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“TO BLAZE THE TRAIL”: BLACK STUDENT ACTIVISM IN THE EARLY
TWENTIETH CENTURY

By

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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During the early twentieth century, a cadre of black student activists engaged in the fight for the rights and freedoms accorded to them as citizens of the United States. Beginning with their own institutions of higher education, student activists adopted a politics of protest, and sought to engender major campus and curricular reforms. As the student activists of the early twentieth century confronted racial and gender inequality on their campuses, and demanded to be included in campus governance, they raised larger questions about racial progress and black self-determination. Black student activists also protested the social, political, and economic injustices wrought by life in Jim Crow America.

This dissertation addresses a particular set of questions: What did student activism in the early twentieth century look like? What were the issues that politicized and mobilized students to organize? What role did gender play in students’ activism? How did students’ activism change throughout the course of the early twentieth century? What role did students’ see themselves having in the larger struggle for civil rights and freedoms during these years? To answer these questions, my dissertation focuses on the history of early twentieth century student activism at three of the most

prominent southern institutions of black higher education: Fisk University, Spelman College, and Howard University.

By placing both the college campus and black collegians at the center of the story, my work provides a new perspective about the connections between black higher education, student leadership and activism, and the origins of the Civil Rights Movement. Indeed, throughout the early twentieth century, student activists at Fisk, Spelman, and Howard cultivated a tradition of leadership, critical thought, and social activism. As they organized around campus and curricular reforms, as well as larger social, political and economic rights, student activists at Fisk, Spelman, and Howard pioneered many of the non-violent direct-action strategies that would become the hallmark of the modern Civil Rights Movement. The ideas, aspirations, organizations, and leadership of the early twentieth century student activists laid the groundwork for the generation of students who would follow in the 1940s, 50s, 60s, and 70s.

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Introduction

Shortly after noon on Friday December 8, 1905, the Howard University student body gathered in the main hall on campus for the daily chapel exercises. As President John Gordon began to deliver his opening address, he was interrupted by shouts and insults from the audience. Unbeknownst to the bewildered Gordon, the disruption of the chapel exercises had been arranged by the students beforehand to protest the “tyranny” of their “Lilly White” president, and expose the paternalistic practices of the school’s white administration. Gordon’s attempts to quiet the students only agitated them further, as the students continued shouting and hurling their schoolbooks at the presidents with some barely missing his head. The seven hundred students then proceeded to march out of the hall, after announcing that they would strike unless President Gordon announced his immediate resignation.¹

The students’ accusations against the president were serious. The day after the disturbance, the *Washington Post* reported that the student protest had been motivated by the presidents’ racism and prejudiced treatment of the student body and black faculty. According to the *Post*, the students were also outraged by the president’s decision to send his children to white schools rather than Howard, which had been the tradition of the university since its founding, and they cited these as examples of the president’s clear acquiescence to the color line. Howard’s prominent alumni along with members of Washington D.C.’s black community supported the student protest.

Archibald Grimke, a noted black lawyer in the District, spearheaded a local campaign in

¹ “Hissed By Students: Howard Students Hurl Books Toward President,” *The Washington Post*, Saturday, December 9, 1905, 2. Perhaps the most interesting observation by *The Post* was its comment that the Howard students had taken their cue from Russia as they declared their strike against President John Gordon. Most likely, the *Post* was referring to the active student movement in Russia that had been

support of the president's resignation.² Summing up its coverage of the Howard student rebellion, the *Post* concluded that the issues that had prompted the strike were a "clear question of right and wrong," and Gordon was clearly in the wrong.³ With public opinion on the side of the students and Grimke's campaign to have the president dismissed, John Gordon submitted his resignation on December 27, 1905.

The Howard student strike in 1905 was the first recorded mass student protest of the early twentieth century black student movement. It took shape around the president, John Gordon, but at the center of the Howard student's protest were larger questions about the nature and function of black higher education, racial progress, civil rights, black leadership, and self-determination. What did student activism in the early twentieth century look like? What were the issues that politicized and mobilized students to organize? What role did gender play in students' activism? How did students' activism change throughout the course of the early twentieth century? What role did students' see themselves having in the larger struggle for civil rights and freedoms during these years? These are the central questions this dissertation addresses.

This dissertation focuses on the history of student activism at the South's three most prominent institutions of black higher education, Fisk University, Spelman

² Walter Dyson, *Howard University, The Capstone of Negro Education, A History: 1867-1940* (The Graduate School: Howard University, 1941), 64; Zachery R. Williams, *In Search of the Talented Tenth: Howard University Public Intellectuals and the Dilemmas of Race, 1926-1970* (Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 2009), 19. When Gordon became president, he changed the long-standing procedures, which Williams suggests was an attempt to "usurp the power of the Triumvirate, moved to establish one-year terms at Howard."

³ Rayford W. Logan, *History of Howard University: The First Hundred Years, 1867-1967* (New York: New York University, 1969), 146-147; Williams, *In Search of the Talented Tenth*, 19. "Justice for Howard," *The Washington Post*, December 29, 1905, p.6. "The withdrawal of the president, Prof. John Gordon" they reported "makes way for the only logical adjustment, which is the installation of a [N]egro educator in his stead." Although a fierce race for the presidency at Howard ensued, because of a lack of consensus among the Triumvirate, Wilbur Thirkfield—a white Methodist and former president of Gammom Theological Seminary in Atlanta (now the Interdenominational Theological Center)—was chosen, and it would be another twenty-one years before Mordecai Johnson would serve as the first black President of Howard.

College, and Howard University. Student activists at these institutions cultivated a tradition of critical thought and social activism, organized around campus and curricular reforms, fought for economic and political rights, and pioneered many of the non-violent direct-action strategies that would become the hallmark of the modern Civil Rights Movement. The social and political turmoil of the first decades of the twentieth century yielded a nascent black student movement. A generation of black student activists coming of age in the early years of the twentieth century protested wars and campus policies, joined voter registration drives, consumer boycotts, and woman suffrage demonstrations. The ideas, aspirations, and organizations created by these young men and women laid the groundwork for the student activists of the postwar generation. By placing both the college campus and black collegians at the center of the story, my work provides a new perspective about the connections between black higher education, student activism, and the origins of the Civil Rights Movement.

At the turn of the twentieth century, the education revolution that had been taking place in the American south since the end of the Civil War had established higher education as a cornerstone in the struggle for black race advancement and full citizenship rights.⁴ Legally denied the right to education during their enslavement, black Americans saw education as the main vehicle to improve the status of their people.⁵ As historian Jacqueline Jones explains, “Slavery had been a form of intellectual as well as

⁴ For more on the way that black Americans shaped higher education during the post-Civil War era, see especially, Heather Andrea Williams, *Self-Taught: African American Education in Slavery and Freedom* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

⁵ James D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1865-1935*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988); Ronald E Burchart, “‘Outthinking and Outflanking the Owner’s of the World’: A Historiography of the African American Struggle for Education”, *History of Education Quarterly*, 1988, 28 3: 333-366; John Hardin Best, “Education in the Forming of the American South,” *History of Education Quarterly*, 1996, 36 1: 39-51.

physical bondage” and “schooling represented individual and collective defiance to white authority.”⁶ Full economic, social, and political equality required the education and training of a professional leadership class, the “Talented Tenth.”⁷ In the years immediately following the Civil War, black southerners formed a coalition with white missionary aide societies, government officials, and northern philanthropists, and launched a mass campaign for the higher education.⁸ This coalition founded the majority of black colleges and universities between 1865 and 1890, with a dozen established before the ratification of the fourteenth amendment in 1868.⁹ More incredible, by 1899 approximately 2,331 students had already graduated from black colleges and universities.¹⁰

Among the colleges and universities founded in the years following the Civil War, Fisk University in Nashville, Spelman College in Atlanta, and Howard University in Washington, D.C., emerged as the South’s leading centers of black higher education and civil rights activism.¹¹ In all three cases, the newly founded institutions benefitted from their advantageous locations in major southern cities and Union strongholds during and after the Civil War. Freedmen and women along with northern missionaries flocked to Nashville, Atlanta, and Washington, D.C and immediately began the task of

⁶ Jacqueline Jones, *Soldiers of Light and Love: Northern Teachers and Georgia Blacks, 1865-1873*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980, 49.

⁷ The term “Talented Tenth” was first coined in an essay written by Reverend L. Henry Morehouse in 1896, and later popularized and expanded by W.E.B. Du Bois.

⁸ Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South*, see especially Chapter 7 “Training the Apostles of Liberal Culture: Black Higher Education, 1900-1935.”

⁹ Rayford W. Logan, “The Evolution of Private Colleges for Negroes,” *The Journal of Negro Education*, Vol. 27, No. 3 (Summer, 1958), 213.

¹⁰ W.E.B. Du Bois, “The College-Bred Negro: Report of a Social Study Made Under the Direction of Atlanta University: together with the Proceedings of the Fifth Conference for the Study of the Negro Problems, held at Atlanta University, May 29-30, 1900,” (Atlanta, Ga: Atlanta University Press, 1900), 36.

¹¹ A note on terminology, I have chosen to refer to Spelman College by its present day names as a matter of simplification. Spelman was first known as the Atlanta Baptist Female Seminary, then Spelman Seminary until it became Spelman College in 1924.

institution building. Combining a rigorous liberal arts curriculum and religious training, missionary educators sought to help the freedmen and women establish a leadership class that would challenge the prevailing system of political, social, and economic inequality.

The missionary educators who taught at Fisk, Spelman, and Howard believed in the inherent equality of blacks and whites, and aspired to provide black collegians with an education equal to that offered at the best northeastern liberal arts institutions.¹² Students took courses in Latin, Greek, French, mathematics, natural science, natural philosophy, history, English, astronomy, and political science. Black colleges and universities also took on the religious and moral tone of northern white liberal arts colleges, a facet of the foundational years that would become deeply engrained into the institutional and campus culture of most historically black colleges and universities. To improve the mind, morals, and manners of the students, missionary educators also established a tradition of strict regulations that would continue through the late nineteenth and into the early twentieth century. Ultimately, graduates of institutions like Fisk, Spelman, and Howard were to be imbued with proper middle-class Victorian ideals of manhood and womanhood needed for the uplift of their communities. To that end, campus life was structured such that it not only nurtured students' intellect, but also cultivated an appreciation for spiritual, physical, and cultural pursuits—the hallmarks of a respectable leadership class, which they in turn would disseminate amongst the black community.

¹²Aspired here becomes an important term, at least for the late 19th and early twentieth century, as most black colleges and universities, were forced to focus on providing elementary, normal and high school training due to the lack of funding for public schools. This would change in the years after World War One, when college enrollments increased in large part to the creation of a better infrastructure of public education for black youth.

While liberal arts training emerged as the dominant education model, an alternative educational and social philosophy advocated by General Samuel Armstrong, founder and principal of the Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute (later the Hampton Institute) began to gain traction amongst northern philanthropists and southern education reformers. Armstrong founded Hampton in 1868, with financial assistance from the American Missionary Association. The Hampton ideal was based on Armstrong's personal beliefs that the ex-slaves lacked the requisite character and culture to fully engage in civic life. Hampton's work then, according to Armstrong, was to equip the freedmen and women with an elementary education, preparation for careers in the manual, agricultural, and domestic arts, and an appreciation for strict social discipline.

Armstrong's approach to black education was, as James Anderson has described, the "ideological antithesis of the educational and social movement begun by ex-slaves."¹³ Where as the liberal arts institutions were training the next generation of black leadership, who would fight for political and civil equality, Hampton was "deliberately teaching prospective black leaders and educators economic values that were detrimental to the objective economic interests of black workers."¹⁴ Often confused with industrial education, which provided graduates with training in the skilled trades, Hampton's primary purpose was to train a conservative corps of elementary school teachers who exemplified, preached, and accepted the "dignity" of hard manual labor.¹⁵ Armstrong's use of the terms "manual labor" and "industrial

¹³ Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South*, 33.

¹⁴ Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South*, 52-52.

¹⁵ Anderson offers a particularly insightful critique of the Hampton-Tuskegee idea and its relation to the former planter class and the conservative approach to southern Reconstruction. Armstrong, "identified

education” was modeled after the missionary schools his father had established as a missionary in Hawaii during the early nineteenth century.¹⁶ Hampton graduates received none of the necessary training that would prepare them for skilled trades, rather, the focus at Hampton was to train teachers to educate the black masses, with the ultimate goal being the removal of blacks from political life and the preparation of students for a subordinate social, economic, and political role in the New South as unskilled laborers.

Upon Armstrong’s death in 1893, his protégé and star pupil, Booker T. Washington, founder and principal of the Tuskegee Normal Institute in Alabama, became the primary spokesman for the Hampton-Tuskegee idea.¹⁷ Founded in 1881, Tuskegee, much like Hampton, was founded for the purpose of training a generation of black teachers who would spread the gospel of accommodationism and gradualism throughout the South. Tuskegee’s curriculum promoted the ideals of self-help, practical education through industrial training, and the economic advancement of blacks. Backed by the “Tuskegee Machine”—a name given to the coalition of southern whites, northern industrialists turned philanthropists, select members of the black intelligentsia and black

Hampton with the conservative wing of southern reconstructionists who supported new forms of external control over blacks, including disfranchisement, segregation, and civil inequality.” Moreover, Armstrong “expected that the work of adjusting blacks to this social arrangement would be carried out by indigenous black educators, particularly teachers and principals, aided by the Hampton-styled industrial normal schools, state departments of education, local school boards, and northern white philanthropists. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South*, 37.

¹⁶ For more on General Samuel Armstrong’s pedagogical and educational ideology see for example, Robert Francis Engs, *Educating the Disfranchised and Disinherited: Samuel Chapman Armstrong and Hampton Institute, 1839-1893*, (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1999).

¹⁷ Washington was born in 1856 into slavery in Franklin County, Virginia. Washington moved to Malden, West Virginia with his mother and brother after emancipation. In 1872, Washington set out for Hampton Institute, determined to attain secondary schooling. Washington completed Hampton’s three-year course in 1875, which qualified him to be an elementary school teacher. Four years later, Washington returned to Hampton as a teacher, and later as the head of the night school. For more on Washington’s early life and career, see Louis R. Harlan, *Booker T. Washington: Volume 1: The Making of a Black Leader, 1856-1901*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972); Louis R. Harlan, *Booker T. Washington: Volume 2: The Wizard of Tuskegee, 1901-1915*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983).

press—Booker T. Washington and his allies promoted industrial education as a conservative model for racial progress.¹⁸ Indeed, the industrial program elevated economic achievement over political and civil rights. Not surprisingly, Washington’s industrial education proved exceptionally popular among southern whites. With the vast economic resources provided by industrialists and support from the white and black press, the Tuskegee Machine was able to mount an impressive public campaign for their cause.¹⁹

Opposing Washington and the Tuskegee Machine, was a cadre of black and white educators and civil rights advocates who proposed a considerably more radical program of civil rights. Among Washington’s loudest critics was W.E.B. Du Bois, the official opposition leader in what has become known as the “Washington-Du Bois debate”—an ideological disagreement about the nature of racial progress and advancement. Du Bois was critical of the Tuskegee principal’s educational program for its silence on the question of black civil and political rights, arguing that Washington’s brand of racial politics and education represented a terrible compromise between the

¹⁸ The “Tuskegee Machine,” was comprised of such influential men including, Robert C. Ogden, George Foster Peabody, John D. Rockefeller, Jr., William H. Baldwin, Jr., William E. Dodge, George Eastman, Andrew Carnegie—who gave Tuskegee its first major endowment, J.G. Phelps-Stokes, Robert R. Moton, W.T.B. Williams, Isaac Fisher, W.J. Edwards, William Holtzclaw, the *Boston Colored Citizen*, *Alexander’s Magazine*, and the *New York Age*.

¹⁹ Washington, himself was a gifted orator, who had risen to national and international fame after his famous 1895 address at the Atlanta Exposition. Washington used his fame to cultivate important relationships with white politicians including President William McKinley and President Theodore Roosevelt. Recent scholarship has acknowledge that Washington’s public persona differed greatly from the role he played behind the scenes to promote racial progress including case litigation and civil rights initiatives. As Susan D. Carle has explained, Washington “sought to reassure powerful and wealthy whites of their continuing racial superiority as a means of manipulating their patrician impulses” while he adopted a “race-based, interest-group, power-brokering model of African-American progress under a capitalist economic system.” An “underlying political model” that “often clashed with broader justice-seeking goals.” Susan D. Carle, *Defining the Struggle: National Organizing for Racial Justice, 1880-1915*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 78.

conservative South, the industrial North, and the southern black working class.²⁰ Du Bois, on the other hand maintained that racial progress could not be achieved without a respectable class of educated race leaders or the “Talented Tenth”—trained in the arts and sciences, who would lead the charge for political *and* economic equality. Thus, despite Booker T. Washington’s appeal among northern white philanthropists and conservative white southerners, the majority of the black populace strongly supported the Talented Tenth/liberal arts education model.

Liberal arts institutions like Fisk, Spelman, and Howard also tended to be more progressive in their approach to the higher education of black women. Scholars like Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham and Stephanie Shaw in particular, have demonstrated that educated black women were integral to the Talented Tenth framework. Late nineteenth and early twentieth century conceptions of race saw the uplift of black Americans intrinsically tied to the progress of black women. Within this strategy for race advancement, it was believed that as black women and thus, black Americans demonstrated respectable middle-class values, they would be found to be deserving of the rights and responsibilities of full citizenship rights. Professionally, college women were trained for service-oriented careers as teachers, nurses, and social workers—careers, which provided graduates with greater economic opportunities and advancement. They also underwent rigorous cultural and moral instruction in Victorian ideals of respectability—temperance, thrift, piety, and purity—and in turn were to disseminate these values amongst the black masses.²¹ Women’s education was thus

²⁰ W.E.B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, (New York: Barnes and Nobles Classics), 41

²¹ Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: the Woman’s Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), Stephanie J. Shaw, *What a Woman Ought to be and to do: Black Professional Women Workers during the Jim Crow Era*, (Chicago:

structured so that college women would be effective guardians over the domestic sphere as wives and mothers, and serve as public representatives of black respectability and progress.

The politics of respectability, as coined by Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, did much to empower black men and women, facilitated race pride, and subverted notions of black immorality, but achieved little in the way of true advancement in the way of civil rights. During the first decade of the twentieth century, race leaders began to turn to a politics of protest that engaged in direct confrontation with the system of white repression and inequality. Black college students, frustrated by their lack of power within their academic institutions were particularly drawn to the more militant approach to race advancement. Indeed, growing signs of student discontent began around 1915 and coincided with the rise of the more militant New Negro political movement. A number of factors contributed to this shift in black political and racial consciousness including black migration, international student and revolutionary movements, the battle for women's suffrage and the growth of the radical black press.²²

The late 1910s also saw an increase in the number of racially militant political organizations among blacks, which multiplied at least in part because the their experience and participation in the First World War generated much disillusionment

University of Chicago Press, 1996), Kevin Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

²² The black press and New Negro periodicals played an important role in the dissemination of ideas to college students. The magazines and periodicals of the New Negro era featured the artwork and literature of Renaissance artists and intellectuals. The black press also helped to further the cause of college and university students, and gave special attention to their struggles, as their strife on the college campuses represented a microcosm of larger racial issues. The many campus outbursts that occurred during this period were covered extensively in the black magazines and periodicals including Du Bois' *Crisis*, Sociologist Charles S. Johnson's *The Opportunity*, and A. Philip Randolph and Chandler Owen's *The Messenger*. For more on the role of the black press and the early twentieth century black freedom struggle see especially, William G. Jordan, *Black Newspapers and America's War for Democracy, 1914-1920*.

among black Americans. Indeed, the experience of the First World War was an important factor in the radicalization of the black student population. A number of students had served in the war and had experienced first-hand the limits of American democracy. Historian Chad L. Williams has argued the important role that black veterans had in shaping the post-war politics. More than a rhetorical or metaphorical symbol of New Negro militancy, he maintains the “activism and racial militancy of black veterans fundamentally shaped the historical development and ideological diversity of the New Negro movement.” Service imbued veterans with a “heightened racial, political, gender and diasporic consciousness, which translated into a commitment to challenge the strictures of racial inequality during the postwar period.”²³

The political culture of the years surrounding the First World War provided an ideal climate to nurture a nascent student movement. As “a ‘new’ generation of black Americans emerged,” Lester C. Lamon argues, black college campuses became “incubators of discontent.”²⁴ As V.P. Franklin has explained, the student protests of the New Negro era reflected the “cognitive dissonance collegians experienced when they left the real world of the ‘New Negro’ and entered the Victorian environment maintained on campus by white and black administrators.”²⁵ While conflicts over the meaning and nature of black higher education had occurred since the 1880s, by the

²³ Chad L. Williams, “Vanguards of The New Negro: African American Veterans and Post-World War I Racial Militancy,” *Journal of African American History*, 92 3 (Summer, 2007). 347-370.

²⁴ Lamon, “The Black Community in Nashville” p.255

²⁵ V.P. Franklin, “Introduction: African American Student Activism in the 20th Century,” *The Journal of African American History*, 88 2, The History of Black student Activism, (Spring, 2003):105.

1920s, students along with faculty and alumni began to openly protest the second-class education offered in black institutions of higher education.²⁶

Other Scholars have offered different explanations of the origins and meaning of the student strikes that erupted across the campuses of black colleges and universities in the 1920s. According to Raymond Wolters, “the wave of rebellion that engulfed most of the leading black colleges of the 1920s was one of the most significant aspects of the New Negro protest movement.”²⁷ “The black college rebels of the 1920s,” Wolters argues, “worked thoughtfully and persistently to raise the academic standards of their colleges to the level of their white counterparts.”²⁸ Martin Summers’ on the other hand argues that we consider that the “unrest among black students should be situated within the emergent youth culture of the 1920s,” rather than solely in the context of the New Negro Movement. In his analysis of the student rebellions at Fisk and Howard Universities in 1925, Summers explains that the students were protesting the bourgeois conventions of their parents’ generation through “the realms of jazz culture”, which he explains the students demands for more lenient dress codes, a lift on the ban of playing, listening, and dancing to blues and jazz, and a relaxation of the rules that governed socializing between college men and women.²⁹ Focusing solely on what student activism meant for college men, Summers argues that “at stake for younger middle-class blacks in these confining environments was the desire and ability to control their own bodies, the freedom to consumer and experience bodily pleasure without fear of

²⁶ Wolters, *The New Negro on Campus*, p. 4-16. Fisk University, Howard University, Tuskegee, Hampton Institute, Florida A&M University, Lincoln Universities, and Wilberforce University. Lincoln Universities refers to Lincoln Universities located in Missouri and Pennsylvania

²⁷ Raymond Wolters, *The New Negro on Campus: Black College Rebellions of the 1920s* (Princeton University Press, 1975), 17.

²⁸ Wolters, *The New Negro on Campus*, 348.

²⁹ Wolters, *The New Negro on Campus*, 243.

being punished.”³⁰ At the heart of students’ discontent, according to Martin Summers, was an ideological conflict between the students and administrative bodies over changing ideals of masculinity.

