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William A. Bootle Dies at 102; Judge in Desegregation Case

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William Augustus Bootle, who as a federal judge in 1961 set in motion a chain of legal decisions that in a single week desegregated the University of Georgia, died on Tuesday at his home in Macon, Ga. He was 102.

Judge Bootle's family announced the death.

Judge Bootle, appointed to the Federal District Court in Georgia by President Dwight D. Eisenhower in 1954, presided over other civil rights cases in the state.

"I think Bootle will always go down in the annals of Southern and civil rights history as one of a handful of progressive-minded, courageous judges who were willing to make pivotal decisions at very key times in the 1960's," said Robert A. Pratt, a professor of history at the University of Georgia and the author of "We Shall Not Be Moved" (University of Georgia, 2002), an account of the university's integration.

The university case, *Holmes v. Danner*, began in late 1960, after two black students, Charlayne Hunter (now the journalist Charlayne Hunter-Gault) and Hamilton E. Holmes, were denied admission. The suit named Walter Danner, the university registrar.

On Jan. 6, 1961, Judge Bootle ruled that the two students were "fully qualified for immediate admission," adding that they "would already have been admitted had it not been for their race and color." Three days later, on Jan. 9, he abruptly stayed his own ruling, giving the university time to appeal.

The students' lawyers, Donald L. Hollowell and Constance Baker Motley, immediately petitioned Judge Elbert P. Tuttle of the United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit, who overturned the stay.

On Jan. 10, the university took its case to Justice Hugo Black of the United States Supreme Court. It hoped for a sympathetic hearing: Justice Black was a former Ku Klux Klan member. But he handed the case to the full court, which upheld Judge Tuttle's ruling.

On Jan. 11, after Mr. Holmes and Ms. Hunter began classes, rioting broke out on campus. The university suspended them, saying it was for their own safety. The next day, Judge Bootle ordered them reinstated.

William Augustus Bootle, called Gus, was born on Aug. 19, 1902, in tiny Round O, S.C., near Walterboro. He earned a bachelor's degree in 1924 from Mercer University in Macon, and a law degree from it in 1925.

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He is survived by two sons, William Augustus Jr., of Warner Robins, Ga., and James, of Atlanta; a daughter, Ann Hall of Macon; six grandchildren; and five great-grandchildren. His wife of 75 years, the former Virginia Childs, died in June.

Judge Bootle was often asked why he subverted his own ruling in the University of Georgia case by granting the stay. He always said it was strictly routine. But in an interview with Dr. Pratt in 2001, he revealed a more considered aim.

"He wanted to get the Fifth Circuit and the U.S. Supreme Court to rule as soon as possible," Dr. Pratt said. "This was all part of a larger calculated strategy."

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