

# A TURNING POINT IN THE HOLY CROSS STORY

## *Fraternity*, Diane Brady

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By John T. Day

**I**t was Fr. Brooks,” says Clarence Thomas, who made the difference in the lives of the five African American men whose education at Holy Cross is the focus of Diane Brady’s *Fraternity*.

In the fall of 1968, 19 freshmen and one sophomore African American men started their Holy Cross careers, recruited by John E. Brooks, S.J., then associate professor and chair of the religious studies department, later dean, and for 24 years president of the College.

Of these 20 men, *Fraternity* focuses on Stanley Grayson, lawyer, financier, and deputy mayor of New York City; Eddie Jenkins, pro-football player, government official, and community leader; Edward P. Jones, fiction writer, recipient of the National Book Critics Circle, Pulitzer, and MacArthur awards; Clarence Thomas, associate justice of the U.S. Supreme Court; Theodore Wells, distinguished defense lawyer. Also playing a key role was Arthur Martin, two years their senior, the big brother to these twenty and others to follow. Martin later became the deputy attorney general for New Jersey.

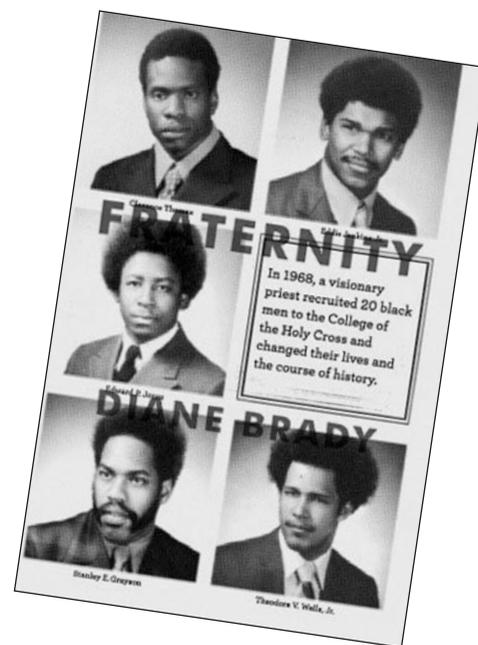
The assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., on April 4, 1968, catalyzed Brooks’s efforts to undertake

what had earlier been contemplated – the intentional recruitment of significant numbers of African American students to Holy Cross. With the assistance of a young admissions counselor, Brooks personally sought smart, motivated young men from Catholic east coast high schools, especially in Philadelphia.

Brady’s book opens with vignettes describing the experience of each young man in his own community on the day of King’s assassination, along with the effect of King’s killing on the few blacks already at Holy Cross. Brady recounts the lives of the five through recruitment, admission, arrival, adjustment, disappointment, challenges, graduation, and early career. By the end each man emerges in a fully developed life story.

Brady was remarkably successful in eliciting comments from each of the men about his own experience, each other, the College, and Fr. Brooks. Of particular note are the more nuanced picture of Clarence Thomas’s college experience than emerges in his own memoir, *My Grandfather’s Son*, and the remarkably detailed recounting of the “black student walkout” in December 1969.

Brady emphasizes the continuing role of Brooks in these men’s lives: he looked out for their wellbeing, mentored and challenged them during their Holy Cross experience and after. Brady



also recounts the important roles of individual faculty, staff, administrators, coaches, trustees, and alumni – named and unnamed — who were important to the success of one or another of the men. Brooks, “with a sharp wit and a short fuse,” persuaded a cautious president, Raymond Swords, exhorted and

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The protest against General Electric Co. recruiters in front of Hogan Campus Center was the spark for the BSU walkout crisis. (Right) Rev. John E. Brooks, S.J. Photos courtesy of the College of the Holy Cross Archives.

successfully cajoled others, despite bald racism on campus, charges of reverse discrimination, and fears about unhappy donors who would close their wallets during hard financial times at the College.

An alumnus from the same era, I found Brady's recounting of the events often moving, bringing to life incidents known to me personally, filling in gaps and details beyond my knowledge. I remembered myself among the undergraduates raising funds for a scholarship program in King's memory; meeting with the advisory committee after the black student walk out; serving as head resident of Healy Hall, which housed the controversial "black corridor."

I found most engaging the personal details of the everyday lives of these young men: their loneliness,

their hours in the library, their efforts to thrive on an all-white campus, their desire to connect with African American women at nearby colleges.

**B**radly spends three chapters on the tumultuous events of my senior year: the foreshortening of the varsity football season due to a hepatitis outbreak; the growing anti-war sentiment; the

walkout of the black students after several of their number were disproportionately charged for obstructing General Electric recruitment; the granting of amnesty by President Swords; Cambodia; Kent State; Jackson State; the semester ending with a strike and no exams. In their remaining years at Holy Cross, they had to contend with the draft, resistance to racial progress, football and basketball challenges, graduate school admissions, marriage and other personal decisions.

Subsequently in their distinguished careers and community engagements these men paid back—or paid forward—the support and continuing friendship of Fr. Brooks. If these men are "the fraternity," he is their Jesuit father. ■