While both Wolters and Summers make important arguments about the politicization of black collegians in the New Negro era, their work leaves open important questions about how the political and cultural changes of the militant New Negro movement and youth culture affected female students. Moreover, both historians focus almost exclusively on the student strikes, and thus miss the diversity of students’ activism during these years. Indeed The New Negro Student Movement of the 1920s organized around a wide range of issues, including anti-war and anti-militarism efforts, anti-imperialism, as well as labor rights, feminism, and race relations. For example, in the early 1920s, black student activists founded the first national black student organization—the American Federation of Negro Students (AFNS). The AFNS was dedicated to facilitating cooperation among black college students, stimulating race pride, encouraging education and culture among black Americans, and fighting for social, economic, and political equality. Black student activists were also involved in the progressive national and international student movement that emerged following the First World War, attending conferences and occupying leadership positions in several prominent student organizations including the National Student Forum, the League for Industrial Democracy, and the Student Volunteer Movement.

A re-evaluation of the New Negro Student Movement also reveals the central role that college women played in these uprisings. Much of the scholarship on the New Negro era is silent about the role of young college women in these events and, we know

³⁰ Wolters, *The New Negro on Campus*, 244.

almost nothing about the specific ideas and politics these college-aged women embraced. Yet, many college-aged black women were drawn to the militant rhetoric of New Negro to re-imagine their roles within the movement. But college women were an important constituency and contributed greatly to intellectual, social, and political life on black college and university campuses; and through their participation in student organizations and as members of the editorial boards of the student newspapers, college women helped shape campuses discourse. Moreover, by focusing on the disciplinary records, activities, and writings, of college women, my dissertation reveals how these students deployed New Negro politics to achieve greater autonomy and self-determination on campus.³¹

Likewise, college women's activism in the 1920s challenges the prevailing scholarship on black women's history of the era. Scholars like Nikki Brown and Deborah Grey White argue that black women, and more specifically, black clubwomen's public and political presence was subordinated by the emergence of the male-dominated organizations of the New Negro era.³² Similarly, in *Prove it On Me: New Negroes, Sex, and Popular Culture in the 1920s*, Erin D. Chapman asks whether "women, especially African American women, really had any more social, political, or

³¹ For example: S.A. Jones, Jr., "Opinions of Students," *The Scroll*. Vol. 33, No. 3, Atlanta University Published and Printed Materials, Box 24, Folder 36, p. 1.

³¹ Jennie L. Douglas, "Students Loyalties," *The Scroll*, Vol.33, No. 3, Atlanta University Published and Printed Materials, Box 24, Folder 36, p.17. Grace Towns, "The Student Interracial Forum", *The Scroll*, Vol. 32, No. 1, April, 1927 p.8-9

³² Mia Bay, *To Tell the Truth Freely: The Life of Ida B. Wells*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 2009); Nikki Brown, *Private Politics & Public Voices: Black Women's Activism from World War I to the New Deal*, Indiana University Press, 2006. Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1880-1920*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Michele Mitchell, *Righteous Propagation: African Americans and the Politics of Racial Destiny After Reconstruction*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Deborah Gray White, *Too Heavy a Load: Black Women in Defense of Themselves, 1894-1994* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999); Victoria W. Wolcott, *Remaking Respectability: African American Women in Interwar Detroit*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

economic power than they had” in the previous era. According to Chapman, organizations like the National Urban League and NAACP set the agenda for race advancement and took over and professionalized the social and civic services that black women had provided throughout much of the early twentieth century.³³ As black men also set the agenda for racial advancement, Chapman argues they also defined the ideal New Negro woman in terms of race motherhood. New Negro women, as Chapman explains were to embody the “ideals of womanly self-sacrifice and deference to male authority” for the purposes of establishing “black patriarchy as a primary goal of racial advancement.”³⁴

College women, however, employed a different definition of New Negro womanhood, one that integrated the changing ideals of femininity associated with the emergence of the New Woman and militant politics of the New Negro. Just as definitions of black masculinity were changing, so too did ideals of femininity, which also underwent a major shift during the late teens and twenties—largely due to the emergence of the New Woman. The New Woman of the 1920s represented a re-thinking of femininity that challenged women’s gender roles and ideas regarding beauty, fashion, sexuality and politics. She was college educated, self-confident, and fashionably contemporary in her dress and appearance; she espoused feminist ideals and championed equal rights for women.³⁵ College women consumed the powerful images of race pride and self-determination, exemplified in the rhetoric of New Negro as well

³³ Erin D. Chapman, *Prove it On Me: New Negroes, Sex, and Popular Culture in the 1920s*, p. 11.

³⁴ Chapman, *Prove it On Me*, 17.

³⁵ Nancy F. Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989), p. 11-50.

as the images of the New Woman to help them to reshape their views about themselves and their desires for greater autonomy.

In defining New Negro womanhood in this way, this dissertation engages with the recent “renaissance” in New Negro Studies, which seeks to challenge previously established understandings of the New Negro “movement.”³⁶ By incorporating such factors as class, gender, and sexual orientation into their analyses, historians such as Davarian Baldwin, Minkah Makalani, Chad Williams, and Treva Lindsey have demonstrated that the New Negro era constituted a broad—temporally, geographically, politically, culturally, and ideological—period in the history of black America.³⁷ Treva Lindsey’s exploration of Howard University’s first Dean of Women, Lucy Slowe as a model of New Negro womanhood is especially important in advancing a new understanding of the complexity of black womanhood in the New Negro era. Lindsey’s definition of New Negro womanhood as a “combination and reimagination of ideas from rhetoric about the New Woman and the New Negro” spoke to black women’s efforts to achieve both racial and gender equality. According to Lindsey, Lucy Slowe “embraced a form of New Negro womanhood as a conduit to the ‘modern world,’” and more specifically to break down intraracial and institutionalized gender ideologies at Howard.

The history of black higher education in the early twentieth century has generated a vast literature that includes debates about curriculum, the role of white philanthropy, and the institutional histories of Fisk, Spelman, and Howard. Over the

³⁶ Davarian L. Baldwin and Minkah Makalani, eds, *Escape from New York: The New Negro Renaissance Beyond Harlem*, University of Minnesota Press, 2013.

³⁷ See for example, Chapman, *Prove It On Me*.

course of the early twentieth century, Fisk, Spelman, and Howard housed some of the most brilliant minds in academia including Alain Locke, E. Franklin Frazier, Ralph Bunche, Abram Harris, Clarence Bacote, Benjamin Brawley, among many others.³⁸ As such much of the scholarship on black higher education during this period has also focused on their intellectual legacy and scholarship. Yet, we know very little about the students themselves. When we shift our focus away from the scholars at these preeminent institutions and onto the students we find a dynamic, politically, and socially conscious student body who agitated for campus reforms, and were active within their local university communities as well as within national and international organizations.

Students generated a number of sources including student newspapers, records of student organizations, and correspondence with faculty and administrators. Student writings reveal the world of black collegiate culture, along with student organizing and activism, the issues, ideals, and aspirations of black college men and women in the early twentieth century. Student newspapers in particular represent an important body of writing on students' political thought and the issues they considered noteworthy. Black collegians were particularly attuned to the activities of their peers—both black and white—and they dedicated a significant amount of space to student issues. Also noteworthy is the cover local, national and international subjects received. Students

³⁸ See for example: David Levering Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: The Fight for Equality and the American Century, 1919-1963*, (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2000); Jonathan Scott Holloway, *Confronting the Veil: Abram Harris Jr., E. Franklin Frazier, and Ralph Bunche, 1919-1941*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Patrick J. Gilpin and Marybeth Gasman, *Charles S. Johnson: Leadership Beyond the Veil in the Age of Jim Crow*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003); Nikhil Pal Singh, *Black is a Country*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2004); Francille Rusan Wilson, *The Segregated Scholars: Black Social Scientists and the Creation of Black Labor Studies, 1890-1950*, (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006); Williams, *In Search of the Talented Tenth* (2009).

offered their opinions on a wide range of issues including contemporary political debates, and strategies for race advancement. Moreover, student newspapers created a discursive space for black collegians to create a collective consciousness, as student newspapers were widely read and circulated in the black collegiate community.

Administrative records, including presidential papers are equally important in constructing portraits of campus life. Exchanges between administrators, parents, faculty, and students offer clear examples of the ways that missionary paternalism operated within black colleges. Of particular importance are the disciplinary records. Most student resistance did not occur in the form of mass student demonstrations, but rather, by small individual acts of defiance that in the aggregate lead to larger policy changes and campus reforms.

Throughout the early twentieth century, the press—black and white, local and national—had an important role in the dissemination and framing of student issues to the public. The press’ attention to student demonstrations and activities could serve to either legitimize or delegitimize student concerns. The student strike at Fisk, for example, shifted from a local issue to a national one, when Fisk alumnus and sociologist editor of the NAACP’s *Crisis* launched a national media campaign giving the students’ complaints greater attention and legitimacy.³⁹

This dissertation begins with a discussion of how higher education became a central component of black Americans’ early twentieth century movement for civil rights. As the “future leaders of the race,” black collegians were expected to engender

³⁹The Fisk Herald re-printed Du Bois’s editorial in the *Crisis*. W.E.B. Du Bois, “Editorial”, *The Fisk Herald*, Vol.33 No. 1, 1924, 3.

the politics of respectability, race pride, and maintain a strict adherence to the gender and class aesthetics of Victorian reform culture. Educators at Fisk, Spelman, and Howard believed in the idea of that both the cultural and built environment were essential to the project of student uplift. As such educators sought to create an ideal college community and campus environment that would both acculturate and prepare students for their future roles as members of the “Talented Tenth”—an educated class of men and women who would lead the struggle for race advancement. Educators placed strict rules on students’ social activities and dress—measures to protect the virtue and chastity of college women and to imbue respectable manhood into male collegians. Extra-curricular activities and student groups also formed an important part of educating the Talented Tenth as students were expected to develop the leadership skills and training they were expected to demonstrate after graduation.

By the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, an active student culture had developed at Fisk, Spelman, and Howard. The proliferation of student organizations and groups led many students to seek greater control and autonomy in areas affecting student life. The opposition they faced from paternalistic and maternalistic educators, who were unwilling to grant students such privileges, led students to question the efficacy of the politics of respectability as a model for race advancement. Chapter 2 turns to a discussion of the “Howard Renaissance,” as a transformative period in the years immediately before the First World War. As students at Howard sought to create a more progressive collegiate culture they adopted a protest style of politics to advance their causes. Howard University offered comparable advantages over Fisk and Spelman, namely a progressive black faculty that supported student initiatives—including the

formation of a student government, a campus NAACP chapter, and Greek letter societies. Moreover, the university's location in Washington, D.C., where many of black America's leading civil rights activists congregated as well as major political events of the decade played out including the controversial election of 1912, the Woman Suffrage Movement, and Suffrage March on Washington in 1913 provided Howard students with the opportunity to directly participate in the new protest strategy for race advancement.

America's entry into the First World War marked another important moment in the early twentieth century student activism. As black Americans were mobilized for the war effort, the contradictions between fighting for freedom and democracy abroad while start racial inequality at home motivated students' activism during these years. Chapter 3 looks at the ways in which the war engaged black collegians in the fight for their own liberty. Students at Fisk, Spelman, and Howard were essential to the black American war effort. College men and Fisk and Howard organized a nation-wide student movement to establish a training camp for black officers, and when the government called upon black college men to enlist in the new Students Army Training Corps, students again responded in numbers ready to serve. Patriotism, civic duty, and the hopes that their service would translate into full citizenship rights motivated black college men's military support, despite larger questions about whether black Americans should service a country that failed to extend to them basic civil freedoms. Similarly, black college women believed that through their wartime service on the domestic front they too were helping to break down the gendered and racial proscriptions that limited their access to full citizenship rights.

Chapter 4 turns to a discussion of the post-WWI. The militant post-war black politics and the changing social and cultural mores of the 1920s, created a surge in student activism that had lasting effects. Disillusionment with the First World War's failure to translate into concrete changes in black civil rights, along with the rise of youth and consumer cultures and the attendant changes in gender norms simultaneously animated students' activism. Students organized on campus, within national and international organizations—including founding the American Federation of Negro Students--the first national black student organization. Collectively, the New Negro Student Movement organized around a core set of concerns, including the detrimental impact of white paternalism and racism in black higher education, academic freedom, curricular reform, the modernization of campus policies and regulations, and student government. Through both individual and collective acts of resistance and protests, students at Fisk, Spelman, and Howard initiated a period of reform unprecedented in black higher education.

The success of the early 1920s New Negro Student Movement resulted in the liberalization of college rules and reforms, dramatically altering black collegiate life. As a result, the cohort of black collegians who entered college in the late 1920s came already politicized and radicalized that with the expectations that they were entitled to basic student and academic freedoms. As life on campus greatly improved, student activists in the late 1920s and early 1930s turned their focus towards the pressing issues of the day, including the rising economic crisis brought about by the Depression, a new threat of war in Europe, and the continuing battle for civil rights and freedoms.

Chapter 1
Educating the Talented Tenth: Black Collegiate Culture in the Early Twentieth Century, 1900-1915

Introduction

“I am not discouraged with our present condition, nor am I hopeless of the future” wrote Howard University student Charles L. Cooper in an article titled “Higher Education the Only Salvation for the Negro,” printed in the Howard *University Journal*. “I believe that education ... is the bulwark of our civil and political liberty, without which in a republic like this no man can be free.” Writing under the title, “Higher Education the Only Salvation for the Negro,” Cooper explained that higher education offered the best, and perhaps the only remedy, for black inequality. The realities of legal segregation, disfranchisement, and increasing anti-black violence had a sobering effect on black youth of the early twentieth century. Still, Charles Cooper, like most black collegians of his generation, was convinced that advancement and equality was possible, and that higher education was crucial to this endeavor. Cooper and his cohort believed “that upon the shoulders of the youth of this generation rests the mantle of grave responsibility” to “demonstrate to the world that in American manhood there is no color line, and in matters of citizenship there should be absolutely no distinction.”⁴⁰ Indeed, black collegians were convinced that because of their training and advantages “college men and women owe[d] it to their people to endeavor to lift them out of the mire.”⁴¹

By the time Charles Cooper’s article was published in 1908, the idea that the advancement of black Americans rested in the hands of an educated professional class

⁴⁰ Charles L. Cooper, “Higher Education the Only Salvation for the Negro,” *Howard University Journal*, Vol.5 No.14, April 25, 1908, 3-5.

⁴¹ Students devoted many pages in their newspapers to the subject of duty and responsibility. For example, in an editorial in the *Fisk Herald* one student wrote “the college man and woman owe it to their people to endeavor to lift them out of the mire, by teaching them their duty to themselves; their duty to society and their duty to the state; and everyone should go forth with this desire and intention. Many are prone to look down on the people who have not had so many advantages as themselves. The man who does this is doomed to failure in the beginning. His is the duty to lift up and not pull down; to comfort and not to annoy; his is the task to help in promoting human happiness in general.” *Fisk Herald* Vol. XXVII No.3, May 1910, 6.

was part of a black civil rights strategy that would come to dominate the early twentieth century race ideology. Cooper of course, was referring to the idea of the “Talented Tenth,” popularized by sociologist and civil rights activist W.E.B. Du Bois. Du Bois contended that the collective good of the race depended on a professional class who would uplift the masses.⁴² In his works, the emerging civil rights activist articulated a strategy for achieving full citizenship rights that focused on black collegians, their education and training. Published in a series of influential writings—beginning with “The College-Bred Negro” (1900) *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), and finally crystalizing in his article titled “Talented Tenth” (1903), Du Bois’ ideas found a wide audience. At the heart of Du Bois’ writings, was the idea that higher education was the key to black American’s struggle for freedom.⁴³ This top-down strategy operated on the assumption that as the educated leadership class advanced they would rise and pull “all that are worth the saving up to their vantage ground.” According to, Du Bois, “the Negro race, like all races, is going to be saved by its exceptional men”—the Talented Tenth.⁴⁴

Du Bois believed that the creation of well-educated leadership class, or Talented Tenth, was a crucial step in any quest for full citizenship rights for black Americans. Du Bois believed that the acquisition of culture and character was the purpose of higher education, which he described as “that whole system of human training within and

⁴² As Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham has so succinctly stated, “The Talented Tenth symbolized the best and the brightest in all societies, African Americans not exempted.” Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women’s Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1994), 20.

⁴³ Kevin K. Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press), 1996, 1.

⁴⁴ W.E.B. Du Bois, “The Talented Tenth”, in *The Negro Problem: A Series of Articles by Representative American Negroes of Today*, Booker T. Washington ed. (New York: J. Pott & Company, 1903), 33.

without the school house walls, which molds and develops men.”⁴⁵ And while he supported education for the black masses, Du Bois argued, “the problem of education, then among Negroes, must first of all deal with the Talented Tenth.”⁴⁶ For any real progress to occur, a select group of black Americans first needed to accrue social and cultural capital that they could disperse to the masses—through a liberal arts education.⁴⁷ The Talented Tenth would then return to their communities as embodiments of true manhood and womanhood to teach in schools, establish businesses, and build institutions to serve the black community. And finally, with economic independence and political parity all the rights of citizenship would follow.

Du Bois based his arguments on research he had collected about the occupations and activities of approximately 1750 college educated men and women who graduated between 1826 and 1900 from top black liberal arts institutions like Fisk University, Spelman College, and Howard University.⁴⁸ The graduates of these schools Du Bois argued “illustrated vividly” that “College-bred Negroes” were exactly as they “ought to be, the group leader, the man who sets the ideals of the community where he lives, and directs its thoughts and heads its social movements.”⁴⁹ The college-educated men and women in Du Bois’ study were actively engaged in the process of race advancement through philanthropic work, social reform, political activity and public service. For Du

⁴⁵ Du Bois, “The Talented Tenth”, 58.

⁴⁶ Du Bois, “The Talented Tenth”, 33.

⁴⁷ In both the *Souls of Black Folk* and his essay on the “Talented Tenth,” Du Bois makes a strong argument that race progress was dependent on a strong education system that included manual arts and industrial training, but argued that in order for these schools to exist, they would require teachers, the graduates of liberal arts institutions.

⁴⁸ Du Bois’ study gathered statistics on approximately 2300 college-educated men and women. 1750 were graduates of black institutions, the others from predominantly white universities and colleges. W.E.B. Du Bois, *The College-Bred Negro: Report of a Social Study Made Under the Direction of Atlanta University; Together With the Fifth Conference For the Study of the Negro Problems, held at Atlanta University, May 29-30, 1900* (Atlanta, Ga.: Atlanta University Press, 1900), 37.

⁴⁹ Du Bois, *The College-Bred Negro*, 65.

Bois, then, the path forward was clear. In order for true progress to occur black Americans had to continue to pursue a strategy that placed “the best and most capable of their youth” in “the colleges and universities of the land.”⁵⁰

In the years before the First World War, Du Bois’ ideas gained serious traction among members of the black aspiring and middle classes who sought a path for equal rights. As a strategy for race advancement, the Talented Tenth model was particularly appealing to ambitious blacks because it emphasized personal advancement through higher education as a vehicle for race empowerment. The cultural capital a liberal arts education afforded was highly attractive to black youth who come of age in the Jim Crow South—amid pseudo-scientific claims of black cultural inferiority and rapidly diminishing civil, economic and social rights. For them, a liberal arts education not only communicated academic achievement, but also insured college graduates a secure place within the black middle class.

This chapter explores how higher education became central to black Americans’ early twentieth century movement for civil rights. The idea of a Talented Tenth as an educated class of women and men who would lead the struggle in race advancement and uplift formed the core of black higher education and shaped collegiate culture. Fisk University, Spelman College, and Howard University were leading institutions in black higher education. Administrators at these schools promoted a curriculum to train the next generation of black leadership. Education for the head, heart, and hand was the guiding philosophy at these schools—a holistic pedagogy that not only nurtured students’ intellect, but also engendered among black collegians a sense of race pride,

⁵⁰ Du Bois, “The Talented Tenth”, 45.

and called for students to strictly adhere to the gender and class aesthetics of Victorian reform culture.

Black students were indispensable to the larger civil rights project. Without the students' compliance or willingness to participate in the education and acculturation process, there would be no Talented Tenth. Beyond the personal gains a higher education afforded them, black collegians understood that their education had a higher mission and they were expected to use their educational advantages for the betterment of the race. Students at all three institutions labored to distinguish themselves as worthy members of the Talented Tenth. They admonished their peers who failed to conduct themselves in accordance with the ideals of "true womanhood" and "true manhood," and similarly chastised those peers who did not engage in their college's various extra-curricular activities.

By the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, an active student culture had developed at Fisk, Spelman, and Howard. College men and women sought opportunities to develop and refine their leadership skills, and organized student groups and clubs that would facilitate such training. Religious groups focused on issues of temperance, chastity, and piety, while secular organizations such as literary and debating societies afforded students and opportunity to discuss the important political, economic, social and cultural issues of the day. Meanwhile, student journalism also flourished in the first decade and a half of the twentieth century, and showcased student politics and ideas on a range of issues. There were limits however, to students' belief in power of the politics of respectability as a means for advancing the race. Beginning right on campus, students saw first-hand that the cultural capital they had accumulated

had little value or practical power; as educators were reluctant to approve student requests to be more involved in issues affecting student life, school policies or governance.

The College Campus and the Aesthetics of Black Higher Education

In the years before the First World War, black institutions of higher education had one singular goal: “the elevation of the Negro race.” While most white educators at black liberal arts institutions believed in the intellectual equality of blacks and whites, they were of the opinion that it was lack of character and cultural training that had prevented the advancement of black Americans. These same educators also believed that whatever cultural deficiencies black collegians may have had before their enrollment, they could mold the young men and women in their charge into respectable models of middle-class deportment. Educators at black colleges and universities, like many of their reform-minded contemporaries, believed in the transformative powers of a properly designed environment. Creating an ideal collegiate culture was thus central to training the Talented Tenth and educators deliberately designed a collegiate culture and campus environment that would both uplift students and prepare them for their future race work. The rules of middle-class respectability permeated all aspects of black collegiate life, which trained students in the Victorian ideals of thrift, industry, piety, chastity, self-reliance, and discipline. From the built environment to social and cultural training students who attended Fisk, Spelman, and Howard in the early twentieth century went through an intensive program of acculturation that integrated mental, moral and manual instruction.

On arriving at the campuses of Fisk, Spelman, and Howard, aspiring members of the Talented Tenth entered spaces constructed specifically for their education and uplift. School officials in the early twentieth century subscribed to a Victorian ideal of aesthetic reform, which held that both the cultural and built environment had an important role to play in project of student uplift. According to architectural historian Peter Turner, the early twentieth century American college campuses were “self-contained” communities, in which architectural design served as an “expression of education and social ideals.”⁵¹ Like other educators, university officials at Fisk, Spelman, and Howard placed great emphasis on landscaping and the architectural design of the buildings to ensure that their campuses projected the image of refinement, virtue, progress, and ordered discipline that they sought to inspire in their students.⁵² Achieving the desired architectural results was particularly difficult for black colleges. Because funding for black higher education was sparse, the founders of Fisk, Spelman, and Howard had little choice in the locations for their schools. All three were located on the outskirts of the cities—namely Nashville, Atlanta, and Washington, D.C., respectively. To create the idyllic campuses they envisioned, educators at Fisk, Spelman, and Howard engaged in extensive campus construction and revitalization efforts.

