972	by U.S. Department of Health education and Welfare (HEW)
5	Annual Report to Board of Trustees, 1973	copy
5	Clarification, In-State Tuition Rates	from by Cameron West, NC State Board of Higher Education
5	ECSU response to State of North Carolina Audit report, 1972	by Arthur L. Jefferson, ECSU Business Manager
5	Five-College Curriculum	with Langston; Southern University; Texas Southern; St. Augustine's
5	Governor Hunt Inaugural, 1981	Program, tickets, etc
5	Governor Scott's Inaugural, 1969	Official Program
5	Memos (MDT) to Faculty & Staff, Campus matters (2 folders)	Scholarship Awards, Admissions standards
5	National Laboratory for Higher Education	Center for Individualized Instructional Systems
5	Personal (MDT) notes for Board of Trustees Meetings, 1971	some handwritten

Box	Folder Title	Notes
5	Personal (MDT) notes for Board of Trustees Meetings, 1973	
5	Personnel Policies, 1969	
5	Phelps-Stokes Fund ECSU Planning Matrix, 1975	Printed Institutional Mission
5	Trustees Roll Book, 1972-1981	"Compositions" cardboard cover notebook containing contact info and per diem info
6	Clippings, 1968	
6	Clippings, 1969	
6	Clippings, 1970	
6	Clippings, 1971	
6	Clippings, 1972	
6	Clippings, 1973	
6	Clippings, 1974	
6	Clippings, 1975	
6	Clippings, 1976	
6	Clippings, 1977	
6	Clippings, 1978	
6	Clippings, 1979	
6	Clippings, 1981	
6	Clippings, 1982	
6	Clippings, 1983	
6	Clippings, n.d.	No dates
6	Clippings, Thorpe Family	
6	Publications Belonging to MDT: NCAA Proceedings, 1977	
6	Publications Belonging to MDT:1978 Intercollegiate debate topic	"Should U.S. Government ...Guarantee Employment Opportunities for all U.S. Citizens?"
6	Publications Belonging to MDT:NC State Capitol Telephone Directory	
7	An Economic Impact Study of ECSU on the Elizabeth City/Pasquotank Area	Economics of university students faculty and spending on area
7	Campus Housing and Dormitories, 1970-1979	Conditions in dorms
7	Correspondence from Maynard Jackson	Declines seat on ECSU Foundation Board
7	Correspondence, 1968-1969	
7	Correspondence, 1973-1974	Athletics
7	Program, Five College Curriculum, 1971	Student presentation
7	Re-structuring of ECSU Business Office, 1969-1972	Consultant's recommendations; correspondence
7	State-Supported Traditionally Negro Colleges in North Carolina North Carolina Board of Higher Education	Thorpe was staffer and wrote for NCBHE
7	Student Support Services, 1970-198-	Economic Improvement Council, HUD, disadvantaged students, urban university

7 North Carolina Higher Education Administrators' group, 1969-1971

“ Institute of
Government" Campus
unrest, campus crisis,
consolidation of
higher education in
NC