

Community members campaign for integration of Girard College in Philadelphia, PA, USA, 1965-68

- [U.S. Civil Rights Movement \(1950s-1960s\)](#) [1]
- [\(mainly or initiated by\) people of color](#) [2]
- [included participation by more than one social class](#) [3]
- [local community or neighborhood-level campaign](#) [4]

- [U.S. Civil Rights Movement \(1950s-1960s\)](#)

Timing

January

1965

to:

September

1968

Location and Goals

Country:

United States

Location City/State/Province:

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

[View Location on Map](#)

Goals:

Protesters demanded that Girard College admit African American boys

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 003. Declarations by organizations and institutions
- 016. Picketing
- 034. Vigils
- 037. Singing
- 038. Marches
- 039. Parades
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 048. Protest meetings

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 016. Picketing
- 034. Vigils
- 037. Singing
- 038. Marches
- 039. Parades
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 048. Protest meetings

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 016. Picketing
- 034. Vigils
- 037. Singing
- 038. Marches
- 039. Parades
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 048. Protest meetings

Methods in 4th segment:

Methods in 5th segment:

Methods in 6th segment:

- 016. Picketing
- 034. Vigils
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

Segment Length:

7.5 months

Classifications

Classification:

Change

Cluster:

Democracy

Human Rights

Group characterization:

- African American students
- interracial community leaders and clergy
- interracial community members
- parents

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

Cecil B. Moore, president of the North Philadelphia branch of the NAACP; Rev. Layton Zimmer, urban

missioner of the Episcopal Diocese of Pennsylvania; Marie Hicks, mother of two of the African American applicants

Partners:

Pennsylvania Governor William W. Scranton, the City of Philadelphia and the State of Pennsylvania

External allies:

National and regional branches of the NAACP; U.S. Senator Joseph Clark (D-PA); American Jewish Congress; Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.; Bayard Rustin; James Farmer, National Director of the Congress of Racial Equality; Roy Wilkins, National Director of the NAACP

Involvement of social elites:

Pennsylvania Governor William W. Scranton, U.S. Senator Joseph Clark (D-PA)

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

- American Jewish Congress
- Governor Scranton
- James Farmer
- Roy Wilkins
- Senator Joseph Clark
- regional branches of the NAACP
- the City of Philadelphia
- the State of Pennsylvania

Groups in 2nd Segment:

- Marie Hicks

Groups in 3rd Segment:

Groups in 4th Segment:

Groups in 5th Segment:

Groups in 6th Segment:

Segment Length:

7.5 months

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

Girard College; Board of Trustees of Girard College

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

Opponents of the campaign held at least one counter-protest and a petition

Campaigner violence:

Limited campaigner violence erupted at the Girard College picket line in June 1965. Most of the violence was directed towards police.

Repressive Violence:

Police maintained a constant presence at Girard College during the May - December 1965 picket line and occasionally attacked demonstrators.

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

6 points out of 6 points

Survival:

1 point out of 1 points

Growth:

3 points out of 3 points

Total points:

10 out of 10 points

Stephen Girard (1750 – 1831), the well known Philadelphia merchant and banker, bequeathed a large sum of money to be used in the founding of Girard College, a boarding school for orphaned youth between the ages of six and ten. The school was established in 1848 on forty acres of farmland north of Philadelphia. Stephen Girard stipulated in his will that the school would only be open to “fatherless” white boys. (At the time that Girard wrote his will, Pennsylvania state law defined an orphan as a child with no father.) When Girard College first opened its doors in 1848, it enrolled 100 students. By 1890, when Girard College opened its middle school, enrollment had climbed to 1,574. Enrollment kept climbing until the Great Depression, after which Social Security and other governmental programs aided single mothers and reduced the need for them to send their sons away.

By the 1960s, the city of Philadelphia had expanded its boundaries and Girard College now found itself in the center of North Philadelphia, an overwhelmingly African American section of the city. As early as 1944, Girard College’s “white only” policy was challenged by Dr. Nathan Mossell, a prominent African American physician in Philadelphia. His challenge was supported by the local branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). There is no evidence that this challenge led to any policy change.

