



Dr. Frederick S. Humphries
President
1974-1985

Frederick Stephen Humphries (born December 26, 1935 in Apalachicola, Florida) is an American academic administrator and chemistry professor. He has been a Regent Professor at the Florida A&M University College of Law since 2003. Dr. Humphries is President Emeritus of Tennessee State University (1974 to 1985), and is President Emeritus of Florida A&M University (1985 to 2001). He served as President and CEO of the National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education from 2001 to 2003. Florida A&M University conferred the President Emeritus title upon Dr. Humphries on Friday, December 11, 2009. Under his leadership Florida A&M University would grow from an enrollment of 5,100 in 1985 to 9,876 in 1993. By the 1998-1999 school year, enrollment had reached 11,828 students and by 2001 Florida A&M had an enrollment of 12,316. He has a bachelor's degree in physical chemistry from Florida A&M University where he graduated Magna Cum Laude in 1957. He received a Ph.D. in physical chemistry from the University of Pittsburgh in 1964 where he was the first African American to receive a Ph.D in this discipline from the University.[1]

Early life

Dr. Frederick S. Humphries is truly a native [Floridian](#). He was born in [Apalachicola, Florida](#), on December 26, 1935, to Thornton Humphries and Minnie Henry, and received his early education there. He was a product of the Holy Family Catholic School and the small, all-black Wallace M. Quinn High School in Apalachicola. He was one of only nine graduates in the class of 1953. Yet, he now contends that because of the quality and dedication of teachers, the small size of his school and the lack of sophisticated equipment did not handicap him. In an interview with Mike Radigan, Humphries remarked in *Capital Outlook* (May 9, 1985): "The greatest science teacher I had in high school was Mr. Charlie Watson. He taught me all my math and science courses. He was a very smart man and he cared about his students." Continuing his praise of Watson, Humphries said: "When he realized your abilities, he pushed you to the limit. When I left Wallace Quinn High School, I didn't know how well-prepared I was." Perhaps this early experience with his mathematics and science teacher instilled in him the concept of "excellence with caring" which became his motto upon becoming FAMU's eighth president. That Humphries was well-prepared for the tasks that faced him was verified, in part, by his outstanding record at FAMU when he earned the bachelor of science degree magna cum laude in chemistry in 1957. In addition to his honors in chemistry, he was a distinguished military science graduate in 1957 and was reported to be the first black officer to be commissioned into the [Army Security Agency](#) (Army Intelligence Branch). After serving in the Army for two years, he entered the University

of Pittsburgh in 1959 as a teaching assistant in chemistry, became a graduate research fellow the next year, and earned his Ph.D. degree in physical chemistry in 1964.

Presidency at Tennessee State University, 1974-1985

The outstanding accomplishments of Humphries on the national level led the Tennessee Board of Regents to name him as President of Tennessee State University (TSU) in 1974, a position he held until being appointed to lead his alma mater in 1985. While at TSU he demonstrated highly effective administration skills which resulted in improved and expanded academic programs, upgraded faculty, increased enrollment and quality of students, and expanded scholarships and support activities. However, he will likely be remembered most for his bold and tenacious fight for the rights of an historically black university which was located in the same area with an historically white university when he insisted on the predominance of TSU over the University of Tennessee at Nashville (UTN). This ultimately led to the merger of TSU and UTN, with TSU becoming the surviving institution, heralded as one of the fairest and most important desegregation decisions of the twentieth century. The posture and eloquence of Humphries in court is largely held as being responsible for this decision along with the brilliant presentation of attorney Avon Williams and the efforts of the Tennesseans for Justice in Higher Education. Humphries did not initiate the court battle over merger of the two universities, but he inherited it upon becoming president of TSU in 1974. In 1968, after the University of Tennessee had announced plans to build a multimillion-dollar facility for its night school extension center in

Nashville, a young black woman named Rita Sanders charged that such action would perpetuate segregation at TSU and continue the dual system of public higher education in the state. The controversy which ended up in U.S. District Court before Judge Frank Gray in 1968 was known as Sanders v. Ellington, et al. (April 5, 1977). Subsequent plaintiff was Rita Sanders Girer (after marriage) versus the governor of Tennessee who happened to be in office. As president of TSU, Humphries was catapulted into a leading role in the drama. When Governor Blanton asked his reaction to merger, Humphries informed the governor that "he and his colleagues were agreeable to merger-under the Board of Regents, not the University of Tennessee trustees." Humphries and his colleagues contended, and so did Judge Gray, that "the existence and expansion of predominantly white UTN alongside the traditionally black TSU have fostered competition for white students and have thus impeded the dismantling of the dual system." The state was ordered by Judge Gray to merge the two schools into a single institution under the State Board of Regents by July 1, 1980. As a result of Judge Gray's ruling, plans were developed and implemented to merge UTN under TSU, making this the first time that a traditionally white university had been placed under the administration of a traditionally black university. In demanding a unitary system, the judge stated: "It is the purpose of this order to achieve a unitary system and not achieve a merger of existing systems of higher education in Tennessee." Humphries said of this settlement: "If TSU had been a white institution, this never would have happened. UT would not have been invited in here to set up a separate institution.

But now that the judge has ordered a merger, I think it is important for this traditionally black university to have the full opportunity to develop into a major university serving the entire community."

Between 1980 and 1985, Humphries and his staff gave leadership to the merged TSU and provided for UTN and began serving an increasingly larger portion of the Nashville community.

As a result of the astuteness and courage demonstrated in continuous conflict over desegregation at TSU, Humphries achieved a national reputation as a dedicated and brilliant fighter for the cause of the continued existence of HBCUs and opportunities for minorities. It was the knowledge of his leadership in Tennessee which made him seem to many alumni and supporters a desirable candidate for the presidency of FAMU, which had also experienced severe battles to avoid merger or subordination of FAMU to FSU. As Humphries progressed up the leadership ladder and proved himself as a national fighter for HBCUs and for enhanced opportunities for minorities in higher education, he was increasingly invited to membership on boards, commissions, committees and other influential groups at the state, regional and national levels.

With a stern focus on improved education for minorities, he served as External Evaluator of Title III Programs; Minority Representative in Graduate Schools Special Academy of Science; as a member of the Planning Committee of the United Negro College Fund Pre-Medical Program, Fisk University; as a member of the Special Committee on Minority Participation in Graduate and Professional Education; and Chairman of the State Board of Education Advisory Committee

on the Education of Blacks in Florida. While Humphries recognized the importance of diversity in the overall educational process, he never missed an opportunity to encourage and motivate minorities in higher education