⁵¹ Paul Venable Turner, *Campus: An American Planning Tradition*, The MIT Press, 1984, p.4

⁵² In their quest to elevate the character of students, educators had to counter a dominant visual culture that included a set of assumptions about black bodies, black culture, and black institutions. As Kenrick Ian Grandison has noted in his work on the landscape architecture of black colleges, by cultivating an idyllic educational setting, educators sought to disassociate students from the negative stereotypes. For example, in the late 19 and early 20th century, most black residential areas were thought to be slums riddled with crime, vice, disease, and unsanitary conditions. The black college campus thus performed a particularly important purpose as a counter to these negative depictions, and instead served as the architectural manifestation of the middle class values that students would acquire. For further discussion on the landscape architecture of black colleges in the post-bellum South, see Kenrick Ian Grandison, “Negotiated Space: The Black College Campus as a Cultural Record of Postbellum America,” *American Quarterly*: 51 3 (1999):529-579.

Founded in 1865 under the auspices of the American Missionary Association (AMA), Fisk University remains one of the oldest of the historically black colleges and universities. In 1865, Reverend Edward P. Smith, and Erastus M. Cravath were instructed by the AMA to establish a school for the freedmen and women of Nashville. With the assistance of John Ogden, the Superintendent of Education for the Freedmen's Bureau, and General Clinton B. Fisk, assistant commissioner of the Freedmen's Bureau for Tennessee and Kentucky—for whom the school was named—the Fisk School was opened on January 9, 1886. Within one month of opening, the Fisk School had enrolled five hundred students attending the day school and an addition one hundred students in the night class. By the end of 1866, one thousand students attended the Fisk School daily.⁵³ The Fisk School was originally located in government buildings outside of Nashville, known at the time as the Railroad Hospital. The buildings had formerly been used to house Union soldiers and were well suited for the purpose of the school. While the location was ideal, the buildings were in such disrepair that none was fit for the school's use.⁵⁴ And as enrollments continued to rise throughout the late 1860s, the buildings quickly fell into disrepair and a new site was needed to continue the work of the University.

In 1871, the founders began an extensive search for a permanent site for Fisk. When officials from Fisk selected Fort Gillam as the permanent site for the university—a thirty-five acre tract of land, approximately one mile northwest of Nashville's city

⁵³ Fisk University historian, Joe M. Richardson notes that in the early years, students attending the Fisk School ranged from ages seven to seventy. The majority of the younger students attended during the day, while the adults attending night classes after work. Joe M. Richardson, *A History of Fisk University, 1865-1946* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1980), 1-12.

⁵⁴ Fisk University, *History, Building and Site, and Services of Dedication, at Nashville, Tennessee, January 1*, (New York: Published for the Trustees of Fisk University, 1876), 6-9.

center. The site of the new Fisk University was located on an elevated plateau, which afforded unobstructed views from all sides. More importantly, for the purposes of the administrators, the relatively undeveloped land allowed them to design a campus specifically for the “enlightenment and elevation” of their students. Construction on Fisk University’s campus lasted almost thirty years, and between 1871 and 1900, a total of eight buildings were erected. Construction for Jubilee Hall, the first building on the new campus began on January 1, 1873 and was completed three years later. A particular source of pride for both students and faculty, the total construction cost of \$100,000.00 was raised entirely by the famous Fisk Jubilee Singers, who had traveled throughout the United States and Europe performing concerts in support of the University.⁵⁵

At six stories high, Jubilee Hall pointed directly towards the capitol of Nashville, offering a view of the city on one side and forested scenery from the other. The “massive proportions” of Jubilee Hall, including its pressed brick, and stone trimmings, and large black walnut front door with bronze trimmings were striking to students and visitors to the campus, alike. Equally impressive as the outside, Jubilee Hall’s interior was furnished with all the modern comforts and conveniences including water, gas, and steam heating—each of the 120 rooms had a radiator.⁵⁶ The largest and most beautiful building on Fisk’s campus, Jubilee Hall was also an impressive monument that stood as the embodiment of race progress and the virtues of self-help and self-reliance that black collegiate life was meant to cultivate and reinforce.

⁵⁵ Aside from financial aid provided by the American Missionary Association, the Fisk Jubilee Singers were the single most important source of funding for Fisk in the early years.

⁵⁶ Fisk University, *History, Building and Site, and Services of Dedication*, 8-9.



Figure 1. Fisk University—Jubilee Hall, ca. 1900.

Spelman and Howard faced similar structural problems in their early years. Founded in 1881 by Sophia Packard and Harriet Giles, of the Women's American Baptist Home Mission Society, Spelman's early days of learning were conducted in the basement of the Friendship Baptist Church in Atlanta.⁵⁷ Spelman opened its doors on Monday, April 11, 1881. Eleven students attended the first day and steadily increased to eighty by the time the school closed for the summer on July 15, 1881. The basement school, as Spelman was called during the early days was poorly equipped to handle the

⁵⁷ Packard and Giles were among the founding members of the Women's American Baptist Home Mission Society, an auxiliary to the American Baptist Home Mission Society, which had been involved in building mission schools since the early 1830s. In her history of Spelman College, Florence Read provides a detailed account of the early steps taken by Packard and Giles to establish their missionary school for the young black women of Atlanta. Florence M. Read, *The Story of Spelman College*, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1961), 31-41.

ever-growing number of students. The dirt floor was covered with rotting boards, sand and dirt blew in from the street when the teachers opened the windows, and when it rained water leaked down the walls creating a muddy mess of the floor. By 1883, a new property was secured for the school, and on February 11, 1883 Spelman re-opened in its new location.



Figure 2. Spelman College—Artist's rendering of Rockefeller Hall, 1887-88.

The founders had selected a nine-acre property on the west side of Atlanta, formerly used as Union Barracks. The property consisted of five frame buildings—four barracks and a former army camp hospital. Although the barracks had been abandoned since the end of the war, the property suited the needs of the teachers and two hundred students. Moreover, with the new location, Spelman educators were able to offer boarding to students. By the end of the 1883 school year there were 293 students, 30 of whom were boarding on campus. The next year, enrollments increased again, with 450 students registered in classes and 120 students boarding on campus. Despite the

increase in space, the repurposed former Army barracks were unable to meet the needs of the continuously growing school. Poorly constructed and hastily built, the buildings had deteriorated significantly in the years following the Civil War and no longer offered the spacious, respectable, healthful, idyllic, and ordered environment educators wished to provide for students. Particularly vexing for the Spelman administrators was the lack of indoor plumbing and indoor bathroom facilities, which at the turn of the century were seen as important additions to homes to promote privacy and order to spatial arrangements.

In 1901 Spelman concluded a major building project that had been ongoing since 1886. Replacing the wood frame barracks were bricked buildings outfitted with all the modern conveniences including steam heating, water, and electric and gas lighting. The conclusion of the massive building phase coincided with the institutions' twentieth anniversary, and at the celebration ceremonies the administrators revealed the five "new noble and substantial structures." In addition to Rockefeller Hall (1886), Packard Hall (1888), and Giles Hall (1893), the new buildings included Reynolds Cottage, the residence of the president; Morehouse Hall, a dormitory for 100 students; Morgan Hall, a community dining room and additional dormitory for 70 students; and Mac Vicar Hospital significantly enlarged and beautified the campus.⁵⁸ The campus itself had also grown, with the purchase of additional lots, so that in 1901 Spelman's campus spanned a total of eleven acres. A large donation from the Rockefeller family also went to improving the campus grounds, including the planting of trees and shrubbery, the completion of a square in the middle of the campus, the completion of walks and drives, and an iron fence around the entire campus. Harriet Giles was particularly pleased with

⁵⁸ Read, *The Story of Spelman*, 90-97, 112-114, 125-141

the effect the campus improvements had on the students, especially in terms of their decorum.⁵⁹

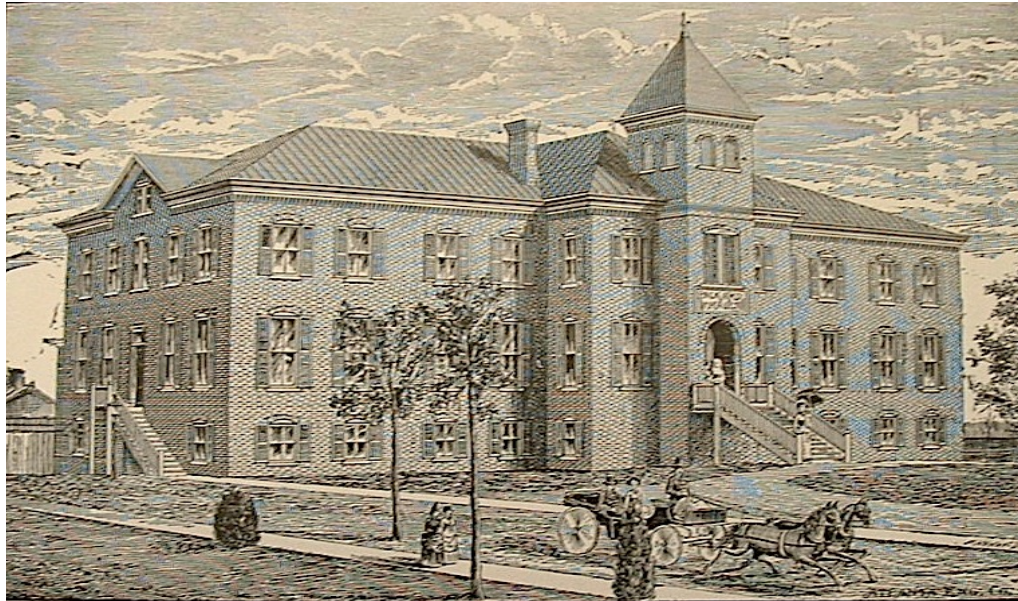


Figure 3. Spelman College—Artist's rendering of Packard Hall, 1891-1892.

Howard's administrators also initiated a major building program that lasted from 1868 to the turn of the twentieth century. Howard's officials were particularly proud of the architectural design of the school's Main Hall, which they boasted was "considered one of the best of its kind in the country."⁶⁰ Construction began in 1868, and when it was done, the Main Hall stood four stories high, at the crown of the hill on which Howard's campus was located. The Main Hall was visible from all sections of the District, and the tower in front offered one of the best panoramic views in the city. Other notable buildings included Miner Hall, the women's dormitory, and one of the original buildings, Andrew Rankin Memorial Chapel, which stood at the entrance of the

⁵⁹ Read, *The Story of Spelman*, 144

⁶⁰ *Howard University Record*, Vol.1 No.1, January 1907, 9

University. Designed in the English Gothic style, the chapel was constructed out of brick and brownstone, had a slate roof, and was large enough to seat up to 800 people.⁶¹



Figure 4. Howard University—East front view of the campus as seen from the Freedmen’s Hospital. Andrew Rankin Memorial Chapel (Left), Main Hall (Center), President’s House (Right), 1907.

In addition to taking on practical necessities, university official pursued these campus beautification projects with the aim of providing collegians with all the accoutrements of middle-class living. If race advancement was to occur, they reasoned, students needed to be isolated from the harmful influences of their former surroundings and introduced to a new set of cultural values and aesthetics. The campus improvements they implemented mirrored larger trends in Victorian middle-class culture; the spacious well-manicured grounds promoted health and well-being, while the aesthetically pleasing buildings encouraged the uplift and refinement of the student body.

⁶¹ *Howard University Record*, Vol. 1 No.1, January 1907, 9-12.

Since the early days of Reconstruction, finding and securing adequate and affordable housing represented a real problem for most blacks in the South. Barred from many neighborhoods, black Americans typically ended up in clustered mixed-class neighborhoods where members of the black middle class, working classes and very poor all lived in close proximity to one another. The neighborhoods where Fisk, Spelman, and Howard were located were representative of typical black residential patterns in the early twentieth century. Fisk for example, was located in Nashville's north end—where former contraband camps had been located during the Civil War and had expanded into a black enclave during Reconstruction. To the northwest of Fisk was an industrial area comprised of cotton mills, lumberyards, railroad tracks, machine works, stockyards, woolen mills, and other small factories along with the large Marathon Automobile Manufacturing Company. South of the University, Nashville's main black business section had expanded alongside the migration of elite and working-class black families.⁶²

In Atlanta's west end the socio-economic disparity between the impoverished residents who inhabited the neighborhoods of "West Fair Street Bottom," "Beatle Alley, and "Beaver side," was striking in comparison to the growing middle class who had migrated to the area following Spelman's relocation to the Army Barracks.⁶³ On one side of the college businessmen, college faculty and other professionals lived in single-family homes close to the university, while the working-class and poor lived in the surrounding neighborhoods in rental homes and "slums"—which contained some of the

⁶² Bobby L. Lovett, *The African American History of Nashville, Tennessee, 1780-1930: Elites and Dilemmas* (Fayetteville: The University of Arkansas Press, 1999), 88-89.

⁶³ In addition to Spelman, the several black institutions of higher education were situated in the West End, including Morehouse College and Atlanta University.

city's oldest and worst housing. The conditions in the west end were particularly harrowing due to the city's blatant neglect of the area. Indeed, the residents of the west end lacked basic city services like sewage, water mains, or street lighting. Potholes were widespread throughout the streets, which were also covered with garbage and debris. Further, the west end was a haven for illegal and illicit activities including gambling and prostitution.⁶⁴ If educators lamented the proximity of the "slums" to the College, they were equally determined that Spelman should stand as a symbol of race progress and advancement, and a moralizing agent for community uplift and reform.⁶⁵ The upkeep of the campus and building projects thus served both a practical and ideological function for the overall reform of Atlanta's west side.

At Howard the impulse for community building and reform was even more overt. When the founders selected the site for the University, they did so with the intention that the trustees and administrators would play an important role in creating a respectable and vibrant community around the campus. The first site of Howard University, was located in an area known as the "Boundary," aptly named because it was located just north of the division between Washington, County and the City of Washington. The "Boundary" was considered one of the least desirable areas of the county. A suburban "slum," the neighborhood counted among its residents an assortment of beer gardens, saloons, cabarets and an amusement park. In fact, the first building purchased for the new Howard University was a three-story red frame building

⁶⁴ Leroy Davis, *A Clashing of the Soul: John Hope and the Dilemma of African American Leadership and Black Higher Education in the Early Twentieth Century* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1998), 122-123.

⁶⁵ Georgina Hickey, "From Auburn Avenue to Buttermilk Bottom: Class and Community Dynamics among Atlanta's Blacks, in Henry Louis Taylor, Jr., and Walter Hill, eds., *Historical Roots of the Urban Crisis: Blacks in the Industrial City, 1900-1950*, New York, NY: Garland Publishing, Inc., 2000, 109-117.

that had previously been a beer saloon and dance hall.⁶⁶ Howard officials though, were searching for a larger tract of land to establish their university. Not soon after, a 150-acre property known as the “Hill” overlooking the Capitol became available for sale. Despite the Boundary neighborhood’s reputation, Howard officials saw the purchase of the property as an opportunity to become a major landholder in the county and lead the effort in community reform. Fifty-nine acres (later reduced to twenty) would be reserved for the new Howard University campus, and the remaining land would be sold in fifty-foot lots.

By the early twentieth century the “Hill,” was no longer on the fringe of respectable District society. Instead, it had become the center of one of the nation’s most prominent metropolitan black commercial, entertainment, and residential enclaves. Despite the fears of many local white landholders that a “negro school would spoil [the value of] the property round about” it, lots sold quickly in the newly named Howardtown. As property holders, Howard University officials took an active role in the development of the suburban community that surrounded the university. The Board of Trustees imposed conditions on all land purchases and prohibited the construction of any “unsightly buildings, liquor stores, or any use of the property that was “deemed offensive or injurious to the interests of the University.”⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Rayford Logan, *Howard University: The First Hundred Years, 1867-1967*, (New York: New York University Press, 1969), 27.

⁶⁷ Whenever possible, these conditions were to be written in the Bond and Deed for each lot sold. Logan, *Howard University: The First Hundred Years*, 28.

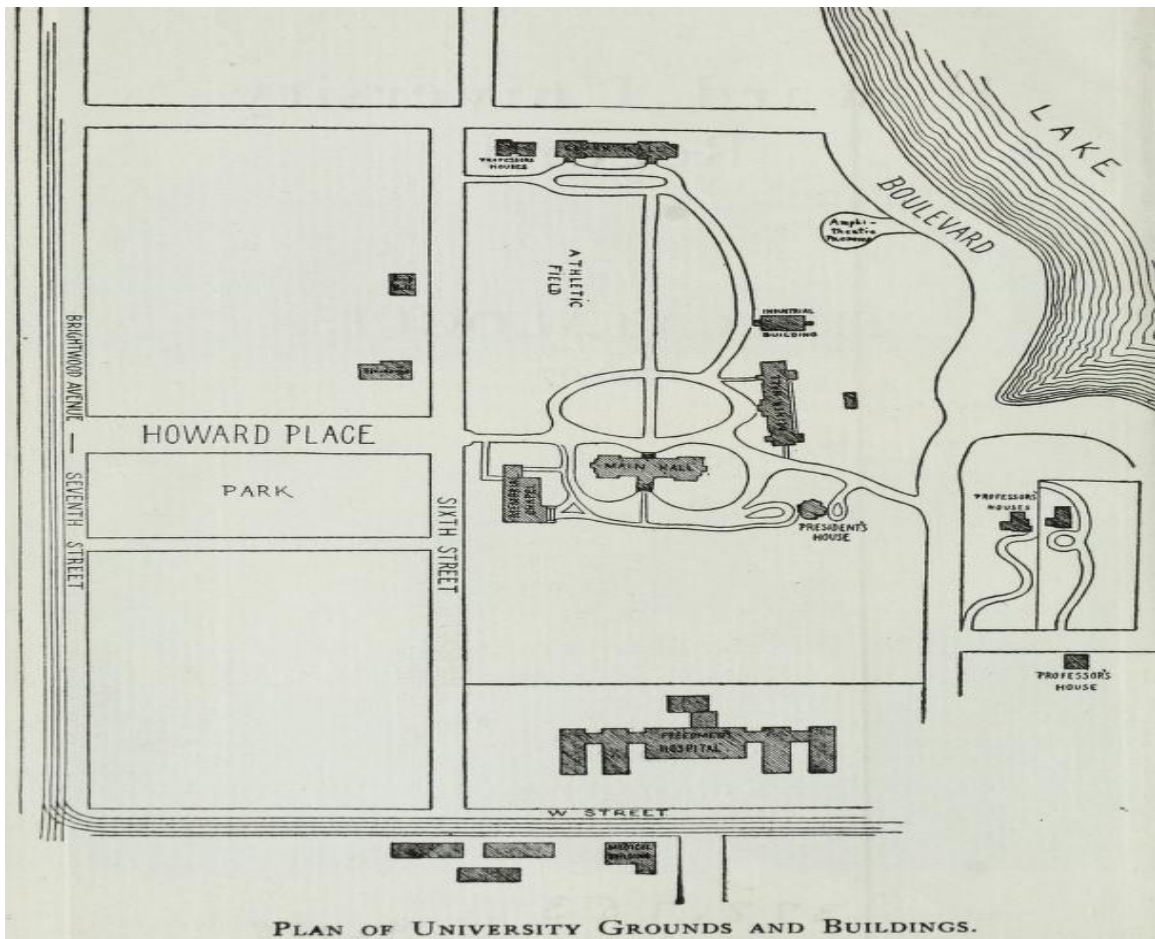


Figure 5. Howard University—Plan of Howard University Grounds and Buildings, 1906-1907

With these restrictions, the trustees sought to attract a class of buyers who would aid in transforming the Howard suburb into a respectable university community.

Howard University played a major role in the community's appeal. By the turn of the twentieth century, Howard had earned the title as black America's national university and its prestige attracted residents to the area. In addition to noted members of Howard University's faculty many of black Washington's elite and middle-class sought to live in close proximity to the University. For example, at the turn of the twentieth century Le Droit Park was the most prestigious black neighborhood in the District. Noted educator Anna Julia Cooper, activist and black woman's club leader Mary Church

Terrell and her husband Judge Robert Terrell along with Howard faculty including Dean Kelly Miller, noted biologist Ernest Just also called Le Droit Park home. Famed literary figures including Jean Toomer and Paul Lawrence Dunbar also took up residence in Le Droit Park along with schoolteachers, doctors, lawyers, and other black professionals.

A symbol of race progress and example of successful black institution building, Howard University played a significant role in the residential and economic transformation of Washington, County. By the turn of the century, its presence had helped transform the northwest boundary of the city of Washington into the center of Washington's black metropolis. Howard University was a major pull for black Washingtonians, and it is no surprise that many of the city's other important black institutions developed in close proximity to the school. For example, many of the city's best black public schools were located in the Howard-Shaw-U Street district. For example, the famous M Street High School (later Dunbar High School) employed some of the city's most talented educators and served as a feeder school for Howard. Along with the area's superior educational opportunities, the Freedman's Hospital located on 7th Street and Florida Avenue provided essential health services to the black community. By the turn of the twentieth century, the District's largest and most prosperous black-owned business and commercial district emerged at the bottom of the "hill" to serve the area's many residents.

Howard University was good for business and the school's presence in the community guaranteed owners a constant, steady, and reliable stream of customers. Moreover, Howard University officials were committed to community reform and

worked closely with local businesses to replace the beer gardens and saloons that once dominated Washington County, with respectable black-owned businesses. The university allowed business to advertise in the university and student publications, and many of these businesses including restaurants, delicatessens, drug stores, tailors and dress-makers were oriented towards serving the students and faculty. Students and faculty, many of whom came from all over the country, were encouraged to shop locally and support black-owned businesses as a means of avoiding the humiliation of Jim Crow and rising discrimination in the city. Finally, many students were an important part of the economic life of the Howard University community beyond their role as consumers, as many students found work and room and board in the Shaw/U-Street corridor to help pay for their schooling.⁶⁸

Educators at Fisk, Spelman, and Howard, like many reformers at the turn of the twentieth century, believed that the built environment could be used to project dominant cultural values. The college campus—grounds and buildings included—was thus essential to the acculturation process: first, as the architectural manifestation of the ideals of black higher education, and second, as symbols of progress and middle-class aesthetics. Surrounded by the aesthetics of the middle-class on campus, students would transform into members of the coveted Talented Tenth. First, though, they had to pass the admissions process. University officials were selective about the students they admitted to their programs—they saw the college campus as a delicate ecosystem with cultural imperatives could easily be disrupted if persons deficient in respectable culture or character were admitted.

⁶⁸ *The Howard University Record*, Vol. VI, No.2, March 1912, 23.