In 1954, the same year that the U.S. Supreme Court decided *Brown v. Board of Education*, six African American boys applied for admission to Girard College. Their application was denied. Legal actions ensued, led by prominent African American civil rights attorney Raymond Pace Alexander. The case went to the U.S. Supreme Court twice and each time the Court affirmed that Stephen Girard’s will must be interpreted literally. The second Supreme Court action (an affirmation of a lower court decision) occurred in 1958. Though Girard College continued to only admit white students, the legal action of 1954 – 1958 galvanized the growing civil rights movement in Philadelphia.

In mid January 1965, Cecil B. Moore, civil rights community leader, criminal defense attorney and newly elected president of the North Philadelphia branch of the NAACP, announced that the NAACP would file a lawsuit challenging the previous court rulings that upheld the exclusion of African American students from Girard College. In his announcement, Moore said that the NAACP would consider picketing the school and blocking its entry gates if legal action failed.

The picketing of Girard College began on the evening of May 1, 1965. That day, the Philadelphia Police Department, having received word that protestors might attempt to scale Girard College’s ten-foot high walls, sent 1,000 officers to patrol the scene. The officers were met by thirty-eight demonstrators.

This picketing was the first in an ongoing direct action campaign, led by Cecil B. Moore and other local NAACP organizers, which reportedly lasted continuously until December 17, 1965. The police presence, as well as the numbers of protesters outside Girard College fluctuated over those seven and a half months. On May 8, 1965, having previously reduced the police presence, the police department increased the number of officers present at Girard College to 900. It should be noted that the majority of the action on the picket line occurred in the evenings or overnight. Police monitored the protesters constantly.

A group of protesters attempted to scale Girard College walls on the night of May 3, 1965. Seven African Americans and one white were arrested after they leaned ladders against the ten-foot wall. Among those arrested was Stanley Branche, chairman of the Committee for Freedom Now of Chester, PA. The protesters were arraigned on \$500 bail each the following day.

On May 4, 1965, the Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Delaware regional branches of the NAACP, which were comprised in total of 150 local branches, endorsed the efforts of Cecil B. Moore and the North Philadelphia Branch of the NAACP at Girard College. The regional organizations encouraged members of local branches to join the picketing in Philadelphia.

On Saturday, May 22, 1965, Raymond Pace Alexander, the Philadelphia African American attorney who was involved in the legal case to integrate Girard College in the 1950s and who had since become a Judge in the Philadelphia Court of Common Pleas, made a proposal to Girard College that the College admit African American students.

On Monday, May 24, 1965, the Girard College Board of Trustees voted unanimously to reject Judge Alexander's proposal. This Board of Trustees was established by the City of Philadelphia in the wake of the legal action of the 1950s. Previously, Girard College had been overseen by a different body that was more under the control of the city government. In an apparent effort to make Girard College appear more "private" so as to insulate it from anti-discrimination laws, the city appointed thirteen private trustees. John Diemand was president of this new body in 1965.

On Sunday, May 23, 1965, two young men, George Henry and Dwight Campbell, were arrested after sitting in chairs at the main entrance of Girard College. On Friday, May 28, 1965, U.S. Senator Joseph S. Clark (D-PA) sent a letter to the Board of Trustees of Girard College, urging them to admit African American students. The trustees rejected Senator Clark's plea on June 5, 1965 and president Diemand sent Senator Clark a letter to this affect.

On Monday, May 31, 1965, the number of protesters picketing Girard College was 125. The group, which gathered at a nearby church, marched to Girard College and marched silently around the walls of the college two by two in the afternoon as 250 police officers watched. The interracial group included representatives of major religious faiths as well as thirty clergymen. James Farmer, national director of the Congress of Racial Equality, joined the picket on that day. The marchers halted east of Girard College's main gates to hold a brief rally. James Farmer, as well as some of the clergymen, addressed the crowd.

