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Daytona Beach Journal
M-35,948 S-43,012

OCT-5 -69

FAMU President Discusses Merger With FSU

185 By JIM PURKS

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (AP)— As long as white society merely tolerates blacks there's plenty of justification for the continued separate existence of Florida State and Florida A&M, says A&M President Benjamin L. Perry.

Perry, 51, said he realizes one of his major challenges will be to resist merger with FSU, a huge university less than five miles away.

Some legislators and state officials, pressed with tight budgets, feel it would make sense— economical and social — to merge the two schools.

A&M stays autonomous, Perry said, "as long as the attitude is one of toleration rather than acceptance of blacks, as long as the attitude is tokenism rather than equality, as long as there's still a gap in the educational preparation of a discernible segment of the population."

"This may disappear, but much of it depends upon the attitude of society. Most of the gains we have made have been through the courts," Perry said in an interview.

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PERRY, APPOINTED by the Board of Regents to succeed

long-term President George Gore, will be inaugurated next Saturday.

Perry already has made his imprint on the university with a so-called "youth movement" among his administrators.

Several veteran administrators have either quietly retired or returned to teaching since Perry assumed office. They've been replaced by men under 40 who, Perry has said privately, bring with them imagination and ideas.

"I might not be able to keep up with them," he once joked.

Florida A&M was established in 1887 as an institution for blacks. It has been predominantly black ever since, although it now has several white professors and some white students.

Perry thinks the school offers a good educational opportunity for both races, especially those who because of weak educational preparation are turned down by other institutions.

"There's no justification here of just being a black institution," Perry said.

A&M, Perry said, offers opportunity for "blacks and whites who have been refused the opportunity for higher education because of man-made tests that are objective in

nature in evaluating aptitude, but fail to evaluate motivation and the will to achieve."

"And this is FAMU's role today and this is the justification for two universities," he said.

Perry has the helm of a university whose enrollment this year is expected to reach 5,000. One of his goals was to establish quick communications with students. Students steadily call him at home, or visit.

Many of the students are determined that A&M stay separate and autonomous, he said.

Perry said they have expressed concern over a recent cooperative agreement with FSU through which students attending one institution can go to classes at the other, and get credit.

Last April A&M was troubled by students demonstrating following the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Perry was asked to compare the mood of students then and now.

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"IT'S A LITTLE early to tell," he said. "I think they may

be somewhat miffed about our lack of progress in the area of housing. They want a little bit more speed in terms of the relevancy of education. And some question the cooperative agreement. They see it as the first means of getting us to phase out."

Perry grew up in Tallahassee, near A&M. He lives in a gray brick house near the campus. He has a wife, nicknamed "Nicki," and a daughter, Kim.

Perry jogs before he goes to work. He runs from the front door of his home, to the football stadium, around the stadium and back home—about a mile.

Perry said he learned the importance of keeping mentally and physically ready when he was in officer training school in the Army, where he had to compete with whites and survive.

His class started with 200 candidates, 13 of them blacks. The graduation class contained 102— 11 of them blacks.

"I happened to be one of the blacks that survived, out of pure grit," Perry recalled.