Administrators carefully vetted prospective applicants by requiring students to solicit testimonials from either respected members of their communities or former educators. At Spelman administrators explicitly specified, “no students are wanted or retained who have not sufficient character to appreciate their advantages and to listen to reasonable advice and admonition.”⁶⁹ And at all three institutions, only those young men and women who could provide references or certificates of “good moral character” and evidence to show that they were open to direction and instruction were granted admission.⁷⁰

In addition to the students’ personal characteristics, administrators at Fisk, Spelman, and Howard were interested in demographic information about their students. At Spelman, for instance, enrollment numbers had remained steady since 1902, with 675 in total with more students boarding on campus as the years progressed. A survey of the students in 1908-09 found that the students hailed from 127 different schools and 19 states along with the District of Columbia and Africa. More than half of the 335 boarding students were either partially or completely working to pay their way. The majority of the students were between 16 and 15 years of age, with a small percentage of students over twenty-five. The administrators collected other information from the students including their parents’ occupations and homeownership status. Of 519 students surveyed, administrators reported that the fathers of 53% of the students worked as professional men or skilled laborers, 35% were the children of widows,

⁶⁹ School administrators also advised: “The Seminary reserves the right to request, at any time during their course, the withdrawal of students who do not maintain the required standards of the school in scholarship, of those who cannot remain in the Seminary without danger to their own health or the health of others, and of those whose presence is found to lower the moral tone of the Seminary.” *Catalogue of Spelman Seminary*, 1914-1915, 15.

⁷⁰ The wording differed slightly at each institution, but all required certificates or references of students’ good moral character.

70.5% of the boarding students' parents owned their own homes, while at least 10.5% were in the process of buying their own homes.⁷¹

Administrators at Fisk kept similar records of their students. The 1899-1900 Catalogue of Fisk University noted that of the 504 students in attendance that year, there were 202 males and 302 females from 21 states, including the District of Columbia, Oklahoma Territory, and Canada.⁷² Further, administrators kept detailed records of their graduates, and in particular their occupations and state of residence. In 1899-1900, there were 368 living graduates of Fisk University. A large proportion of graduates—120 in total—worked as grammar school teachers, 43 served as teachers in either High or Normal School, there were 34 principals of grammar schools, 8 college professors, 12 High School principals, 19 ministers, 17 doctors, 9 lawyers, along with 16 students enrolled in professional schools, 13 in business, and 9 who were employed by the U.S. Government.⁷³ The vast majority of Fisk Graduates lived below the Mason Dixon Line, with the largest proportion of graduates living in Tennessee (106), followed by Texas with 52. Others still had moved to the north and mid-west, and one alumnus resided in Mexico.

⁷¹ Read, *The Story of Spelman*, 155-156.

⁷² The catalogue lists the states represented: Alabama, Arkansas, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Ohio, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, West Virginia, and Wisconsin. *Catalogue of Fisk University*, 1899-1900, 8.

⁷³ An additional 44 alumni were categorized as “wives,” while two alumni were labeled as having “miscellaneous” occupations, and 13 alumni were listed as “living at home.” “Occupation of Living Graduates and Location by State,” *Catalogue of Fisk University*, 1899-1900, 15.

REPRESENTATION BY STATES AND FOREIGN COUNTRIES			
COUNTRIES			
Alabama	36	New York	44
Arkansas	10	North Carolina	63
California	3	Oklahoma	3
Colorado	6	Ohio	21
Connecticut	10	Pennsylvania	39
Delaware	10	Rhode Island	3
District of Columbia.....	264	South Carolina	44
Florida	25	Tennessee	25
Georgia	41	Texas	25
Illinois	9	Virginia	172
Indiana	6	Washington	1
Iowa	8	West Virginia	23
Kentucky	17	Wyoming	1
Louisiana	13	Africa	5
Maryland	82	British West Indies	80
Massachusetts	7	Cuba	5
Michigan	2	Haiti	1
Mississippi	25	India	1
Missouri	27	Porto Rico	7
Montana	1	Republic of Panama	2
Nebraska	1	Santo Domingo	1
New Jersey	26	South America	10
Total			1,205

Figure 6. Howard University—Student population as represented by state and country, 1906-1907.

Among the three institutions, Howard University had the largest and most diverse student body. According to the 1888-1889 Catalogue of the Officers and Students of Howard, there were 418 (355 men and 63 women) students from thirty-seven states, territories, and foreign lands including: Alabama, Arkansas, California, Connecticut, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Vermont, Virginia, West Virginia, Wisconsin, Africa, Canada, Nova Scotia, Switzerland, and the British West Indies. Almost twenty years later, the student population had nearly tripled. Of the 1,205 students attending Howard during the 1906-1907 academic year, there were representatives from thirty-five states and nine different countries. Unsurprisingly, the majority of students came from the

District of Columbia, Virginia, and Maryland. More notable, is the number of foreign students enrolled at Howard, which in total amounted to nearly ten percent of the student population.

With students coming from all parts of the country, and in many cases foreign countries, educators sought to create a unified set of ideals and practices on campus. To that end, collegiate life at Fisk, Spelman, and Howard was structured around the Victorian domestic ideal. A strong paternal and maternal administrative body and faculty served as models of respectable manhood and womanhood for collegians and prepared them for useful citizenship. This pedagogical strategy also incorporated a belief that the black family was a broken and dysfunctional institution—a lasting legacy of the institution of slavery.⁷⁴ At the turn of the twentieth century, black and white reformers alike were convinced that many of the pathologies attributed to the black masses such as “ignorance, poverty, and moral darkness” could be explained by the fact that the black family unit was “less efficient for its onerous social duties.”⁷⁵ Observers like Rev. Henry L. Morehouse of the American Baptist Home Mission Society, extolled the potential benefits that training the Talented Tenth could have for race advancement, noting that “for the young women, particularly colored young women, many of whom have never enjoyed the benefit of contact with highly cultured, earnest, noble Christian womanhood, nothing is of greater benefit to them to be under the influence of teachers

⁷⁴ For example, in 1909 W.E.B. Du Bois published a study of the Negro American Family, where he argued that the system of slavery had done “its deadly work of disintegrating the ancient Negro Home and putting but a poor substitute in its place.” W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Negro American Family: Report of a Social Study made Principally by the College Classes of 1909 and 1910 of Atlanta University, under the patronage of the Trustees of the John F. Slater Fund; together with the Proceedings of the 13th Annual Conference for the Study of the Negro Problems, held at Atlanta University on Tuesday, May the 26th, 1908* (Atlanta, Ga.: The Atlanta University Press, 1908), 37.

⁷⁵ Du Bois, *The Negro American Family*, 153, 37.

such as are gathered here at Spelman.”⁷⁶ By cultivating a familial environment that included proper social and cultural training educators would not only offer a corrective to their students’ upbringing, educators believed, but that this training would have an ameliorative effect on the black population at large.

Once a student was admitted to Fisk, Spelman, or Howard, they entered a contractual agreement with the faculty and university officials.⁷⁷ As the Dean of Fisk explained in his opening remarks of the 1900-1901 academic year, students had a “right to expect that the teaching and executive force of the university will do as they have promised and afford you the advantages which have induced you to enter our school.”⁷⁸ When students accepted their offers of admittance, they were “giving a sacred promise” to observe the school’s rules as outlined in the catalogs. The contract was simple and the expectations clear: educators promised to uphold the aims and purposes stated in the college catalogues, and students agreed to adhere to university regulations, and the end result would be a disciplined student body and a collegial spirit of mutual obligation.⁷⁹

Educators at Fisk, Spelman, and Howard preferred students to board on campus where they would be under the moralizing influence of the faculty. In the case of women students, living on campus was a requirement. W.E.B. Du Bois, himself a graduate of Fisk University in the late 1890s, likened black colleges and universities to

⁷⁶ Rev. H.L. Morehouse, Field Sec’y A.B.H.M.S., “The Worth of Spelman Seminary to the World,” *Spelman Messenger*, Vol.12, June 1896, 2.

⁷⁷ The annual catalogues’ of Fisk and Spelman contained the detailed regulations of the school, which administrators argued served as an informal contract between potential students and the administration. Howard, on the other hand, is an outlier in this regard and it is unclear from the University archival records whether a separate student handbook existed during this period.

⁷⁸ “Remarks Made by the Dean at the Opening of the School,” *The Fisk Herald*, Vol. 18, No.1, October 1900, 3-4.

⁷⁹ By 1915, administrators at Fisk had included the following caveats to this statement: (1) “Those not willing to give this promise and to keep it are urged not to come, as their presence here would be a great handicap to the efficiency of our work.” (2) “A student may be sent away at any time if he is considered unsatisfactory, without any definite charge being preferred against him.” *Catalogue of Fisk University*, 1905-1906, 22.

settlement homes. For much of the late nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, both students and educators—the majority of whom were white New Englanders—lived together on campus. According to Du Bois, students benefited from the “close and sympathetic contact with the best traditions of New England.”⁸⁰ Like the reformers who oversaw settlement houses, the white missionary educators at black colleges and universities imagined themselves as models of moral propriety and exemplars of respectability. Through personal direction and close contact, educators could police students’ cultural development. At Fisk officials described their boarding department as a well-regulated “Christian home” where the rules were “administered with firmness and impartiality” and discipline was “parental in character.”⁸¹

There were many practical reasons for requiring students to live on campus and one of them was that it allowed educators to ensure that students received proper domestic training in hygiene, sanitation, thrift and industry were all essential to maintaining a home. Faculty members acted as surrogate parents to the young men and women in their care and saw to it that students received gender-specific instruction. Female students at Fisk, Howard, and Spelman could expect to be under the charge of a “competent and cultured matron,” House Mother, or Dean of Women who was responsible for providing “special instructions and counsel regarding womanly conduct and character.” Howard administrators assured parents that at their institution, “the internal economy of Miner Hall will be sympathetic and motherly and conform to the highest standards of discipline and culture.” Moreover, administrators boasted that “we

⁸⁰ W.E.B. Du Bois, Introduction and Notes by Farah Jasmine Griffin, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Barnes & Noble Classics Series), (New York: Barnes & Noble Classics, 2003), 75.

⁸¹ This was the typical wording found in the *Catalogue of Fisk University* in the years between 1880-1920.

have an exceptionally fine company of young women from the best homes of the country” and “parents may send their daughters to this institution with the full assurance that they will be safeguarded by all the wholesome and refining influences of a well ordered and refined home.”⁸²



Figure 7. Howard University—Suite of dormitory rooms in Miner Hall, ca. 1907.

Because physical space was critical to the indoctrination of cultural values, the dormitories on black campuses served as the epicenter of student life. The carefully planned dormitory facilities reproduced Victorian ideals of domesticity. And at the turn of the twentieth century, the home was an important symbol in Victorian middle-class culture. As one Fisk student explained it, the family was “an important factor in shaping the characteristics of the age. If family government is good, the influence which it

⁸² “Our Girls Department,” *Howard University Journal*, Vol.4 No.1, September 28, 1906, 3.

exerts on society will likewise be good.”⁸³ The University, by extension thus functioned as both a physical barrier from the ills that afflicted urban life, and the home was the center of spiritual education and place where character, cultural, and social training occurred.⁸⁴

Administrators promised that for those students who lived on campus “no effort is spared to give it a home-like atmosphere and to make it a center of intellectual and moral culture.”⁸⁵ Students ate, slept, studied, and socialized in their dormitories which were constructed to accommodate all these functions. Each room had its own function and therefore required a separate space. For example, sleeping quarters were separate from parlors and other spaces dedicated to socializing and entertaining, while work spaces were similarly delineated. Again, such order was a hallmark of Victorian middle-class homes.

At Fisk, the female students stayed in Jubilee Hall which was described in the school’s catalog as one of the “largest, best equipped, and most beautifully located school buildings in the South.” To ensure the students’ comfort Jubilee Hall also accommodated a reception parlor, music, and sewing rooms. Moreover, the building was surrounded by eight acres of land providing female students with “ample grounds for healthful exercise.”⁸⁶ The female collegians at Howard who stayed in Miner Hall enjoyed a similarly serene setting, and school officials described the building as an “attractive home” for the young women that “faced the Reservoir Lake.”

⁸³ “The Future Man” *Fisk Herald*, Vol. XXXII No.4, February 1905, 1.

⁸⁴ Gwendolyn Wright, *Building the Dream: A Social History of Housing*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1983), 96

⁸⁵ Although this quote was specifically directed towards the female collegians at Howard, school records indicate that efforts were directed to providing a similar experience for the male collegians. Howard University Record, Vol. VI No.2, March 1912, 23.

⁸⁶ *Catalogue of Fisk University*, 1905, 15-16.

Accommodations for the male students were similarly appealing. At Howard, the young men resided in Clark Hall where rooms were arranged in a suite style to “allow a study and a bedroom for each of the two or three students.”⁸⁷ The goal was to provide a “comfortable dwelling place” for the young men on campus. The argument was that “many boys who on leaving the cheerful parental hearthside, [are] unable to accustom themselves to the meager accommodations of the dormitory [life], have been forced out into the city with all of its freedom and allurements.”⁸⁸ Clark Hall on the other hand was to “be revered, for it has sheltered some of our best men. Under its roof many hard struggle eased, many inseparable ties have been formed.” The young men at Fisk were also supplied with large and well-furnished rooms in the “commanding and beautiful” Livingstone and Bennett Halls in addition to a chapel, prayer room, Y.M.C.A. recreation room. And to foster collegiality among the young men adjacent to their dormitories were large grounds where students could “form games and athletic sports.” Advanced or graduate students along with faculty members and the Dean of Men ensured that the young men of Fisk and Howard acquired the requisite gentlemanly habits that would enable them to “marry, make homes and rear families.”⁸⁹ During their college careers, male collegians were to develop the manly qualities and necessary skills to assume their roles as producers and providers for their families.⁹⁰

⁸⁷ Howard University Record, Vol. 1. No.1 1907. It should also be noted that residence requirements for Howard’s men students differed from their contemporaries at Fisk. Administrators at Howard were not as strict in their campus residency requirements, explaining that a number of students received permission to live and board off campus, often at the places where they worked.

⁸⁸ “The Modernizing of Clark Hall,” *Howard University Journal*, Vol.1 No.7, March 1, 1904, 3.

⁸⁹ Anna Julia Cooper, “The Duty of Young Men: What Society, In Its Best Sense, Expects From Young Men,” *The University Journal*, Vol.1 No.6, February 15, 1904, 1.

⁹⁰ The author of the article further noted that the young man “is by nature of circumstances head of household. In this capacity he will largely determine by his personality their states in society.” “Future Man”, *Fisk Herald*, Vol. XXII No.4, February 1904, p.1.

One Fisk student explained it “the boy who makes the best of his time while he is in college will be the man who will make the greatest success in life.”⁹¹

Educators considered the practical skills, self-help, and appreciation for the dignity of labor that students acquired through their training, essential to combat deficiencies in students’ character and upbringing. Despite their altruistic motives, white educators were not free from the prejudices that ascribed to black Americans an inferior status to their white counterparts. Although the white educators at Fisk, Spelman, and Howard used the rhetoric of social inheritance, which posited that the progress of the race was the result of social and cultural conditions rather than innate traits, the idea that students required such training underscored a belief in their deficiency in these skills. Never mind that the economic system of the Old South had been organized almost entirely around the forced labor extracted from enslaved black men and women, many whites still assumed black southerners were naturally lazy and lacking a work ethic. Thus, not only were students to acquire these skills for their own personal uplift, but they were expected to impart them upon to black masses. Fisk and Spelman developed intensive home training programs to accomplish these goals. Supervised by college faculty, students at both institutions spent at least one hour per day performing labor for the upkeep of the school, which administrators described as being “conducive to good health and right habits.”⁹² At co-educational institutions like Fisk, the duties were divided according to traditional gender norms. Young men were

⁹¹ *Fisk Herald*, Vol. XXXI No.4, February 1914, 4-5.

⁹² The irony here is that most students had to work extremely hard to pay for their education. In fact, it was quite uncommon for students to attend school on a consistent basis, as many students were forced to take prolonged absences between semesters to work.

expected to help with the general upkeep of the facilities, while women were instructed in the duties of running a home.

At single-sex institutions like Spelman, by contrast, students were expected to contribute in ways that at times defied traditional gender roles. In addition to taking on traditionally feminine duties, Spelman students were also required to gather and carry wood for fires, and help with the general maintenance and upkeep. While educators promoted normative gender roles, the training Spelman students received closely approximated the realities their graduates would encounter. The majority of the graduates of Spelman went on to be teachers in mostly rural areas. The conditions of the school-houses were such that the teachers were often responsible for building repairs and maintenance and an integral part of a Spelman students' training included instruction in traditionally masculine skills like woodworking. Such skills were useful in the home as well. Unlike their white middle-class counterparts who could afford to hire domestic workers, the household income for most middle-class black families was much lower. Thus, most black women except for the extremely wealthy could expect that they would be managing their home and performing most of the household duties themselves.⁹³ Moreover, proficiency in household management was an important component of race uplift that students were expected to incorporate in their future race work. Administrators at Spelman explained that the instruction offered in their boarding department would "make cheerful workers, who will look upon every kind of labor as

⁹³ As Deborah Gray White has succinctly explained, throughout the first quarter of the twentieth century, black people as a group were largely prevented from acquiring upward mobility in the traditional economic and political sense. Middle-class status, White notes, "was therefore associated more with 'style of life' than with gross economic income." "Manners, morality, a particular mode of consumption, race work—these were the criteria for middle-class status," White explains. Deborah Gray White, "The Cost of Club Work, The Price of Black Feminism," in Nancy A. Hewitt and Suzanne Lebsock, eds. *Visible Women: New Essays on American Activism*, Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993, 258-259.

honorable.” Students thus received training in domestic service, cooking, sewing, dressmaking, millinery, printing, basketry and gardening. These activities, educators argued, were essential to acquiring intelligence and skill in “habits of industry [and] neatness necessary for preparation in homemaking” and most importantly students “learned many valuable lessons not found in textbooks.”⁹⁴

Black Collegiate Culture and the Rules of Respectability

Many of the most valuable lessons educators intended students to learn during their collegiate years would not be found in textbooks. An important part of the acculturation that colleges sought to offer their students was based on the idea that close contact between faculty and students would provide collegians with exemplary models of etiquette, personal modesty, and sexual propriety. Many Officials at black institutions of higher education were motivated by a set of concerns that at their core were based on racist stereotypes about the sexual appetites of black men and women—ideas that dominated the white consciousness in the early twentieth century. The recent legacy of enslavement and the legally sanctioned rape of black women continued to fuel persistent stereotypes of black women as promiscuous jezebels, as did the gendered politics of Reconstruction and Redemption. Likewise, black men were demonized as inherently criminal and “bestial” or “savage” with an insatiable desire for white women. The scientific racism behind these fictions of the white mind justified black men’s

⁹⁴ “Our Family Life,” *Spelman Messenger*, Vol. 20, No.5, 1914, 5

disenfranchisement, and contributed to the ever-increasing use of extralegal violence and terror in the form of mob violence and lynching to keep black men “their place.”⁹⁵

Educators were well aware of both the sexual dangers of the outside world and the fact that students’ own sexual desires could create roadblocks to racial advancement. Their efforts to reform black women’s sexuality and protect their chastity are well documented in the historical literature. Indeed in the early twentieth century, the sexual morality of black women was thought to be an important variable upon which the advancement of the race was dependent. Susan K. Cahn has written that at black colleges educators “taught the kind of self-controlled ‘ladylike’ behavior that would ensure a girls reputation in the community, establish her as a respectable representation of her race in the broader society, and shield her from sexual danger in the form of white assault or her own desires.”⁹⁶ Rev. Henry Morehouse’s statements reflect the sentiments of the period when he explained that “in the formative period of life what can be of greater benefit to a young woman than to spend a few years aloof from old associations and influences” and with refined associations in a “Christian atmosphere, where the intellectual and moral and spiritual nature are strengthened for life’s conflicts and temptations.”⁹⁷

Just as educators instituted measures to protect the virtue and chastity of female collegians, they were equally committed to ensuring that the young men who graduated

⁹⁵ Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995; Laura F. Edwards, *Gendered Strife and Confusion: The Political Culture of Reconstruction, Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press*, 1997; Glenda E Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920*, Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996; Hannah Rosen, *Terror in the Heart of Freedom: Citizenship, Sexual Violence, and the Meaning of Race in the Postemancipation South*, Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009.

⁹⁶ Susan K. Cahn, *Sexual Reckonings: Southern Girls in a Troubling Age*. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2007), 4.

⁹⁷ “The Worth of Spelman Seminary to the World,” *Spelman Messenger*, p.2

from their campuses had acquired habits of respectable manhood. Administrators at Howard used chapel lectures to address the male student body. In one particularly notable lecture, Dr. Lyman Beecher Sperry gave “one of the most interesting, instructive, and valuable lectures heard in Andrew Rankin Hall” to the young men of Howard on the subject of “Sex, Health and Human Progress.” The speaker, according to an article in the *Howard University Journal*, was said to have “spent his best efforts on the question of sex, outlining the qualities of manhood and womanhood and the blessed results of their being properly conducted and directed.”⁹⁸ Sperry concluded his talk by describing the “horrid results of the disregard or abuse of” sex “the highest function of the human organism.”⁹⁹ In addition to chapel lectures, weekly prayer meetings, and campus groups like the White Cross League—an organization where young men pledged to remain chaste—and the Y.M.C.A. were spaces dedicated to the moral and spiritual development of male collegians. Male students at Fisk and Howard were encouraged to aspire to these ideals, which were coded in the language of “true manhood” and “Christian manhood,”

The college campus was an ideal environment to impart upon the future race leaders a conservative standard of sexual respectability. Not only did the campus offer protection from potential harmful outside influences, educators could also enact rules and regulations to guard against any potential acts of impropriety and prevent students from acting on their natural desires. Life for the collegians at Fisk, Spelman, and Howard was extremely regimented and school officials rigorously policed student interactions and social events. Students followed a strict daily regimen carefully

⁹⁸ “Dr. Lyman Beecher Sperry Speaks to the Young Men of Howard”, *Howard University Journal*, Vol. 6, No.13, January 22, 1909, p.6.

⁹⁹ Dr. Lyman Beecher Sperry Speaks,” *Howard University Journal*,” 6.

choreographed by educators to help them navigate the potentially precarious terrain of campus interactions with their peers of the opposite sex. Moreover, by restricting when and where these exchanges could occur, educators sought to impart upon students a sense of restraint, moral refinement, self-control, and discipline—the hallmarks of respectable Victorian manhood and womanhood.¹⁰⁰

From sunrise to sunset college students followed a carefully planned schedule. A typical day at Spelman College offers a glimpse at daily life for collegians. The school day began early: students rose at 5:45am, washed, dressed, and arrived to the dining hall by 7:00am for breakfast. Students walked single file from their dormitories to the dining room and were sat in groups of ten, with each one serving a turn as a waitress. A dining-hall matron supervised, paying particular attention to ensure that students kept their conversations to suitable topics. After breakfast, the students hurried to complete their morning chores—dishwashing, sweeping, dusting, and making their beds—before the 8:15 am bell rang for morning classes. One observer visiting from the Home Mission Monthly noted that “from eight-fifteen until twelve o’clock, a beautiful silence rests upon the campus, broken only by the song of birds.” The visitor also noted that lunch, was a brief and informal affair “so that some time remains for a walk and talk on the grounds.” At 12:25, classes resumed again until the three o’clock bell dismissed students for the day. The early afternoon was usually reserved for completing housekeeping chores or maintenance, and when these activities were complete students were permitted an hour or two of social time before the dinner bell summoned them. For many students, their afternoon program varied ensuring that “each girl has some

¹⁰⁰ As Susan K. Cahn has argued, “black colleges provided a level of protection for all black youth, and, for girls, a kind of sexual insulation.” Cahn, *Sexual Reckonings*, 34

leisure, so that on one has an excuse for being what all work and no play makes one.”