On Tuesday, June 1, 1965, prominent civil rights activist Bayard Rustin called for immediate judicial action to open Girard College to African Americans. The first action that the City of Philadelphia took on the Girard College issue occurred on June 5, 1965 when the City Commission on Human Relations announced that it would ask Girard College's Board of Trustees to voluntarily admit African American students.

Thirty-two members of the Philadelphia Chapter of the Presbyterian Interracial Council joined the demonstration at Girard College on June 5, 1965.

On Saturday, June 12, 1965, Roy Wilkins, National Director of the NAACP, addressed a crowd of three hundred protesters at Girard College and told them that the Girard College issue was on the agenda of the national organization. Later that evening, five protesters jumped over the Girard College walls and were quickly arrested by the police. Six other protesters were arrested that night. This was apparently the first time the protesters had actually jumped over the wall, although they had previously threatened to do so.

On Tuesday, June 15, 1965, Episcopal Diocese of Pennsylvania Bishop Robert L. DeWitt announced that urban missionary Rev. Layton Zimmer, who was organizing area clergy to participate in the Girard College demonstration, was acting with Diocesan approval. Father Paul Washington of the Church of the Advocate also participated in the picketing. Father Washington opened his church to community meetings to organize the continued picketing at Girard College.

Around this time, the American Jewish Congress released a statement in which they urged the Board of Trustees of Girard College to "seek whatever court approval may be necessary to racially integrate the student body of Girard College."

On Thursday, June 24, 1965, City Solicitor Edward Bauer petitioned the support of Pennsylvania State Attorney General Walter E. Alessandrini and asked him to join in a lawsuit aimed at integrating Girard College. That night, at 11:15 PM, between 50 and 100 protesters rushed police barricades outside Girard College. Limited violence erupted between protesters and police as the demonstrators rushed, singing and dancing, into Girard Avenue. They blocked traffic along several blocks of Girard Avenue by sitting, laying and standing in the street. Approximately 150 police officers, aided by fifty patrol cars, forced the protesters out of the streets. The crowd regrouped and gradually the number of protesters grew to between 1,000 and 1,500. Cecil B. Moore arrived at the scene shortly after midnight and told the protesters to go home. By 1 AM, the crowd had diminished to 500 demonstrators gathered around the main gates of Girard College. In total, nineteen demonstrators were arrested that night.

This incident was the first in a short series of violent or semi-violent actions on the part of the protesters. Cecil B. Moore attributed this violence to the fact that many of the local NAACP organizers were involved in a Teamsters' Union strike in downtown Philadelphia. Once this strike ended and the NAACP organizers returned to the Girard College site, peaceful demonstrations resumed.

The following morning, the nineteen protesters who had been arrested the night before were arraigned at a local police station. Twenty-five demonstrators held a rally outside the police station in support of the nineteen protesters. They marched and sang. In response to the actions of the previous night, the Philadelphia Police Department increased the number of officers at Girard College to 250.

The next Saturday, June 26, 1965, as the picketing of Girard College continued, fifteen members of the local John Birch Society briefly rallied in opposition to the NAACP rally. Their signs read "Don't Break the Girard Will."

On July 2, 1965, Pennsylvania Governor William W. Scranton announced a coalition between the state and the city of Philadelphia to take the struggle to integrate Girard College into the courts. He urged the demonstrators to end their picketing. Nonetheless, the picketing at Girard College continued. On July 12, 1965, federal, state and local officials including Governor Scranton, Philadelphia mayor James Tate, and a representative from the U.S. Department of Justice met with Girard College trustees to discuss the situation. Cecil B. Moore was not invited to this meeting. Demonstrators protested outside and were met by police. Five demonstrators were arrested. Cecil B. Moore announced that the demonstrations at Girard College would increase in size.

In late July 1965, the civil rights leader, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. planned a speaking tour of northern cities facing racial tensions. He wanted to come to Philadelphia, but Cecil B. Moore opposed this, claiming that Philadelphia - and the Girard College situation in particular - did not need outside support. Moore faced severe criticism from within his own ranks of the North Philadelphia branch of the NAACP and the city's African American community and reversed his stance.

Dr. King visited Philadelphia over two days (Monday and Tuesday, August 2 and 3, 1965). On August 2, Dr. King endorsed the efforts of the NAACP at Girard College, saying that the ongoing picketing was "the kind of direct action that is needed to solve these problems."

The following evening, Tuesday, August 3, Dr. King addressed a crowd of 5,000 protesters outside the main gates of Girard College. As he addressed the chanting and singing crowd from the back of a flatbed truck, he compared the walls of Girard College to the Berlin Wall. "At this stage of the 20th century," Dr. King told the crowd, "in the city that has been known as the cradle of liberty, the Girard College wall is like the Berlin Wall. This wall, this school, is symbolic of a cancer in the body politic that must be removed before there will be freedom and democracy in this country." Dr. King encouraged the crowd to remain nonviolent and to continue protesting. His visit galvanized the campaign.

In early December 1965, mothers of seven African American "fatherless" boys applied for their children to be admitted to Girard College. The seven applicants were Alan Levi Bond, 6; Charles William Hicks, 9; Theodore Lewis Hicks, 7; James Scruggs, 9; Henry Scruggs, 8; Tyrone Karl White, 9; and Terry Sherwood White, 7. Marie Hicks, the mother of Theodore and Charles Hicks, became a leader in this campaign. On Wednesday, December 15, 1965, the Girard College Board of Trustees voted to refuse admittance to these seven boys, stating that admitting African Americans would violate the will of Stephen Girard. The following day, Thursday, December 16, the mothers of the seven applicants, along with the City of Philadelphia, State of Pennsylvania, and the local NAACP filed a suit in Federal District Court challenging the Board of Trustees' decision. Chief counsel for this case was prominent Philadelphia NAACP attorney William T. Coleman, who was assisted by Charles J. Biddle.

In response to the filing of the lawsuit, the NAACP decided to end the ongoing picketing of Girard College. The picketing, which started on May 1, 1965, ended with a final rally outside the main gate of Girard College at 7:30 PM on Friday, December 17, 1965. At that rally, Cecil B. Moore said, however, that if African Americans were not admitted to Girard College by September 1966, the picketing would resume.

Moore fulfilled this promise, and as the litigation process progressed in the courts with no foreseeable resolution, Moore called for demonstrations to resume on October 8, 1966. It is not clear how long these demonstrations lasted.

On October 11, 1965 approximately 100 Temple University students and professors had held a rally on that university's campus in support of the integration efforts at Girard College. The rally was organized by the Temple University chapter of Students for a Democratic Society. Following the rally, approximately 25 protesters went to Girard College and marched around its walls.

In the months between October 1965 and October 1966, the legal case had progressed through the federal court system. On Wednesday, November 2, 1966, Federal Court District Judge Joseph S. Lord ruled that the Girard College Board of Trustees could not deny admission to the seven African American boys solely on the basis of race. In his ruling, Judge Lord added that since Girard College was a public institution, it fell under Pennsylvania's Public Accommodations Act, which forbade discrimination in public institutions. The judge ordered Girard College to begin standard pre-enrollment examinations of the seven African American applicants. He gave Girard College until November 16 to either admit African American students or file for additional time to appeal.

The day after Judge Lord made this ruling, Thursday, November 3, 1966, Girard College Board of Trustees President Diemand announced that examinations of the seven African American applicants would begin. These examinations were standard in the Girard College admission process.

On that same day, Dr. H. Todd Williamson, president of the Girard College Alumni Association, released a statement in which he said that his organization would seek to have the College closed if it admitted African Americans. Williamson wrote that the members of the Association believe that Stephen "Girard made it abundantly clear that if the trustees for any reason, including subsequent legislation or court action, could not carry out his instructions for a home for white, male orphan boys, the money should go to the state."