Students thus spent their free time participating in “games, fancy work, reading, visiting or basketball.”¹⁰¹ After dinner, students returned to their studies and spent the remainder of their evenings in the library, in study hall, or in their rooms preparing for lessons the next day. Friday nights and Saturdays offered students more opportunities for socializing, while Sundays were reserved for religious devotion.

Free time was limited, and faculty closely monitored any socializing that occurred between students, especially between students of the opposite sex.¹⁰² At single-sex institutions such as Spelman, administrators faced less of a challenge than their colleagues at co-educational Fisk and Howard. Still, there were many occasions when Spelman girls interacted with the students at the nearby all-male Morehouse College or co-educational Atlanta University, and in these instances educators took full precautions to against any chance that an act of impropriety would occur. For example, Spelman students often attended classes at Morehouse College or Atlanta University and administrators demanded that students return to campus immediately, they were not to “linger at the back of Giles Hall or [in] the campus halls, at the front gate or other gates.”¹⁰³ But students from the two colleges still had some opportunities to see each other. They often participated in joint Chapel exercises, which Mordecai Johnson, a Morehouse alumnus (1907-1911) and president of Howard University (1926-1960) remembered long afterward the exciting point of contact with Spelman students: “We

¹⁰¹ Mabel H. Parsons, Traveling Secretary, in The Home Mission Monthly, “A Day at Spelman,” *The Spelman Messenger*, Vol.25, No.2, November 1908, 3.

¹⁰² Read, *The Story of Spelman* p.155

¹⁰³ Spelman College Rules, n.d., Box 23, Folder 29, Florence M. Read Collection, Spelman College Archives.

boys used to come over to chapel, and we would listen to the preacher with our ears and look at the girls with our eyes, and go away inspired in body, mind, and soul.”¹⁰⁴

Friday evenings were also set aside for the young men and women of Morehouse and Spelman to get together for a lecture or concert. The gatherings typically ended promptly at nine o’clock when a bell signed the end of the evening, and the Morehouse men retreated back to their campus. On rare Saturday afternoons, the young men of Morehouse College would play host to their sister scholars. On these occasions, the reception room in Sale Hall would be transformed in preparation for their visitors. In order to accommodate their female guests, the “curtains, flowers, rugs, and pictures [were] artistically arranged” while “beautiful and tasteful decorations” added to the atmosphere. The Morehouse men spared no attention to detail. They arranged “various cozy corners” for the comfort of their guests and insured that all in attendance were treated to “delicious refreshments.”¹⁰⁵ Outside of the school sponsored events, school officials only allowed Spelman students to receive callers on Saturdays. Young men were permitted to call on Spelman girls, but never the same girl, in the same month, and these visits were restricted to twenty minutes per week—making it especially challenging to forge any lasting love connections.¹⁰⁶ Thus a rigorous schedule and physical barriers enabled Spelman administrators to regulate the contact their students had with men.

¹⁰⁴ Read, *The Story of Spelman*, p 154.

¹⁰⁵ E.L. Hudson, ’13, “The Glee Club Reception,” *The Athenaeum*, Vol. XIV, No.5, March, 1912, 75

¹⁰⁶ Spelman College Rules, n.d., Box 12, Folder 29, Florence Read Collection, Spelman College Archives. Despite these strict rules, many Morehouse men and Spelman girls did manage to make matches. In the columns of the Spelman Messenger, students and faculty frequently reported on the marriages of alumnae and they were often to Morehouse men.

Officials at Fisk and Howard faced different challenges when it came to the interactions between students of the opposite sex. Public opinion was divided on the wisdom of co-educational institutions and whether it was advisable for young men and women to attend school together.¹⁰⁷ At Fisk and Howard, co-education was promoted by the administration as an important, if not advantageous, aspect of the collegiate culture. In an address, Howard University President Wilbur Thirkield proclaimed that “it is the greatest advantage to a young person to be educated in a progressive modern university” where the “great bond is in the common spirit of [the] departments that are producing men and women, and equipping them for some line of work in an ever advancing Christian civilization.”¹⁰⁸ Fisk administrators similarly proclaimed that equality in opportunity for men and women was among the greatest strengths of their institution. In addition to the educational advantages co-educational experience provided social benefits and the experience of comingling during their college years was said to foster good Christian families and inspire greater harmony between men and women.¹⁰⁹ A student-authored editorial in the *Howard University Journal* reiterated these views, stating that at Howard “we take it that co- education in colleges is desirable. Here men and women meet who have been drawn hither by the same common impulses.” The editorial further explained that it was the “daily association [that] makes men and women understand more thoroughly the art of living together.

¹⁰⁷ “Non-Coeds” *The Athenaeum*, Vol. XVI, No.4, February 1914, 4-5. This article provides insight into the criticisms of co-education for example “where the boys and girls eat together, study together, and have frequent socials, is that it has a tendency to render the society of each other more common and ordinary, and hence the relations will not be as dignified as they ought.”

¹⁰⁸ *Howard University Record*, Vol. 5 No.4, November, 1911, 3.

¹⁰⁹ L. O’Hara, “College Life,” *Fisk Herald*, Vol. XXVII, No.3, December 1909, 8.

There is an opportunity for each to learn what the other is, his tastes, inclinations and capabilities.”¹¹⁰

University officials did their best to foster a spirit of cooperation and collegiality amongst their students, while limiting this contact to the classroom and other school-sanctioned social activities. Fisk and Howard, students took their meals together while faculty supervised. At Howard, this practice began in the late 1890s when officials announced in the annual catalog that the “young gentlemen and ladies will eat in the same dining hall” a faculty member would “preside over the domestic economy in order to make it home-like and attractive.”¹¹¹ The dining facilities were located in Miner Hall, the women’s dormitory, and a separate entrance was created for the young men so they would not disrupt the female collegians. A similar arrangement existed at Fisk; the young men arrived to Jubilee Halls for their meals, entering and exiting from a separate entrance constructed specifically for their use.

Outside of the carefully crafted and scheduled social functions, faculty relied on students to adhere to the principles of decorum and propriety. At Howard, public spaces became gathering places for students—in particular an area known as the “eclipse” in front of the Main Hall was a popular spot where students congregated between classes.¹¹² While underclassmen were discouraged from partaking in these gatherings, it was not uncommon to see the upperclass men and women walking together on

¹¹⁰ “Co-Education in College,” *The Howard University Journal*, Vol.4 January 19, 1906, 2.

¹¹¹ *Catalogue of the Officers and Students Of Howard University*, March 1894 to March 1895, 66.

¹¹² In general, it appeared that Howard officials were more lenient in their approach to student regulations—though students hardly thought so. Howard’s liberal stance in comparison to the more conservative campus cultures at Fisk and Spelman is likely due to the fact that these schools were founded and maintained by missionary associations. Although no less religious than Fisk and Spelman, one major difference might also have been that Howard, during these years was run by a triumvirate (Kelly Miller, George Cook, and XX) as opposed to the largely all-white, missionary association administrators at Fisk and Spelman.

campus.¹¹³ Students at Fisk were not given the same autonomy. Educators there were especially conservative when it came to socializing between the sexes and officials prohibited Fiskites from walking together on campus, dating was off limits, and any student who married while they were enrolled at the university faced immediate dismissal. A zero tolerance policy was instituted and the threat of expulsion loomed over those collegians who failed to conform to the rules.

Despite the variations in their regulations regarding campus interactions, administrators at Fisk, Spelman, and Howard were united in their stance on co-ed dancing, banning the activity from their campuses. In the early twentieth century, dancing had become a controversial activity among the reform minded, and especially so for the aspiring Talented Tenth who occupied the precarious liminal position between becoming and being respectable men and women. In particular, dance halls, which had become increasingly popular in the early 1900s and 1910s, were criticized by middle class reformers—both black and white—as being breeding grounds for vice, violence, and illicit sex. Moreover, public dance halls were the social and cultural spaces for the lower classes—not for the next generation of race leaders. Dance hall culture was part of a larger trend that Tera Hunter refers to as a blues aesthetic. She explains that the “major underlying principles that informed this atheistic and that were embodied in vernacular dance were irreverence, transcendence, social realism, self-empowerment, and collective individualism.”¹¹⁴ The vernacular dance forms created by working class blacks represented a direct challenge to Euro-American conceptions of

¹¹³ At Howard at least, it appeared that interactions between men and women were prohibited more on a class basis than on a sex basis. For example, upperclassmen were allowed to interact with students of the opposite sex, while underclassmen engaging in the same activities were more likely to be reprimanded.

¹¹⁴ Tera W. Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors After the Civil War* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1997), 183.

“proper bodily etiquette.” Moreover, the spontaneity and constant evolution of the new dance moves subverted and resisted reformers efforts to standardize and control this new vernacular style. For these reasons, blues aesthetic offered an alternative to the aesthetics of Victorian reform culture but also challenged the Talented Tenth’s claim over the leadership of racial progress.

Resolute in their mission, educators at Fisk, Spelman, and Howard were determined that the blues aesthetic would not taint the moral rectitude and virtue of their campuses. School officials derided the dance hall culture and at Fisk, “dancing between the sexes in the University or in public places” was listed in the college catalog among a number of activities “strictly forbidden” at the University.¹¹⁵ Not only was dancing banned on campus, it was forbidden off campus as well. Students who failed to adhere to the ban on dancing in public places were assured that even off campus they were still “subject to the discipline of the University for immoral or unworthy conduct during absence from the institution.”¹¹⁶ For the most part, students complied with the institutional guidelines and were determined to demonstrate their ability to conform to Victorian normative gender conventions and sexual morality. Indeed, as aspiring members of the Talented Tenth and future race leaders, collegians deeply abhorred any insults or threats to their sense of masculinity and femininity.

However, the faculty embraced marches as an alternative to dancing. Whereas dancing required partners to maintain constant physical contact with one another, the

¹¹⁵ It is interesting to note that the 1905 Fisk catalog simply lists “dancing” among the prohibited activities, however by 1915 the wording became more specific to include “dancing between the sexes in the University or in public places.” This indicated that perhaps students had used the initial loophole to partake in dancing off campus. Additionally, jazz music and the playing ragtime on school pianos were among the prohibited activities.

¹¹⁶ *Fisk Course Catalogue*, 1905, 21

march avoided any danger of impropriety as this form of movement simply required that partners “march” side by side. One particularly enjoyable Morehouse-Spelman social was captured by student James H. Jones who wrote:

One of the most charming of the series of entertainments given by the Y.W.C.A. was the Thanksgiving social in the dining room in Morgan Hall, Friday night, November 29. As the guests entered the room they were given beautiful programs upon which were designated the different features of the evening. These consisted of marches and promenades. The young men were very busy trying to engage the different marches with the young ladies, many of who succeeded in getting their programs filled. After the guests had all arrived the orchestra began to play the prelude and everybody began to get his feet in a marching attitude...The music began and everybody marched until he was satiated with the strains of the glorious music.¹¹⁷

Within this well-regimented schedule, and despite the ban on dancing, educators emphasized leisure time as a necessary and even healthful aspect of collegiate culture. Administrators at Fisk, Spelman, and Howard accommodated students by offering wholesome entertainment and activities that would enrich student life. Formal affairs including dinner parties, concert recitals, and plays provided an opportunity for students to gather for an evening of culture and entertainment. While the holidays including Halloween, Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Years, Mardi Gras, and Easter were particularly festive occasions on campus and offered a reprieve from the formality of every-day life on campus. One student reported that holiday time at Howard broke the “monotony” of student life as students were able to take “trips to points of interest in and around Washington” attend “theater parties” and “shopping expeditions.” For the female students in Miner Hall, “there was greater freedom, the rules being partially suspended. On each day the young ladies were permitted to receive their friends: while exchange calls were made between the two dormitories.”¹¹⁸ At Fisk and Spelman too,

¹¹⁷ “The Y.W.C.A. Social,” *The Athenaeum*, Vol. XV, No. 2, December 1912, 5.

¹¹⁸ “Holiday Time at Miner Hall,” *Howard University Journal*, Vol.3 No.7 January 5, 1907, 3.

students organized day-long activities during these events and the campuses transformed as students filled their dormitories and parlors with elaborate decorations.¹¹⁹ Yet when the festivities ended students understood that “the morrow’s coming meant a return to hard work.”¹²⁰

Representatives of the Race

Being a student at a black liberal arts institution was hard work. As the designated future race leaders, students were among the most visible members of the black community, and with this prestigious position came the burden, responsibility, and expectation that they would stand out as exceptional representations of their race.¹²¹ Whether they were attending morning devotions, sitting in class, at social events, or in nightly study hall, students were to use proper speech, appear neat and tidy, and most importantly dress in modest and tasteful clothing. Indeed, for all the administrators’ talk of the campuses as idyllic domestic spaces, black colleges were in fact very much public spaces designed to showcase students’ progress to visitors, white philanthropists, and the American public at large.¹²² Given this level of scrutiny educators required

¹¹⁹ Halloween and Mardi Gras were special favorites among the students and across the campuses of Fisk, Spelman, and Howard the students celebrated the evenings with extravagant costumed balls. These holidays provided students a culturally sanctioned escape from the rules that typically governed their dress. Surveying the student newspapers indicates that at Halloween it was not uncommon for young men to dress up in women’s clothing.

¹²⁰ “Holiday Time at Miner Hall,” *Howard University Journal*, 3.

¹²¹ Michael Fultz, “The Morning Cometh,” *The Journal of Negro History*, 80 3:105-107. Black periodicals of the first decade of the twentieth century, made special effort to highlight notable men and women, and focused on presenting members of the race in a favorable light to counter white stereotypes of black inferiority. Higher education was particularly important to this endeavor, as the achievements of black collegians provided proof of black Americans’ capabilities to be disciplined and “achieve academic distinction.”

¹²² It was a common practice for visitors—especially philanthropists and leaders of organizations such as the American Missionary Association, American Women’s Baptist Home Missionary Association, the Slater Fund, the Rosenwald Fund, or General Education Board to stop by black college campuses to assess and report their findings.

students to appear as models of respectability at all times—whether it be for their peers or for the scholars, philanthropists, reporters, and curious observers who constantly passed through black college campuses.¹²³ As Stephanie Wright has explained, educators believed that “internal order (or lack thereof) was reflected in part by exterior order, the dress of students was strictly regulated.”¹²⁴ Moreover, Wright notes that as “the most visible marker of gender and class, dress was of supreme importance on black colleges.”¹²⁵ One’s fashion choices were an important arbiter in determining the nature of a person’s character and educators at Fisk, Spelman, and Howard imposed a dress code on students that required them to wear clothing that was “becoming, plain, and substantial” clothing that displayed their sense of modesty, humility, and refinement in taste.¹²⁶

The rules governing female collegians’ dress were particularly elaborate. Administrators at Fisk went to special lengths to ensure that their students strictly adhered to the rules of respectable women’s fashion. To simplify this process, administrators imposed a standardized uniform which was to “be worn on all public occasions” which included “church, Sunday School, dinner calls, socials,” and even “Friday night entertainments.” The Fisk women’s uniform consisted of a navy blue suit with skirt and jacket, a white blouse, hat and Windsor tie. A Dress Committee consisting of faculty members enforced the dress code, and any articles of clothing considered to

¹²³ Fisk, Spelman, and Howard were nationally recognized schools that exemplified the highest standard of black higher education. Visitors to these institutions could be counted on to publish reports of their findings. Obtaining favorable reports were particularly given that each institution was competing for a small pool of philanthropic money at a time when Industrial education was the preference of many funders.

¹²⁴ Stephanie R. Wight, “Education and the Changing Social Identities of Black Southerners, 1865-1915” PhD Dissertation (Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, 2004), 78

¹²⁵ Wright, “Education and the Changing Social Identities of Black Southerners,” 79.

¹²⁶ *Fisk Catalogue*, 1915-1916, 20.

be “unsuitable, extravagant or unnecessary” by the Committee were to be laid aside while the students were in the University.¹²⁷ In the annual course catalogue, Fisk university officials cautioned young women to avoid bringing with them to campus any clothing that contained “chiffon, lace, or all-over embroidery.” Other prohibited articles of clothing included “evening wraps” along with “suits, skirts, waist, coats, or dresses of silk, white wool, velvet, or corduroy.” The Dress Committee did make one exception; a plain white wool skirt could be worn for calls, to class parties, and socials. Students could accessorize, but faculty warned that “whatever jewelry is worn must conform to the requirements of simplicity.”¹²⁸



Figure 8. Fisk University—Senior Preparatory Class, ca.1906.

Similar regulations were in effect at Spelman. While no formal dress code existed, school officials urged all incoming and returning students to bring clothing that was “sensible, neat, simple, and suitable.” Spelman administrators further informed

¹²⁷ *Catalogue of Fisk University*, 1905-1906, 24.

¹²⁸ *Catalogue of Fisk University*, 1905-1906, 4.

students that “expensive and showy dress and jewelry are out of place and in bad taste for schools girls.” In the interest of promoting the “health, economy, and good taste” of Spelman’s campus culture, students were told by the administration not to bring “silk, net, chiffon, velvet, or any other fancy dress.”¹²⁹ Instead, educators instructed the young women to pack a trunk with the following items: three dark wash dresses, two dark petticoats, aprons, and skirts as well as one pair of substantial high shoes and strong cotton stockings. Photographs in Howard University’s course catalogs and other promotional material indicate that while no formal dress code was in place, female collegians observed dress regulations similar to their peers at Spelman.



Figure 9. Spelman College—Students, ca. 1900.

The same principles that informed the women’s dress code applied to the young men as well—clothing contributed to the “important work of molding personality.”

Restraint and refinement in their fashion choices guided educators rules regarding the

¹²⁹ *Catalogue of Spelman Seminary, 1914-1915*, 11-12 . Over the course of the early twentieth century, the dress code regulations got progressively more detailed, supposedly to match the changing fashions, and to curb student dress. At Spelman, the changes occurred alongside Lucy Hale Tapley’s appointment as President. As Yolanda Watson and Shelia Gregory explain that prior to Tapley’s administration the dress code was significantly more “moderately regulated.” However, they note that both Tapley’s own penchant for rules along with changing fads in women’s fashion necessitated more stringent rules. Yolanda L. Watson, Shelia T. Gregory, *Daring to Educate: The Legacy of the Early Spelman College Presidents* (Sterling, Va: Stylus, 2005), 84.

dress of the young men at Fisk and Howard which were relatively simple; a coat, collar, and tie were to be worn at all times. The efforts of the male students to adhere to the administrative guidelines did not go unnoticed. Visitors to Howard's campus in 1904 noted that the young men there took particular pride in their appearance. Reporting on the visit, one student wrote that the visitors had been particularly "impressed by the unusual neatness of the students." The student explained that at Howard the young men "dress well—that much is admitted" and was pleased that the visitors were "readily convinced that our dress, taken with the other material results" which they had observed was an indication that "we are turning out educated young gentlemen."¹³⁰



Figure 10. Howard University—Students, ca. 1900.

The aesthetics of Victorian reform culture had an important impact on collegiate life and the making of the Talented Tenth. To attend an institution like Fisk, Spelman, or Howard was a rare opportunity and privilege for black youth in the early twentieth century and students self-consciously participated in forging and enforcing a collegiate

¹³⁰ "How We Dress," *The University Journal*, Vol. 1 No.6 February 15, 1904, 3.

culture that adhered to the highest moral standards. While university officials required complete compliance to the rules and regulations, students also militantly policed their peers' conduct and dress. Spending time on frivolous accessories or wearing garish clothing, many students believed, reflected a lack of judgment and character. The young freshmen class of 1907 learned this lesson when the upper classmen at Howard University penned a scathing critique of the younger students' fashion choices. In an open letter published in Howard's student newspaper, the older students publicly rebuked the younger men's behavior, stating that "by reason of thy overbearing, haughty and most disgusting deportment" they had "polluted the very atmosphere" of the campus. To correct this aesthetic assault on Howard's collegiate culture, the upper classmen wrote a code of conduct, which they titled, "The Twenty-Three Commandments." The first ten commandments established regulations for the students' clothing, and notified the freshmen that hereafter they were prohibited from wearing the following: "loud" socks, "loud" ties, "loud" vests (except on Sundays and holidays), and "loud" hat bands. The older peers further admonished the younger cohort for wearing "kid gloves" when "woolen gloves are good enough," and cautioned them from wearing their "trousers rolled up with a double roll." In their final commandment, the upper classmen demanded that the freshmen present a "gentlemanly, sober, and becoming deportment" on all occasions.¹³¹

The emphasis placed on appearance by both college officials and black college students reflects a deeper truth about the visual politics of Jim Crow and the early twentieth century preoccupation with visual culture. At the turn of the twentieth century, America's visual landscape had changed dramatically. An influx of new

¹³¹ "The Twenty-Three Commandments," *Howard University Journal*, Vol.5 No.3, Nov. 1, 1907, 5.

immigrants, along with black Americans' participation in the political sphere created a visual dissonance and discord for many white Americans who jealously guarded their hold on economic, social, and political supremacy. Popular race sciences at the time offered ready explanations for racial differences, and determined that characteristics such intelligence, sexual morality, and industry as immutable traits rather than the outcomes of systemic oppression and racial violence. The visual politics of Jim Crow thus operated by ascribing an aesthetic value to whiteness and blackness whereby such terms as "civilized," "respectable," and "virtuous" became synonymous with white manhood and womanhood. Black men and women, in contrast were under constant attack by a battery of negative stereotypes, myths, and caricatures based principally on the distorted notions about their gender and sexuality.

The Talented Tenth, however, challenged the visual and cultural politics of the Jim Crow establishment, by presenting black collegians as paradigms of respectability and race progress. Indeed, the very idea of a "Talented Tenth" was meant to challenge the white middle class's exclusive claims to respectable manhood and womanhood. Marlon Ross has described this strategy as "staging the race," a process whereby black leaders worked to break down "the norms and stigmas through which their collective identification was oppressively reinforced."¹³² And in the early twentieth century black collegians were an essential part of the "self-conscious ideological struggle to stage the reform of the race in order to achieve collective agency—and ultimately the rights of

¹³² Marlon B. Ross, *Manning the Race: Reforming Black Men in the Jim Crow Era*, (New York: New York University Press, 2004), 23. Ross specifically looks to Du Bois and his chapter "On the Education of Black Men" as an example of staging the race, and how race leaders presented black higher education, and more importantly the college-bred Negro as a paramount example of this particular strategy—which was both rhetorical and visual.

citizenship.”¹³³ While racial staging was not a civil rights strategy that explicitly attacked the economic, social, and political causes of black oppression, it did represent a direct assault against the ideological underpinnings of these structural barriers to equality. Further, among blacks enacting middle-class standards and values represented a radical act directed squarely at the racist visual and cultural politics of the white power structure.

The Extra-Curriculum

Breaking down the southern caste system required a multi-pronged approach, and racial staging was just one of the many ways that black Americans in the early twentieth century confronted the intolerable conditions of Jim Crow. Effectively denied access to traditional social, political, legal, and legislative channels of redress, black Americans faced indifference and hostility at all levels of government. Separate and unequal characterized all aspects of black urban life in the South—from inadequate housing, education, health care, and employment. In response, black reformers and activists organized on a massive scale to fill the void left by the elected leaders at the local, state, and federal level and provide essential social services to the black community. Ironically, the same conditions that produced the “nadir” of American race relations also produced one of the most comprehensive eras of black institution building and organizing. The early twentieth century saw a boon in black fraternal, mutual aid, and self-help organizations, as this was the era of the black clubwomen’s movement and the foundational moment of some of the century’s first national civil rights organizations like the NAACP and the National Urban League.

¹³³ Ross, *Manning the Race*, 23.

Black colleges and universities had an important role in this movement. They educated many of the founders of these early civil rights organizations. As the producers of the next generation of race leaders, black liberal arts institutions were tasked with ensuring that students were prepared to take up the vital “race work” being done by their elders. Accordingly, during the early twentieth century, a “spirit of cooperation,” race consciousness, and community mindedness were infused into black collegiate culture. Extra-curricular activities and student groups were organized by educators to develop these ideals among students. Through their participation in volunteer groups, student organizations, clubs, and societies, black collegians were to acquire the leadership skills and practical experience to prepare them for the responsibilities of race work. During the early years of the twentieth century, student groups organized to address important issues of the day such as temperance, chastity, piety, self-governance, racial problems, and community-mindedness. The proliferation of student organizations during the progressive era ran parallel with the growth of adult reform organizations addressing similar issues during these years. Spelman president Lucy Hale Tapley was delighted to see students pursuing civic-minded extra-curricular activities. They gained valuable “experience... in the management of these societies” she noted, and still more important, they encountered opportunities to have “influence on community life.”¹³⁴

No other aspect of early twentieth century black collegiate life enabled students to shape their own educational experience, as did their involvement in extra-curricular activities. Educators observed very early on that students embraced extracurricular activities both as a matter of “self-cultivation” and to supplement their courses of

¹³⁴ Lucy Hale Tapley, “President’s Annual Report,” *Spelman Messenger*, Vol.28, No.7, April 1912, 1.

study.¹³⁵ Student leaders encouraged their peers to avail themselves to “the opportunity of club training which is so valuable a part of a college education” in order to acquire the necessary “qualifications for future usefulness.”¹³⁶ Many students saw extra-curricular pursuits as the part of their collegiate training that would “best make [them] ready” to “play the part upon the state of human affairs that is required and expected” of the “youth of this generation.”¹³⁷ And more importantly, many of them judged other students’ willingness to actively participate in the uplift and advancement of their college community to be a reliable predictor of their commitment to race-work. “All college students” one Atlanta University student journalist maintained, owe it to “themselves and to their people to develop themselves in every way that opportunity affords.”¹³⁸ At Spelman, for example, students were evaluated by their peers on their willingness to partake in extracurricular activities and whether they had a “fair sense of proportion as to the relative importance of work, play, or social activities.”¹³⁹ Those students who neglected this aspect of college training, who failed to acquire the cooperative spirit, or were not willing to spend their hours of free-time in service to their campus and community were not only “narrowing and dwarfing” themselves, but

¹³⁵ Benjamin Brawley, *History of Morehouse College*, (Morehouse College, Atlanta, Ga., 1917), 120.

¹³⁶ P.O. Creuzot, “The Value of Club Discipline,” *The Fisk Herald*, Vol. XXVII No.2, Nov. 1909, 9.

¹³⁷ “Why We Go to College,” *Howard University Journal*, Vol. 3 No.3, December 1, 1905, 3.

¹³⁸ “How a Collegian Appeals to the People,” *The Scroll*, Vol. XV, No.5, March 1911, p.71, Atlanta University Published and Printed Materials, Box 24, Folder 2, Atlanta University Archives,.

¹³⁹ Deceased Alumnae Files, Box-1, Folder 15, Spelman College Archives. Faculty members at Spelman were required to keep daily records of students’ scholarly development and proficiency in certain tasks. This was called the Credit System, and the information gathered was for the benefit of parents and patrons to assess the progress of the student. While this comes from a questionnaire for the academic year 1933-1934, House Mothers were required to keep similar notes on their students earlier in the 1900s.

also depriving themselves of future opportunities to help their “people to reach loftier intellectual, moral, religious, and physical planes.”¹⁴⁰

Among the oldest student organizations were the debating and literary societies, which had become popular at black colleges during the late nineteenth century.¹⁴¹

These societies promoted discussion and debate of current political, social, cultural, and economic issues amongst students and also provided a space for students to improve and hone their public speaking skills. One Fisk student explained that membership in these societies enabled students to “better grapple with our political, social and economic problems; in order that we may better interpret literature, art and science; in order that we may better cultivate the art of self-expression and become more familiar with parliamentary rules and usages, and last but not least, in order that we may the better develop that friendship and fellowship, which only close association can afford.”¹⁴² Fisk had an especially robust tradition of literary and debating societies. The Union Literary Society, a male student group was founded in 1868, just two years after the college itself. Not to be left out, the female collegians of Jubilee Hall formed their own Young Ladies Lyceum, and by 1915, the school had as many as six such clubs—three for men and three for women.¹⁴³

A similar tradition developed at Howard. The Alpha Phi Literary Society—Howard’s oldest student organization—was founded in 1872 exclusively for the young

¹⁴⁰ “How a Collegian Appeals to the People”, *The Scroll*, Vol. XV, No.5, March 1911, p.71, Atlanta University Published and Printed Materials, Box 24, Folder 2, Atlanta University Archives,.

¹⁴¹ For a detailed discussion of the history of literary and debating societies at Historically Black Colleges and Universities see Monroe H. Little, “The Extra-Curricular Activities of Black College Students, 1868-1940,” *The Journal of African American History*, Vol.87 (Winter, 2002): 44-46.

¹⁴² “Our Clubs”, *Fisk Herald*, Vol.XXXII No.7, May 1915, 33.

¹⁴³ Over the course of the early twentieth century, certain clubs folded and new ones arose. By 1915 the following Literary Societies existed at Fisk: The Excelsior, Extempo, and Dunbar Clubs for the young men of the College Department, and the Decagynian, D.L.V., Girls’ Debating and Tanner Art Clubs for the young women. Catalog Number, *Fisk University News* Vol. VI. No.4, 1915, 16.

men of Howard University, and later opened up to female membership. Howard educators, however took a step back in 1901 when for reasons unknown, the female student membership was revoked. An article in the newly formed student newspaper brought attention to the decline in the attendance and popularity of the school's literary society. The writer noted that the "decided slump" in enthusiasm and support for the student group could be pinpointed back to a decision made in 1901, when "the young ladies in Miner Hall were prohibited from attending" meetings of the literary society. The author questioned the rationale behind this decision, and asked, "why should the young ladies in Miner Hall ever have been denied the benefit of the literaries? Do they not need the training in literary work, which they can obtain from these societies? These same young ladies attend the weekly meetings of the two religious societies fostered by the school, but when it comes to the literary societies they are prohibited from attending." The student concluded his article by reminding Howard administrators of the considerable weight that the female student body carried on campus stating that, "in some of these departments a large number of the students are young ladies and anything that effects them must effect the different departments of which they form so great a part."¹⁴⁴ The following year, the situation was remedied. The *Journal* proudly reported that the Alpha Phi had embarked upon a "new era," and would once again open their membership to "girls of the College of Arts and Sciences and Teachers College."¹⁴⁵

As the above example demonstrates, student journalism could be an important force in effecting change in early twentieth century collegiate life. Students considered journalism to be "a definite part in the life of any college community" and a valuable

¹⁴⁴ "The Decline of Literary Societies," *Howard University Journal*, Vol.1 No.1, November 15, 1903, 4-5.

¹⁴⁵ "The Alpha Phi," *Howard University Journal*, Vol.2 No.1 November 4, 1904, 2.

part of a college education.¹⁴⁶ It also allowed them to challenge their otherwise paternalistic relationship with university administrators and faculty. When they disagreed with their college's administration or faculty students could use their newspapers as a platform to lay out their side of whatever was at issue to a wider audience: And on occasion, they did. Student newspapers, like Howard's *University Journal* had a wide readership that included alumni, scholars, and white philanthropic and missionary associations.

While students sometimes used negative publicity to force faculty or administrators to address their concerns these instances were few and far between. Instead, students chose their public battles carefully, so as not to attract negative press towards their institution. More often, as one of the primary media outlets for their school, student newspapers recorded the achievements of the institution, its scholars, and students. These publications were dedicated to fostering pride among students for their institution and in the achievements of their peers. As one student journalist at Fisk explained, the purpose of the student newspaper was to let outsiders "judge what we are doing, and what we propose to do by reading our expressions in our articles. All people cannot conveniently come to Fisk but we, through the *Herald*, can conveniently carry Fisk to them."¹⁴⁷ Likewise, a student journalist at Howard maintained that the *Howard University Journal* was the "mouthpiece" of the Howard community: its purpose was "to keep the world informed of its existence, to make known its wants, to shed forth its blessings." To this end, the editors of the *Journal* focused on publishing "editorials on topics of general and University interest" as well as highlighting "the literary, athletic,

¹⁴⁶ "College Journalism," *Howard University Journal*, Vol.3 No.1, November 17, 1905, p.1.

¹⁴⁷ "A Case of Negligence," *Fisk Herald*, Vol. XXV No.4, March, 1913, 3.

social and religious sides of our student life.”¹⁴⁸ Regular columns in the *Howard Journal*, the *Fisk Herald*, and the *Spelman Messenger*, spotlighted student organizations and special events. Also common to all three papers were features on exceptional students who had fully embraced all the opportunities that college life afforded, as well as profiles of alumni whose careers would encourage students in their studies—such individuals also served as exemplars of life among the Talented Tenth.

The students who ran the newspapers took their responsibilities seriously. The *Fisk Herald*, *The Athenaeum* (a joint Morehouse-Spelman publication), and *Howard University Journal* were edited and managed by an editorial board and featured articles commissioned from the student body. Although a faculty supervisor retained oversight of the content of the articles, all three newspapers nonetheless provided collegians with a discursive space to address the issues that concerned them. Students wrote about the value of higher education and pondered the virtues of middle-class values such as temperance, thrift, and chastity. They discussed the significance of developing good character and contemplated what it meant to be an “ideal woman” and what it took to achieve “true manhood.” Students explored broader topics as well. The “race question” and solutions to the “Negro Problem” were central to students’ concerns as were issues such as imperialism, urbanization, industrialism, and politics—local, national, and international. Overwhelmingly though, students wrote about themselves and their organizations. Their focus on this subject is not surprising: aside from the hours they spent in the classroom, collegians devoted the most time to extra-curricular pursuits. While faculty members typically had some sort of supervisory role in student organizations, the students organized and managed the day-to-day operations.

¹⁴⁸ “The Journal,” *Howard University Journal*, Vol.4, No.1, September, 28, 1906, 2.

Participation in these organizations developed leadership and public speaking skills among both male and female collegians, and also promoted the value of community building, activism, and organizing.

At Fisk and Spelman in particular, the most popular student organizations included the Christian Endeavor Society, which sought to convert students to Christianity; and the White Shield Society, which enrolled both male and female collegians, and required its members to pledge to remain chaste, be modest in their language, behavior and dress, and to guard the purity of others. Temperance was also popular cause. Even though the college had strict rules regarding the use of alcohol and ardent spirits both on and off campus, students further dedicated themselves to sobriety by organizing of campus temperance societies. Members signed were required to sign a pledge book marking their support of temperance and vowed to collect the signatures during the summer months, and many started temperance societies at home or wherever they were employed.¹⁴⁹ Finally, each campus had a YMCA and YWCA student chapter. In addition to campus uplift, the YMCA-YWCA chapters required students to be involved in community organizing, as well as focusing on national and international issues. These student organizations typically combined a religious and service-oriented missions meant to promote the “social uplift of the students” and put into “concrete forms the school ideals.”¹⁵⁰

Despite having one of the smaller student populations, Spelman had one of the most active student bodies among the leading black liberal arts institutions. For example, students there formed the White Shield Society when “some of the older and

¹⁴⁹ “Temperance Work at Spelman,” *Spelman Messenger*, Vol.5 No.8, June 1899, 6.

¹⁵⁰ “Y.W.C.A. At Spelman,” *Spelman Messenger*, Vol. 26 No.6, March, 1910, 7.

more thoughtful pupils [noticed] that some of the girls, during their recreation hours, were not engaged in conversation which they would have liked their parents or teachers to know about.” The older students approached the faculty who “concluded that they would organize a society that would help, strengthen, and teach girls along lines of purity of both soul and body.”¹⁵¹ Christian Endeavor Societies were also prominent at Spelman. The earliest such societies organized there in 1889, with each hall having its own society, and in 1890 the Christian Endeavor Union was formed, which was composed of all the societies. To maximize their members’ practical experience, each society had a full set of officers, as well as a committee system, which sought “to find some task for everyone and some one for every task.”¹⁵² By 1910, there were seven societies with two hundred members, and in 1913 an Executive Committee formed comprised of the presidents of the various societies to “stimulate interest in the society by devising plans for more effectual work and to bring about a closer union among the different societies.”¹⁵³

The oldest student organization at Spelman was the YWCA, organized in 1884. Although membership varied over the years, the YWCA remained a “potent factor” both on campus and in the Atlanta community as the only regularly organized chapter in the city. Members of the Spelman YWCA were active in various lines of work. They had a social committee, worked with young converts, and performed mission work—

¹⁵¹ When students joined the White Shield Society they were required to take the following pledge: “I promise by the help of God: To uphold the law of purity as equally binding upon men and women. To be moistest in language, behavior, and dress. To avoid conversations, art and amusement which may put impure thoughts into the mind. To guard the purity of others, especially of my companions and friends. To strive after the special blessing promised to the pure of heart.” As cited in: “Our White Shield Society,” *Spelman Messenger*, Vol. 28 No.6, March, 1912, p.2

¹⁵² The office of the Christian Endeavor societies included a president, vice-president, secretary, and treasurer. The committees included the look-out, home circle, and quiet committees. “Christian Endeavor Societies,” *Spelman Messenger*, Vol. 29 No.4, January 1913, 2-3.

¹⁵³ “Christian Endeavor Societies,” *Spelman Messenger*, 3.

which included establishing and staffing both mission Sunday Schools and a home for “homeless working girls, and a day nursery where working mothers have their children properly cared for.”¹⁵⁴ The weekly prayer meetings held in the school’s chapel were led by one of the Association members and were described by participants as being “full of interest and are developing skill and confidence which will be invaluable later in life.”¹⁵⁵ As members of a national and international organization, student YWCA members also took an active interest in national and international issues such as temperance and foreign missionary work. Ultimately, the Spelman YWCA chapter sought to ensure that it was developing its members for greater usefulness in the world beyond the campus.

Between 1905 and 1912, a growing number of secular student-centered organizations were founded at Fisk and Howard. Both Fisk and Howard established a form of student government, and at Howard, college men and women were successful in convincing administrators to allow them to organize Greek-letter societies¹⁵⁶. In founding these organizations, students sought to implement the ideals of the Talented Tenth on campus, and assert themselves more directly in campus life. Take for example, the Self-Government Club (a pre-cursor to student government) at Fisk. The object of this organization was “to help the student to cultivate the habit of governing himself.”¹⁵⁷ Students argued that “this is one organization that should be in every school” and that membership in this club was to be automatic by virtue of being enrolled as a full-

¹⁵⁴ “YMCA & Spelman,” *Spelman Messenger*, Vol.22 No.3, December 1905, 3.

¹⁵⁵ “Spelman Seminary YWCA,” *Spelman Messenger*, Vol.28 No.4, January 1912, 1.

¹⁵⁶ Alpha Phi Alpha established a chapter at Howard University 1907. The following year, in 1908, the Alpha Kappa Alpha becomes the first black sorority and in 1912 the Delta Sigma Theta sorority is also established at Howard.

¹⁵⁷ “Self-Government,” *Fisk Herald*, Vol. XXV No.7, April 1908, 16.

time student. An article in the *Fisk Herald* laid out the rationale for the organization stating that “a student may have all the literary and religious training possible, but unless he has the power of self-control he is still lacking.” However, “if every student would exhibit more signs of this self-governing ability, then there would be less need of so many rules in the University.”¹⁵⁸ The Self-Government club thus acted as a disciplinary body which handled “student delinquencies” thus “saving the faculty the trouble of dealing with them” and “thereby preventing the enactment of laws that would abridge the privileges of those who would do right under similar circumstances.”¹⁵⁹ With the Self-Government Club, Fisk students made an important first step in gaining greater autonomy and governance in policy-making decisions. Although administrators and faculty would continue to retain strict oversight of disciplinary actions and campus regulations

Conclusion

By the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, there was a subtle, but perceptible change in the attitudes of black collegians. As students began to seek greater autonomy and control and participation in governance and shaping school policy, they came up against white administrators who were unwilling to extend these privileges to students. These confrontations with their administrative bodies over student organizing and institutional control began to show the fallibility in the idea of the Talented Tenth as a model for race advancement and civil rights. Elsewhere, race leaders in the 1910s were pursuing more militant forms of protest and organizing. The founding of the

¹⁵⁸ “Self-Government,” *Fisk Herald*, 16.

¹⁵⁹ “Self-Government,” *Fisk Herald*, 17.

Niagara Movement in 1905, by W.E.B. Du Bois and William Monroe Trotter among others, provided a militant and radical counterpoint to the accommodationist politics proposed by Booker T. Washington. After the Niagara Movement's decline in 1910, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People—founded that same year—became the national organization for black civil rights. Similarly, the woman suffrage movement of the 1910s also provided collegians, and especially female students with a model for expanding their spheres of influence on campus. Even more important, these organizations and movements explicitly sought student involvement and targeted black collegians in their messaging and organizing.

Despite the shift in national black politics and civil rights organizing, these changes did not necessarily lead to tangible change within black institutions of higher education. Factors like geographic location, missionary association—or lack thereof, as well as sources of funding support, and the racial make-up of the administrative staff played an important role in shaping the degree of success students' achieved through their activism and resistance in the years leading up to the First World War. Located further south of the Mason Dixon line, Fisk and Spelman—headed by white administrators—Fayette Avery McKenzie and Lucy Hale Tapley—who were steeped in the tradition of missionary paternalism. Moreover both institutions were subservient to the oversight of their founding missionary associations, and reliant on the financial support of white philanthropists. To a large degree, Howard University's advantageous location in the nation's capital, its autonomy from the oversight of missionary organizations, and white presidents' who functioned more as figure heads while the black triumvirate—Kelly Miller, George Miller, and Lewis B. Moore—ran the

university, helped to facilitate student initiatives. Still, it would take radical action on the part of students in the years after the First World War to convince administrators and faculty to relinquish some control in these areas.

Chapter 2

The Howard Renaissance: Towards a Politics of Protest, 1909-1917

Introduction

On the forty-eighth anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation, Howard University student Charles H. Garvin wrote an editorial for the student newspaper arguing that black Americans' freedom remained a "prize that must [still] be defended." It was now 1911, but the full rights and privileges of American citizenship still eluded black men and women. He cited disfranchisement, the "curtailing of school training," "economic slavery" along with the "insult of our womanhood, lynching, segregation, and injustices before the courts" as evidence of the injustices perpetrated against African Americans. While Garvin's words painted a sobering picture of the status of black Americans as they entered the second decade of the twentieth century, he remained optimistic. Writing to his fellow students, Garvin advised that change would require "inspired, brave, and manly men" to "contend and agitate for our rights" and "arouse the masses to their duty" to use the "ultimate weapon of citizenship"—the ballot—effectively" black Americans would be able to "secure its full advantages."¹⁶⁰

Garvin was not alone in his convictions, his sentiments were shared by a growing number of black collegians who believed that with their education and training came a duty to "be the leaders in this fight" for "true democratic liberty" and recognition as "equal citizens."¹⁶¹ Garvin was among a small, but growing, number of black men and women who believed that without direct and confrontational methods, including political participation and agitation for civil rights, black Americans would

¹⁶⁰ Charles H. Garvin, "Freedom," *Howard University Journal*, Vol.8 No.14, January 14, 1911, 5.

¹⁶¹ "Responsibility and Action," *Howard University Journal*, Vol. 8 No.10, December, 9, 1910, 5.

never secure full citizenship rights. Most noticeably, the roots of Charles Garvin's ideas can be traced back to the militant politics of protest advocated by members of the Niagara Movement. A black civil right organization founded in 1905 by W.E.B. Du Bois, William Monroe Trotter, and other leaders who opposed Booker T. Washington and the Tuskegee Machine, the Niagara movement had an important role in framing black racial politics and policies in the years before America's entry into the Great War.¹⁶²

During its years of operation from 1905-1910, the Niagara Movement proposed a radical program for race advancement, and openly called for black Americans—including black women—to agitate and protest for the civil, political, economic, and social rights due to them as citizens of the United States.¹⁶³ In their founding statement, the Niagara Movement's Declaration of Principles, the movement leaders asserted that "persistent manly agitation is the way to liberty." The leaders further vowed to "protest against the curtailment of our civil rights," and to "refuse to allow the impression to remain that the Negro-American assents to inferiority, is submissive under oppression and apologetic before insults."¹⁶⁴ The Niagara Movement was committed to advancing the ideals of equal educational and economic opportunities for black Americans, full political participation, electoral activism, and universal suffrage—a stance that stood out in stark relief of the conciliatory politics of accommodation advocated by Booker T.

¹⁶² A total of twenty-nine from the fifty-nine men who were originally invited, attended the founding meeting held in Fort Erie, Ontario, held from July 11 to July 13, 1905.

¹⁶³ The Niagara Movement initially excluded women from membership. This exclusionary policy was modified for the second annual meeting, where women were allowed to attend all but the business meetings. Under pressure from women though, they were extended membership.

¹⁶⁴ Niagara Movement (Organization). Niagara Movement declaration of principles, 1905. W.E.B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.

Washington, who encouraged his followers to pursue economic self-help rather than agitate for civil and political rights.

Ultimately, the Niagara Movement was disbanded in 1909. Several factors account for the organizations' decline, including obstructionism by the powerful Booker T. Washington and the Tuskegee Machine. Whereas Washington had access to large financial resources, powerful white allies, political patronage, and controlled a large majority of the black press, the Niagara Movement lacked the financial, social, and political capital necessary to advance the organization's program. Further, the Niagara Movement's inability to connect or devise a message that resonated with the black masses along conflict within the leadership structure, namely between Du Bois and Trotter, limited the organization's success.¹⁶⁵

Despite its short life, in many ways the Niagara Movement was a success. First, the Niagara Movement legitimized a politics of protest and resistance to accommodation and attracted the attention of progressive whites including Mary White Ovington and Oswald Garrison Villard—the grandson of the famous abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison—to the cause for full citizenship rights for black Americans. Indeed, the militant program of the Niagara Movement served as the basis for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). After the Niagara Movement disbanded in 1909, many of its leaders were invited to join the new bi-racial civil rights organization, including W.E.B Du Bois who was named as the organization's director of publicity and research.