On Friday, November 18, 1966, Girard College began testing the seven African American applicants. The testing took just under two weeks.

The Board of Trustees of Girard College appealed Judge Lord's November 2 decision on December 2, 1966. In the appeal, the trustees challenged Judge Lord's argument that Girard College fell under the Pennsylvania Public Accommodations Act. The U.S. Supreme Court remanded the case back to Judge Lord for further review.

Opponents of integration at Girard College organized the Association for the Preservation of Wills and Private Schools in late December 1966. On January 3, 1967, this organization announced the beginning of a petition drive to gather 2 million signatures in opposition to the integration efforts at Girard College. The Republican Women of Pennsylvania, a 2,500-member organization, announced on January 31 that it had joined in this petition campaign.

On July 5, 1967, Judge Lord again ruled that Girard College must admit the African American applicants. This ruling was unanimously upheld by the U.S. Court of Appeal for the Third Circuit on March 7, 1968. The Appeals Court ruled that Girard College had violated the seven African American applicants' constitutional rights by refusing them admission.

The board of Trustees of Girard College appealed this decision to the U. S. Supreme Court, which, on May 20, 1968, refused to hear arguments in the case, thereby affirming the Appeals Court's decision. In response to this, Board of Trustees President Diemand announced the following day that the Trustees would meet at their earliest convenience to admit African American students. The trustees met on May 23, 1968 and issued a statement indicating that they would admit the seven African American boys who were plaintiffs in the case as well as one additional African American applicant whose application was received some time after the initial seven.

Cecil B. Moore announced on May 29, 1968, that he would hold a "peace festival" at Girard College on Sunday, June 9 to celebrate victory. Moore said the rally would include speeches from those who played an active part in the campaign and would also include live entertainment. Moore planned another celebration rally for June 23. He also organized a committee of schoolteachers. Initially, this committee consisted of three African American teachers who helped the seven applicants prepare for the entrance exams and afterwards, prepare to enter Girard College. This committee grew to include a larger number of both African American and white schoolteachers who assisted other eligible African American boys as they applied to Girard College.

On Wednesday, September 11, 1968, four African American boys (Theodore Hicks, 9; William L. Dade, 11; Carl W. Riley, 8; and Owan Gowan, 7) as well as Budha Ragcha Dalantinov, a Kalmuck fourth grader, entered Girard College to begin their studies. Charles Hicks, 12, who was one of the original applicants, was denied entry in September 1968, because Girard College did not admit boys that old at that time. Four months later, the school made an exception and admitted him. He graduated in 1974 as the first African American graduate. Theodore Hicks, Charles' younger brother, graduated in 1977 as the first African American valedictorian. The Hicks family alone had received more than one hundred death threats over the course of the lawsuit. All of the plaintiffs had received bomb threats and hate mail. Each of their addresses had been printed in the newspaper.

The first non-white students to attend Girard College faced severe racism from their classmates. Some teachers attempted to make them feel welcome. Girard College continued to admit new African American students in the years following 1968.

Research Notes

Sources:

Temple University Libraries Digital Collection: Collection of newspaper articles about Girard College integration: <http://digital.library.temple.edu/cdm4/results.php?CISOOOP1=all&CISOBOX1=Girard%20College--Racial%20Dispute&CISOFIELD1=CISOSEARCHALL&CISOOP2=exact&CISOBOX2=&CISOFIELD2=CISOSEAR>

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"Marie Hicks, 83, the Rosa Parks of Girard College" Philadelphia Inquirer article by Gayle Ronan Sims, April 21, 2007

"Civil Rights Movement" on the Pennsylvania Historical an Museum Commission website:
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"State Attorney General Walter E. Alessandroni discusses the Girard College desegregation case" (video)
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Additional Notes:

Edited by Max Rennebohm (24/07/2011)

Name of researcher, and date dd/mm/yyyy:

Carl E. Sigmond, 16/6/2011

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