¹⁶⁵ Elliott M. Rudwick. "The Niagara Movement," *The Journal of Negro History*, 42 3 (Jul., 1957): 199-200.

The Niagara Movement and its successor the NAACP were also important to shaping the politics and activism of black collegians in the years before the First World War. The Niagara Movement in particular, valued the role that black college youth would play in the struggle for civil rights. In 1906, the organization distributed “An Open Letter to College Men,” wherein leaders outlined their goals for black youth. According to the letter the General Secretary—Du Bois—was determined to establish a Junior Niagara Movement so that the ideals and aims of the Niagara Movement would become rooted in “the fertile and fearless hearts of our college students.” Specifically the letter stated “we want our college students to take a stand for the principles set down in the objects of the Niagara movement,” and encouraged students to “develop and make yourself strong for the leadership which will come to you!” Black colleges and universities were to establish campus chapters and hold regular monthly meetings where “subjects of interest in keeping with the object of the movement may be discussed.”¹⁶⁶ The NAACP also sought to engage and develop leadership among black collegiate youth by encouraging administrators at black colleges and universities to allow students to form campus chapters.

The protest politics advanced by the Niagara Movement and later the NAACP appealed to black collegians. Black college students, and more specifically, students at Howard University began to organize around a more confrontational style of race politics, marking an important turning point in the history of black student activism. In 1909, a student journalist writing in the *Howard University Journal* declared that Howard was going through a “Renaissance”—referring to widespread political

¹⁶⁶ Niagara Movement (Organization). An Open Letter to College Men: The Meaning of the Niagara Movement and the Junior Niagara Movement, ca. 1906. W.E.B. Du Bois Papers. (MS 312). Special Collections and University Archives of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.

organizing and activism, students at Howard were engaged in that year.¹⁶⁷ Howard's Renaissance continued throughout the period before the First World War, as students at the university pursued a path for black freedom, equality, and justice, which focused on the importance of electoral activism, black participation in the political sphere, woman's suffrage, and the creation of national and international organizations.

The 1910s were volatile years for all black Americans, and black collegians like their adult counterparts were affected by the proliferation of Jim Crow laws in the South. These same years were also an exciting period of black civil, electoral, and political activism. The presidential elections of 1912 and 1916 and debates over America's imminent entry into the European War raised important questions about the meanings and rights of citizenship and democracy in America. The Woman Suffrage Movement of the 1910s and the rise of the NAACP as a national militant civil rights organization provided black Americans with the platform to assert their rights in the political process and test out the new protest politics. These larger events politicized black students—as both observers and participants—and directly influenced the more militant and protest-oriented style of racial politics that emerged as an important part of collegiate life.

¹⁶⁷ For example, students were acknowledged for their involvement in the District's Colored Social Settlement, run by Howard alumnae Miss Bibb and for their active participation in the Student Volunteer Convention. Mary Church Terrell, noted suffragist addressed the female collegians on the topic of women and citizenship. And students participated in an international student conference. The conference, held in Rochester was attended by nearly four thousand delectates from 722 colleges and universities, 49 states and provinces, and 29 different countries. Howard sent four delegates (three women and one man) to this conference dedicated to recruit missionaries for foreign fields in Africa, China, India, and Japan.

The Howard Difference

The differences between Fisk, Spelman, and Howard can be traced back to these institutions' founding years. Between 1860 and 1915, missionary societies like the American Missionary Association (AMA), which founded Fisk and the American Baptist Home Missionary (ABHMS), which founded Spelman were responsible for educating sixty percent of black students who attended colleges and universities nationwide.¹⁶⁸ According to William H. Watkins, missionary organizations like the AMA and ABHMS were especially successful at establishing institutions of higher education for black Americans because of their conservative approach to race advancement. Writing about the missionary associations, Watkins notes, "they were part of the cultural and religious evolution of the South, they accepted an evolutionary view of societal change" and "they espoused the paternal social and racial relations of the South."¹⁶⁹

Howard University was similarly initially founded with the same missionary impulse as Fisk and Spelman. Members from the prestigious First Congregational Society in Washington, D.C., intended to establish a seminary to train black ministers. Soon though, the plan changed to create a full-scale University. At the same time, the founders also decided that the new Howard University would have no denominational affiliation. While the school would be Christian in its mission, the students were "educated and not the subjects of missionary efforts."¹⁷⁰ One the plans for the

¹⁶⁸ William H. Watkins, *The White Architects of Black Education*, (Teachers College Press, Teachers College, Columbia University, 2001) 5, 19.

¹⁶⁹ Watkins, *The White Architects*, 15.

¹⁷⁰ *National Republican* (Washington City (D.C.)), 02 Jan. 1875. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Library of Congress. <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn86053573/1875-01-02/ed-1/seq-4/>>

University were set, a committee was selected to obtain a charter. On March 2, 1867 the act to incorporate Howard University was passed by Congress and signed into law by President Andrew Johnson.¹⁷¹ Funding for the new University came mainly from the Freedman's Bureau, along with some philanthropic sources and tuition. When the Freedman's Bureau was shut down in 1872, funding from the federal government continued in the form of annual congressional appropriations.

The federal funding meant that Howard University from organizational oversight, which freed administrative personnel and faculty from the ideological constraints of a missionary education. To be sure, congressional oversight carried its own burdens: each year Howard administrators were required to submit an annual report to the Secretary of the Interior explaining their expenditures. Moreover, the government's financial involvement also made Howard University vulnerable to the whims of racist congressmen who threatened to withhold the schools funding to keep faculty and students in line.¹⁷² Still, when it came to the university's daily operations, Howard educators had considerable more autonomy than their colleagues at Fisk and Spelman, whose curricula was shaped by the pedagogical and religious ideologies of their patrons.¹⁷³

¹⁷¹ Rayford Logan, *Howard University: The First Hundred Years, 1867-1967* (New York: New York University Press, 1969), 20-26.

¹⁷² Babalola Cole, "Appropriation Politics and Black Schools: Howard University in the U.S. Congress, 1879-1928," *The Journal of Negro Education* 46 1 (Winter, 1977): 7-23.

¹⁷³ By the early twentieth century, most missionary-run institutions were in dire financial shape. Many turned to northern industrial philanthropists for funds. Many northern philanthropists had concrete ideals about the nature and purpose of black higher education, and distributed their funds to those institutions that most approximated these ideals. Thus, the degree to which educators held socially and racially paternalistic ideals or publicly espoused these ideals by the early twentieth century is debated. For example, *In Daring to Educate: The Legacy of the Early Spelman College Presidents* (Stylus, 2005), Yolanda Watson and Sheila Gregory argue over the degree to which Spelman's administrators held these particular beliefs as opposed to the administrators public overtures to secure funding from the Rockefeller-run General Education board. The authors argue that it was the later. On the other hand, there is plenty of evidence that Fisk's autocratic president Fayette Avery McKenzie both publicly and privately

The leaders of missionary-run institutions believed in civil and political rights for black citizens, and the mental and moral training they received at liberal arts institutions would prepare them for the responsibilities and duties of citizenship rights. Thus, well into the twentieth century the AMA and ABHMS continued to exert paternalistic influence over the operations of their institutions. An ideological hangover from the late nineteenth century, “missionary paternalism” (or missionary maternalism in the case of Spelman) was predicated on the belief that white educators possessed a moral, spiritual, and cultural superiority and as such, were uniquely prepared to guide black collegians through the acculturation process into respectable manhood and womanhood.¹⁷⁴ Because of these beliefs, missionary-run institutions like Fisk and Spelman tended to disproportionately employ white faculty who received higher compensation than their black colleagues. White administrators and faculty also received preferential hiring treatment over black applicants; Fisk President Fayette Avery McKenzie was well known for consistently passing over black academics in favor of hiring and promoting white department heads.¹⁷⁵

Missionary paternalism also employed an authoritarian style of governance that placed a premium on the strict enforcement of rules and regulations. Educators at Fisk and Spelman prohibited the formation of any student organization or club that challenged these administrations’ authority. And when it came to racial politics, educators at Fisk and Spelman continued to advocate a program of gradualism focused

held paternalistic ideals about black civil, political, and social rights and openly sought to attract philanthropic funding based on his views (see for example Joe M. Richardson, *The History of Fisk University*).

¹⁷⁴ James M. McPherson *The Abolitionist Legacy: From Reconstruction to the NAACP*, (Princeton University Press, 1995), 194.

¹⁷⁵ Lester C. Lamon, *Black Tennesseans, 1900-1930*, (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1977), 230.

on higher education, service, property accumulation, and cultural transformation over the increasingly popular protest strategies that sought to address black inequality.¹⁷⁶ At Fisk, for example, student orations and debates were subject to faculty censorship lest they promote any “radical ideas,” and administrators censored or banned publications considered by administrators to be “controversial” like the NAACP’s *Crisis* magazine. Spelman President Lucy Hale Tapley believed that black women were best served in the areas of reform and uplift. To that end administrators discouraged political organization and student politics at Spelman, lest these activities detract from students’ primary focus—becoming respectable wives, mothers, and community leaders. Administrators also prohibited student debates, and Spelman students were barred from organizing their own campus NAACP chapter.¹⁷⁷ Instead, Spelman promoted religious and service-oriented activities consistent with the ideals of feminine respectability.

Howard University’s administrative structure and the racial composition of the faculty also contributed to the school’s progressive environment. At Fisk and Spelman, white men and women almost exclusively held the top administrative positions. Moreover, these schools’ presidents exerted almost unilateral control over all administrative matters. From its earliest beginnings, Howard University ensured that there were black voices in the decision-making process and in the running of the institution, both of which had an important effect on the school’s growth and development. For instance, a number of Howard’s founding members and trustees were noted black abolitionists including Henry H. Garnet, Frederick Douglass, and the

¹⁷⁶ As historian Lynn Gordon has noted the gradualist program included “no plan for how black communities might progress beyond a separate and politically disadvantaged status.” Lynn D. Gordon, “Race, Class and the Bonds of Womanhood,” *History of Higher Education Annual* 9, 1989, 16.

¹⁷⁷ Although *The Crisis* was considered controversial, McKenzie permitted a copy edited for content to be placed in the school’s library.

Reverend Francis Grimke. Moreover, Howard elected black men to the school's top administrative positions: one example is John Mercer Langston who served both as the Dean of Howard's Law School during the early 1870s and as the school's interim president.

The institutional culture and administrative system at Howard was also unique in that both white and black administrators had separate spheres of influence. Since the 1890s, Howard's white university presidents had shared their administrative duties with African Americans, most notably three deans: Kelly Miller, George William Cook, and Lewis B. Moore. The administrative arrangement between Howard Presidents and the Triumvirate—as the black deans were called—worked well into the 1910s with each party ensuring checks and balances against the other. The Triumvirate not only curtailed the power of white presidents, but also ensured that black voices were represented in the decision-making processes at Howard.

In 1905, when newly elected President John Gordon attempted to circumscribe the authorities of the black deans, he experienced extreme backlash from both the Howard student body and the black Washington community. Seven hundred Howard students organized a strike in protest the practices of their “Lily White” president. Through their actions, the students sought to expose the “tyranny” and paternalism of their white administrator.¹⁷⁸ They pledged to return to class only when Gordon handed in his resignation. Eventually, pressure from several of black Washington's notable

¹⁷⁸ In addition to President Gordon's attempts to thwart the Triumvirate's authority, students protested his decision to send his children to white schools rather than Howard, which had been the tradition of the school's faculty and administrators since the university's founding. For more on Gordon's presidency see Walter Dyson, *Howard University, The Capstone of Negro Education, A History: 1867-1940*. (The Graduate School: Howard University, 1941), 64, and Zachery R. Williams, *In Search of the Talented Tenth: Howard University Public Intellectuals and the Dilemmas of Race, 1926-1970* (University of Missouri Press, 2009), 9.

leaders and attention from the local press persuaded Gordon to resign. Thereafter, both Wilbur Thirkield who occupied the presidency from 1906 to 1912 and his successor Stephen Newman (1912-1918) proved eager to work alongside the Triumvirate and were determined not to make the mistakes as their predecessors. Newman in particular relied on the experience and wisdom of the Triumvirate, deferring to their judgment in most affairs.

The racial composition of Howard's faculty was also a factor in the university's progressive collegiate life. By the 1910s, approximately two-thirds of the Howard faculty was African American. By contrast, only one-third of Fisk and Spelman's faculty members were black. Rather than militantly police student activities, Howard faculty encouraged student initiatives. African American professors Thomas Montgomery Gregory and Alain L. Locke exemplified the type of young, idealistic, and politically engaged faculty that the university attracted in the years before the First World War. Gregory, a native of Washington, had graduated from Harvard in 1910, and began his career at Howard in 1911 as an instructor, assistant professor, and eventually as a full professor and head of Howard's nationally renowned English Department. Alain Locke, who would become known for his role in the New Negro cultural movement, received his early acclaim as a dedicated educator. Locke joined the Howard faculty in 1912 as an assistant professor of the teaching of English at Howard's Teacher's College and as an instructor in Philosophy and Education in the College of Arts and Sciences. Born in Philadelphia in 1886, Locke attended Harvard University. The first African-American Rhodes Scholar, he attended Oxford College, and spent one year at the University of Berlin before joining the Howard faculty. Together, Gregory

and Locke served as faculty advisors for a number of student organizations including the campus chapter of the NAACP; co-founded the *Stylus* literary magazine which fostered the talents of New Negro writers including Zora Neal Hurston; and were instrumental in assisting Howard students establish a campus chapter of the Intercollegiate Student Socialist Society.

Beyond the support that Howard collegians had from administrators and faculty, students also had the added benefit of location. In the early 1910s, Washington, D.C. was widely regarded by contemporaries as the cultural capital of black America. Howard had helped create the city's black community by restricting any land purchases near the university that would be injurious or offensive to the interests of Howard, by stimulating business development, attracting black middle-class homeowners. For example, the famous Shaw/U Street corridor: black Washington's central commercial, cultural, and entertainment district, was located just a few blocks south of Howard's campus. The Howard University neighborhood was home to many of the country's prominent race leaders including Anna Julia Cooper, Mary Church Terrell, and Archibald and Francis Grimke, as well as cultural icons Jean Toomer, Paul Lawrence Dunbar, and Georgia Johnson, and of course many of Howard's esteemed black faculty.¹⁷⁹ Only Atlanta's West End neighborhood, which included the campuses of Atlanta University, Spelman and Morehouse Colleges, and adjacent Sweet Auburn Avenue—the city's black business and commercial district—came close to rivaling black Washington in the 1910s.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁹ Michael Andrew Fitzpatrick, "A Great Agitation for Business:" Black Economic Development in Shaw, *Washington History*, 22 (Fall/Winter, 1900/1991), 62-70.

¹⁸⁰ For a detailed description of Auburn Avenue during the 1910s see Clifford M. Kuhn, *Living Atlanta: A Oral History Of the City*, (University of Georgia Press), 10-13.

Rather than prohibit their students from spending too much time outside the campus walls, like their colleagues at Spelman or Fisk, Howard's administrative personnel and faculty encouraged their collegians to become active in the city's black communities and take advantage of the opportunities the District had to offer.¹⁸¹ The Shaw and U Street neighborhoods offered collegians a variety of leisure, cultural, and entertainment options, and Howard educators especially encouraged their students to attend the weekly meetings of the Bethel Literary and Historical Society. The Bethel Literary and Historical Society, which had been a fixture of black Washington life since 1881, was an important link between town and gown relations. It often gathered the District's community residents, Howard collegians, and many of the most prominent black intellectuals of the era in one meeting place.¹⁸² The Society's weekly meetings at the Metropolitan A.M.E. Church at 1518 M Street NW attracted hundreds of listeners who came to hear presentations from invited speakers, to celebrate the achievements of black men and women, participate in an open public discussion, and debate the most important issues concerning black Americans. The Bethel Literary meetings were well known for encouraging audience participation and e Howard students who attended had the opportunity to further cultivate their critical thinking and oratorical skills among many of the country's prominent race leaders.

The nation's capital was also a hotbed of politics and activism in the early 1910s and Howard students had a front row seat to some of the era's most important national debates and political movements. For example, both woman's suffrage activists and the

¹⁸¹ For more on the Shaw-U Street corridor in the early 1900s, see Michael Andrew Fitzpatrick, "A Great Agitation for Business:" Black Economic Development in Shaw, *Washington History*, 2 2 (Fall/Winter, 1900/1991):48-73.

¹⁸² Elizabeth McHenry, *Forgotten Readers: Recovering the Lost History of African American Literary Societies* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2002), 141.

NAACP had a strong presence in the District. In the period before WWI support for women's enfranchisement below the Mason-Dixon line was tepid at best and hostile at worst, but suffragists in the Northeast and Mid-West made significant strides. Although D.C. was technically below the Mason-Dixon line, its long history as a stronghold for woman's suffrage and seat of the national government made the District a natural choice for suffrage activists to stage their protests and establish organizational headquarters. The women's activism in the district had generative impact on Howard's female student population: the presence of suffragists in the capital emboldened them to demand a voice in their school's collegiate life.

Similarly, The NAACP, which was founded in 1909, had largely concentrated its efforts in growing their memberships in urban centers in the North. The NAACP's regional focus was strategic, and the fledgling organization sought to direct its limited resources in areas where they felt they would achieve the greatest measure of success.¹⁸³ According to the NAACP's top officials, the Deep South was beyond the reach of effective intervention—Jim Crow laws were firmly entrenched, the franchise had been lost, and racial violence and terror was a daily reality for Southern blacks. Moreover, many NAACP leaders (erroneously) believed that their Southern comrades would reject their militant civil rights agenda because of their commitment to the Washingtonian or accommodationist strategy of race advancement.¹⁸⁴ Still, the NAACP also played an

¹⁸³ Patricia Sullivan, *Lift Every Voice: The NAACP and the Making of the Civil Rights Movement*, (The New Press, 2009), 41.

¹⁸⁴ Although the NAACP didn't take hold in either Atlanta or Nashville until much later, both cities had did have a strong foundation and networks of organizing and activism. In Atlanta for example, the Neighborhood Union led by Lugenia Burns Hope was known for its work in community development and reform. Atlanta's black businessmen also encouraged black institutional and economic development during the period. In Nashville, the black press was vocal on issues of segregation and race prejudice. And like their peers in Atlanta, black Nashvillians also focused on community development, reform, and institution building. So when organizations like the NAACP did try to establish chapters in these cities in

important role in black political life in Washington, D.C. Its local chapter was the largest and most powerful outside of the NAACP's headquarters in New York City.

For the politically engaged student of the pre-war era, Howard University was the ideal place to be. Socially conscious, politically engaged, and dedicated to civic activism, Howard students were directly involved in the new national civil rights program that emerged among African Americans in the years before the First World War. The university's strategic location in the nation's capital placed Howard collegians directly at the center of some of the early 1910s most important political movements. Members of the Howard student body took advantage of this opportunity to directly participate in several of the key events that helped solidify the new way forward for black civil rights including the electoral activism that coincided with presidential election of 1912, the Woman Suffrage movement and Suffrage March on Washington in 1913, and the rise of the NAACP as a national civil rights organization. These events directly shaped the course of the Howard Renaissance and guided students' activism as they wrestled with questions of citizenship and political participation, the nature and meaning of democracy in America, and the best means to achieve racial equality—both on campus and off.

Campus Reforms

As the 1909-1910 academic year came to a close, Howard University reported that the institution had had its most successful year yet. Among the year's notable

the post-WWI period, they were able to tap into well-established networks of activists and organizers. For more on the history of Atlanta's black community building in the early 1900s, see for example: Jacqueline A. Rouse, "The Legacy of Community Organizing: Lugenia Burns Hope and the Neighborhood Union," *The Journal of Negro History*, 69 (Summer-Autumn, 1984):114-133, Jacqueline A. Rouse, *Lugenia Burns Hope, Black Southern Reformer*, (University of Georgia Press, 1989). For more on early activism and organizing in Nashville during this period see for example: Bobby L. Lovett, *The African-American History of Nashville, Tennessee, 1780-1930: Elites and Dilemmas*, (University of Arkansas Press, 1999), and Lamon, *Black Tennesseans*.

highlights the founding of the school's first Y.W.C.A. chapter in the fall of 1909; a campaign for student self-government; and a mass student movement organized in February 1910 to raise money for the construction of a new gymnasium. Assessing the changes that had taken place on campus that year, the student-run *Howard University Journal* proclaimed that a "great awakening" had occurred that year among the student body. The students had become aware of the need to "eliminate the oppressing conditions of the race" and that "the solution of the much talked about race problem could be found in institutions [such] as Howard."¹⁸⁵

The 1909-1910 academic year also marked the beginning of the "Howard Renaissance." The student initiatives like those mentioned above were representative of the type of student-centered reforms that characterized the early years of Howard's Renaissance. During these years, student activism focused on implementing electoral reforms to existing student clubs to ensure a more egalitarian and democratic process in student affairs. One of the first and most important events of the early Howard Renaissance occurred in October 1909 when several members of the student body submitted a proposal to the administration requesting the permission to form a council of student government. In their proposal, the students explain that the council would act as a disciplinary body and would hear cases of minor student infractions. The students' acknowledged that their proposal was a "radical move." There was no precedent for establishing a student council at Howard: school personnel had always handled disciplinary cases. However, such a council would be useful, the collegians argued similar student councils had already been adopted with great success at many nationally renowned (white) colleges and universities. Moreover, the students reasoned, if Howard

¹⁸⁵ *Howard University Journal*, Vol.7 No.30, May 27, 1910, 4.

University and its collegians were to stay on par with white colleges and universities—as its administrators claimed the school was—it was time that students play a “large part in their own government.”¹⁸⁶

The ideals expressed by Howard collegians may have been radical to black college and university administrators, but they were not alone in making these request. The desire for greater autonomy and democracy in student affairs was typical of all college-aged youth of the era. A national movement for student government had pervaded institutions of higher learning in the United States since the late nineteenth century. One of the oldest forms of student government was student committees whose principal function was to maintain order in the dormitories. The second type of student self-government involved an elected student advisory committee that consulted with faculty—this model formed the basis for the twentieth-century student council movement. The third and most radical type of student self-government, which was also the model the Howard student body proposed —involved delegating disciplinary control to a body of student representatives rather than faculty members.¹⁸⁷

In addition to their efforts to institute a form of student self-government on campus, Howard collegians also looked to make existing student organizations more democratic. A debate among Howard students in the fall of 1910 about whether Howard’s female students should be permitted to vote for the athletic council provided the perfect opportunity for radical collegians to address gender inequality on campus.

¹⁸⁶ Editorials, *Howard University Journal*, Vol. VII No.3, Oct.22, 1909, 4-5.

¹⁸⁷ John Seiler Brubacher and Willis Rudy, *Higher Education in Transition: A History of American Colleges and Universities*, (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers; 4 edition, 1997), p.124-125. The authors describe a fourth style of student government that had greater traction in the southern colleges—the “honor system.” This system functioned differently at each institution, but generally involved the self-discipline of students to abide by an honor code without direct faculty supervision. By 1915, at least 123 American colleges and universities had adopted some form of honor system.

The *University Journal* chronicled student debates over female voting, which spanned the fall semester. Proponents of extending the vote to female students argued that the athletic council's current policy was akin to "taxation without representation." Female collegians dutifully paid an athletic fee, but were unable to participate in the council's political process, and had no say in the way council members spent the funds. Moreover, advocates argued, the question of woman suffrage was not just of consequence to their female peers, but one that was receiving renewed attention in the national political discourse. As an article in the *Journal* pointed out, "the young men of this university" would very likely "have to face the woman suffrage problem when they get out in the world" so it was best to "think upon these things" now, and determine their position on the question.¹⁸⁸ In the end, there was very little opposition, and the measure to extend Howard's female students a vote in the athletic council passed.

In the spring of 1912, a group of Howard collegians representing the "progressive" party began to agitate for a more democratic electoral process in the selection of the student newspaper's editorial board. At Howard, it was the tradition for the outgoing *Journal* staff to hold closed elections to determine the editorial board for the following school year. Under this system, each year the election resulted in an all-male editorial board, usually with students whose views tended to ascribe to similar political viewpoints. A school-wide election, the progressive students argued would not only be more democratic, but would also ensure that the newspaper staff was more representative of the student body. Moreover, that the content of the paper would better reflect students' varied interests. The dearth of content related to the interests and

¹⁸⁸ Editorials, *Howard University Journal*, Vol.8, No.5, Oct.28, 1910, 4.

activities of Howard's co-eds was also an issue, and the dissenters sought a more inclusive editorial board that would include at least one female collegian.¹⁸⁹

Pressure from the student body left the newspaper staff with little choice but to open up the election process. After some negotiations it was determined by the *Journal* staff that the entire student body would not be allowed to vote. Instead those collegians enrolled in the College of Liberal Arts and who held a subscription to the *Journal* could cast a ballot. An election date was set for early May, and students who were enrolled in the Liberal Arts but did not yet subscribe to the *Journal* were given a thirty-day window to sign up. By the time of the election, the Howard campus was abuzz with excitement. The newspaper reported that many students had "availed themselves of the opportunity of voting" for those who would be in "control of the student organ for the ensuing year."¹⁹⁰ The election featured two ballots. The first was an all-male "Official" ballot consisting of candidates nominated by the old regime. The second ticket consisted of both male and female candidates put forth by the "Independent" or "Free Thinkers" who claimed to represent the "progressives" on campus. Both parties campaigned, but in the end, the student body decided to elect the members representing the official ballot.

Although the progressives failed to elect a member from their ticket, when elections were held for the *Journal* staff the following year, both parties presented ballots with female collegians. That year, the results favored the progressive "People's Party," which succeeded in winning several positions including the election of Madree

¹⁸⁹ "Suffrage at Howard," *Howard University Journal*, Vol.9, No.26, May 10, 1912, 1.

¹⁹⁰ "Election of Journal Staff," *Howard University Journal*, Vol.9 No.26, May 10, 1912, 2.

Penn who became the first female collegian on the paper's editorial board.¹⁹¹ Her peers hailed Penn's election as a major success for the *Journal*. Penn was well regarded amongst the student body as a "lady worth of her position on the score of efficiency and enthusiasm" and she was expected "to be a valuable addition to the staff."¹⁹²

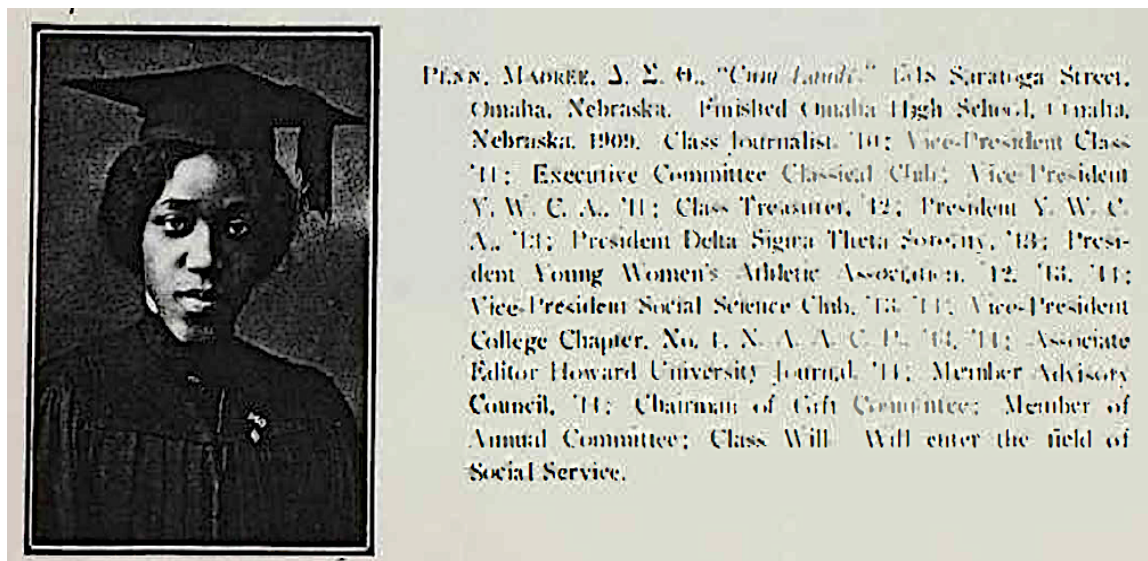


Figure 11. Howard University—Madree Penn, Senior Year, 1914.

Originally from Omaha, Nebraska, Madree Penn enrolled at Howard in 1909 with the intention of entering the field of social service. During her four years at Howard, Penn emerged as an important leader on campus. In addition her role as Associate Editor, Penn served as President of the YWCA, President of the Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, President of the Young Women's Athletic Association, Vice-President of the Social Science Club, and the Vice-President of the College Chapter of the NAACP. Penn proved worthy of her supporters' confidence: her presence in the

¹⁹¹ When she was elected to the *Journal's* editorial board, Penn was Already a member of the Delta Sigma Theta Sorority and Vice President and founding member of the Howard NAACP student chapter.

¹⁹² Penn's presence in the editorial room for the 1913-1914 academic year was immediately reflected in the *Journal's* content which up to that point, had focused largely on the activities of Howard's male students. For example, the first few issues of the 1913-1914 *Journal* featured profiles of the Howard YWCA. "Journal Staff for the Year 1913 Elected," *Howard University Journal*, Vol. 10, No.28, May 9, 1913, 1

editorial boardroom during the 1913-1914 academic year resulted in an almost immediate shift in the *Journal's* content. Up to that point, the *Journal* had almost exclusively focused on the happenings of Howard's male students, but that year, the activities and interests of Howard's female collegians received equal attention.

The reforms initiated by Howard students during the early years of the Howard Renaissance challenged the existing power structures. In their proposal for the student council for example, the students sought to create an elected body of their peers who would hold them accountable for their actions. Other measures dedicated to extending female collegians a vote on the athletic council and creating college-wide elections for the student newspaper further demonstrated Howard collegians' commitment to democratic processes. Electoral activism and political participation would become central components of the Howard Renaissance. Students, however, did not limit their pursuit of the right to vote and the fight for full citizenship rights solely to campus reforms. They also sought to demonstrate their right to a voice within the national political sphere by participating in the 1912 presidential election.

Collegians who attended Howard during the election of 1912 were first-hand witnesses to one of the most important elections for black Americans since the end of Reconstruction. The election was a four way contest in which Progressive Party candidate and former president, Theodore Roosevelt ran against not only Eugene V. Debs of the Socialist Party; but also against Republican Party incumbent Howard Taft; and Woodrow Wilson--the Democratic Party's nominee. The Taft presidency had been a major disappointment for black Americans who saw their limited rights and freedoms

diminished even further.¹⁹³ During his 1908 campaign, the Niagara Movement had strongly opposed Taft's candidacy on the grounds that he was no friend to black Americans. Taft was a strong proponent of Booker T. Washington's ideas, opposed full civil rights for black citizens, and had been openly vocal about his belief that black Americans had no place in politics. Taft's politics and policies towards black Americans damaged the Republican Party's relationship with this voting bloc.¹⁹⁴

By 1912, black voters had an important choice to make—either continue voting along the traditional Republican Party line, or cast their vote according to “men and measures.”¹⁹⁵ To help guide the black electorate, the newly founded NAACP devoted a number of pages and pages in each issue of its monthly magazine, *The Crisis*, to covering the election and its candidates.¹⁹⁶ Initially, Theodore Roosevelt had seemed an appealing option, but he ultimately alienated black voters by refusing to seat black delegates at the Progressive Party convention, and with his persistent overtures to capitulate to Jim Crow to please Southern voters. The politics and policies of the Socialist party also appealed to many black Americans, but ultimately many black voters would prove unwilling to waste their ballot on an unlikely winner. Their only option was throwing their support to Wilson and the Democrats. Throughout the campaign, Woodrow Wilson had worked to ingratiate himself amongst the black

¹⁹³ Under Taft, federal appointments decreased significantly, and in the South especially.

¹⁹⁴ David Levering Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois, 1868-1919: Biography of a Race*, (Henry Holt and Company, 1993), 421.

¹⁹⁵ “Big Political Mass Meeting,” *Howard University Journal*, Vol. 10, No.6, Nov.8, 1912, 2

¹⁹⁶ See for example the following issues of *The Crisis*: January, 1912, Vol.3 No.3, February, 1912, Vol.3 No.4, March, 1912, Vol. 3 No.5, May, 1912, Vol.4 No.1, July, 1912, Vol.4 No.3, August, 1912, Vol.5 No.4, and September 1912, Vol.4 No.5.

electorate by promising that “if elected President of the United States the colored people would have no occasion to regret having voted for him.”¹⁹⁷

The 1912 election was a critical test of black political strength during a period in which national politics were increasingly mirroring southern politics. Located in the nation’s capital, Howard students were able to attend the black protest meetings and political rallies that took place in the District. At one event sponsored by the Bethel Literary and Historical Association, Howard students gathered to hear W.E.B. Du Bois outline his latest political program.¹⁹⁸ During the campaign season, Howard’s campus was a highly politicized space. The student newspaper regularly featured articles discussing the importance of the ballot and the rights of citizenship. “Suffrage,” one article began, was “the great question that transcends all others in this nation” and whether “people without discrimination as to rank or class, or race or color, shall have a free exercise of the ballot.”¹⁹⁹ And a few days before the election in November, a mass political meeting held on Howard’s campus addressed the students as voters, featuring speakers from the Democratic, Republican, and Progressive parties. Staff from the *Journal* covered the event, and its reporters remarked when noting the scale of Howard collegians in attendance that there were “adherents to more political parties than were represented on stage” including Socialists, Social Progressives, Prohibitionists, and

¹⁹⁷*The Crisis*, Sept 1912, Vol. 4 No.5, 217. Speaking to black delegates Wilson promised three things to black Americans. First he “intended to be a President of the whole nation,” second, that he would veto any “measures inimical to colored people,” and third, that “as far as patronage was concerned” the “colored people would fare as well under his administration as they had under the Republicans. In the end, and with strong support from race leaders including W.E.B. Du Bois, black voters for the first time since the Civil War cast their vote for a Democrat.

¹⁹⁸ “The Political Program of the Colored America,” *Howard University Journal*, Vol. 10, No.1, Oct.4, 1912, 1. Du Bois proposed that the 600,000 eligible black voters could best use the ballot by forming a solid voting bloc and approaching the various leaders of the political parties to “demand what they want for a solid Negro vote.”

¹⁹⁹ “Suffrage in the Republic,” *Howard University Journal*, Vol. 9, No.10, Jan. 5, 1912, 1.

Suffragists. According to the *Journal*, Howard students, regardless of their political persuasions were concerned about the election and its bearing on questions of black political rights.²⁰⁰

Civil Rights Activism and the College Chapter of the NAACP

The Howard Renaissance was defined by the proliferation of student organizations. During the Renaissance student organizations expanded beyond the literary and debating societies and religious organizations that had been popular at the turn of the twentieth century to include many of the country's first black fraternities and sororities. Students also organized clubs and societies around the arts including a glee club, choir, and the famous *Stylus* literary magazine. But political and civil rights-oriented student organizations were the most popular groups on the Howard campus in the years before the First World War.

No student organization captured the attention and support of the student body like the Howard Chapter of the NAACP, which was largest and was the most popular of Renaissance-era clubs. When the Howard chapter was founded by a group of Howard collegians led by Samuel Allen and Madree Penn in 1913, the District was already an NAACP stronghold—it boasted the country's largest chapter. The civil rights organization's brand of protest politics, militant reform, and appeals to the black public to agitate for equal rights held the attention of D.C.'s black students and black public alike. Moreover, the NAACP's militant *Crisis* magazine helped create a nation-wide conversation about black civil rights and was the go-to source among both African Americans and white progressives for information on the current state of race relations.

²⁰⁰ "Big Mass Political Meeting," *Howard University Journal*, No.10, Vol.6, Nov.8, 1912, 2.

Each month, the magazine educated its readership about the work of the NAACP and important issues concerning black America. Not surprisingly, black youth, and Howard collegians especially, were drawn to the NAACP's stand for a "nation-wide fight for human rights" and also to its calls for "real democracy, social and economic justice" and "respect for women," both of which appealed to their political sensibilities.²⁰¹

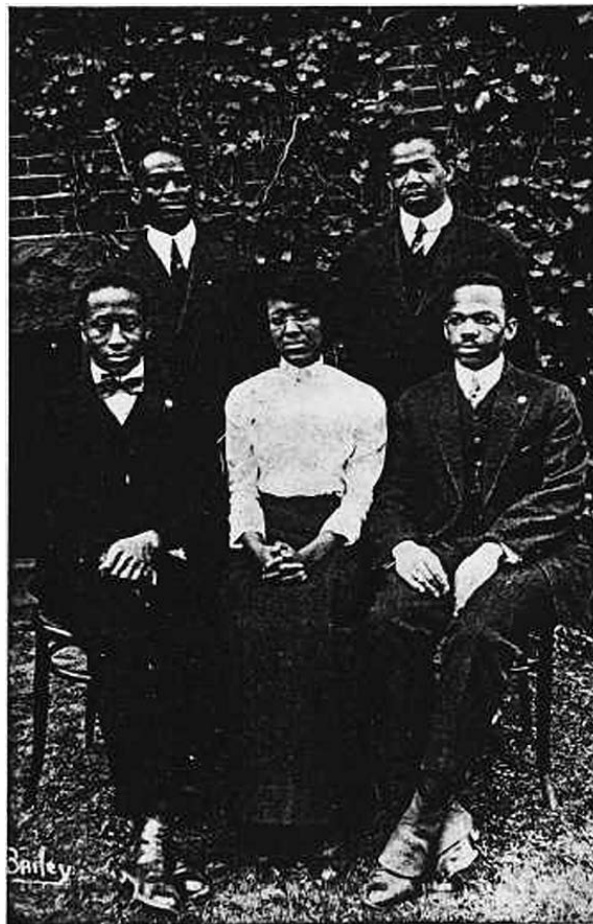


Figure 12. Howard University—The Officers of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People-College Chapter No.1 Howard University

The idea for organizing a college chapter at Howard first arose in February 1913. That winter, NAACP president Joel Spingarn visited Howard's campus while

²⁰¹ *The Crisis*, Jan. 1913, Vol.5 No.3, 129.

pursuing a publicity campaign to bring greater awareness to the work of the NAACP. During his visit, Spingarn delivered an impassioned speech to the student body titled “The New Abolition” in which he reflected on the fiftieth Anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation. Rather than celebrating fifty years of race advancement, Spingarn contended that emancipation’s anniversary served as a reminder of the myriad of ways that white southerners had reversed the liberties and freedoms that blacks in the South had obtained during the last half-century. The work of the NAACP, Spingarn explained, represented a new abolition movement to address political disfranchisement, lack of access to education, and discrimination that impeded race advancement. He also hoped that this movement would “free the white man of his prejudice.”²⁰² Spingarn’s address captured the militancy of the NAACP in its early years, and his message resonated with the Howard student body, particularly when Spingarn asserted that education alone was not sufficient to bring about change and that black Americans would need to “assert their rights and make a stand for their freedom.”²⁰³

In the days immediately following the NAACP president’s visit, a group of Howard collegians mobilized their peers, and began the process of establishing the nation’s first student chapter of the NAACP at Howard. First, they called a meeting of the entire student body on February 13, 1912. At this meeting, the students resolved that “the salvation of the race from the second slavery” required the future race leaders—college men and women—to join the organization that would prepare them for

²⁰² *The Crisis*, 5.

²⁰³ Spingarn’s speech highlighted the NAACP’s civil rights program for 1913, which also marked the 50th Anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation. The historic event was an important reminder to black America of their ongoing struggle for civil rights and citizenship rights. “The New Abolition,” *Howard University Journal*, Vol. 10, No.17, Feb.14, 1913, p.5.

“efficient leadership.”²⁰⁴ Howard collegians believed that as their school was a leader in black higher education, they had a special duty to be leaders in the forefront of student activism. And since no such organization existed on Howard’s campus at the time, the students unanimously decided they would appeal to the NAACP to permit them to form a college branch of their association.²⁰⁵

With no opposition from Howard administrators, the students made their formal request to the NAACP’s national headquarters in New York. Thereafter, the student chapter quickly came together. *Crisis* editor, W.E.B. Du Bois traveled to Washington in March to assist the students with establishing a permanent branch at Howard. Under Du Bois’ tutorship, the collegians decided that the student body would decide the chapter’s officer positions by holding elections in late March. By April 4, the elected members of the first student NAACP chapter were announced; Samuel Allen of the College of Arts and Sciences was president, and Madree Penn would serve as the Vice President.²⁰⁶ Following the officer elections, Howard students also decided to form an executive committee, consisting of student representatives from each department. Unlike the chapter’s officers, the students on the executive committee would not be elected. Instead, the chapter president appointed them, with the approval of the elected officers.²⁰⁷ The students also created an advisory committee that included faculty

²⁰⁴ Editorial, *Howard University Journal*, Vol.10 No.18, Feb.21, 1913, 4.

²⁰⁵ “A Resolution,” *Howard University Journal*, Vol.10 No.18, Feb.21, 1913, 8.

²⁰⁶ The other officers included Miss Eulalia Lane as the secretary, Mr. T.B. Dyett in the role of corresponding secretary, and Mr. G.A. Brice serving as the club treasurer. “Howard Again a Leader: First Students’ Branch of NAACP Formed Here,” *Howard University Journal*, Vol.10 No.23, April 4, 1913, 3.

²⁰⁷ The other officers included Miss Eulalia Lane as the secretary, Mr. T.B. Dyett in the role of corresponding secretary, and Mr. G.A. Brice serving as the club treasurer. Following the elections, it was further agreed that an executive committee would be formed and would consist of student representatives from each department, “Howard Again a Leader: First Students’ Branch of NAACP Formed Here,” *Howard University Journal*, Vol.10 No.23, April 4, 1913, 3.

members such as the newly hired Alain L. Locke and Professor Montgomery Gregory.²⁰⁸

As the only student organization expressly dedicated to civil rights issues, the new NAACP College Club generated a great deal of enthusiasm among the Howard student body. In a report to the faculty advisory committee, club president Samuel Allen reported the results of a straw vote held in April during chapel exercises. The final tally revealed that approximately two hundred students wanted to become members of the NAACP College Club.²⁰⁹ The school year came to a close before the Howard NAACP chapter could organize any official events, but the break did not diminish Howard collegians enthusiasm for the new club.

Over the summer, the District sizzled with controversy over the newly elected Woodrow Wilson's administration's plans to segregate the federal government. Both the treasury department led by William McAdoo and post-office headed by Albert Burleson—the two departments with the largest number of black employees—instituted department-wide segregation policies.²¹⁰ The controversy federal government's new segregation policies reached a boiling point when members of Willson's cabinet introduced a bill that segregated employees in the U.S. Civil Service Department, which particularly incensed race leaders. And for his part, the newly elected President Wilson

²⁰⁸The Constitution of the Howard NAACP was approved by the NAACP Board of Directors. The Constitution also stated that the Advisory Committee would comprise three faculty members, Constitution of The College Club, No.1. Of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People at Howard University, 29 December 1913, Alain Locke Papers, Box 164-180, Folder 16, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University.

²⁰⁹ S.A. Allen to Alain Locke, 24 April 1913, Alain Locke Papers, Box 164-180, Folder 16, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University. Membership in the college chapter required a fee of fifty cents per year, twenty-five of which was sent to the headquarters of the Association. The other half was retained by the Howard student chapter.

²¹⁰ Patricia Sullivan, *Lift Every Voice: The NAACP and the Making of the Civil Rights Movement*, (The New Press, 2009), 27-30.

had quietly approved and supported these measures. Even more infuriating to black leaders was that Wilson had explicitly campaigned on the promise, that if elected, black government workers would enjoy the same employment opportunities that they had had under Taft. He also assured them that he would veto any law that sought to further restrict black civil rights.²¹¹

Accordingly, when school opened in the fall of 1913, Howard students were more convinced than ever before of the vital importance of having a civil rights organization on campus. The NAACP's Howard college chapter did not yet have the membership and infrastructure to organize a protest against the new bill on its own. But student officers took an active part in the movement organized by the local Washington, D.C. NAACP chapter to oppose segregation in the District.²¹² The movement coalesced in a mass meeting designed "To Protest against Segregation—The New Slavery" in October 1913.²¹³ Held two blocks from the White House in the Metropolitan A.M.E. church, the meeting drew over 2,000 people. Among those in attendance at the meeting was a sizeable contingent of Howard collegians and faculty, local race leaders, and white allies who all gathered to formulate a strategy in response to the legislation.²¹⁴ Those who attended heralded the meeting as a major success. In an interview with the *Journal*, Howard's Professor Montgomery Gregory said "the meeting should give a new

²¹¹ Beginning in June 1913 and through to the Washington, D.C., local NAACP's protest meeting in October, *The Crisis* provided coverage of Congress's systematic attempts to segregate federal employees.

²¹² "National Association for the Advancement of Colored People Holds Mass Meeting to Protest Against Segregation in the District," *Howard University Journal*, Vol.11 No.5, Oct.31, 1913, 5.

²¹³ The Washington, D.C. Chapter was founded in March, 1913 around the same time as the Howard college chapter. In November 1913, it was announced that Archibald Grimke would serve as the chapter president. *The Crisis*, November, Vol. 7 No.1 1913, 342.

²¹⁴ "Opinion," *The Crisis*, November, Vol.7 No.1 1913, 332-336.

inspiration to us all to keep the faith in the great struggle for our freedom.”²¹⁵ Professor Thomas, who also attended, told the *Journal* that he hoped that in the wake of the mass meeting that “many such thunders protests” would follow “so that the conscience of those who oppress us many be thoroughly awakened.”²¹⁶

That same week, the prominent Washington clergyman, Reverend Francis J. Grimke delivered a powerful address to the Howard collegiate community. Grimke’s talk, “Fifty Years of Freedom,” was an indictment against the state of race relations in America. As black Americans continued to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation, Grimke cited recent attempts by municipal leaders to enact residential segregation ordinances and Congress’ attempt to segregate federal employees to argue that race prejudice in the United States had become stronger, bitter, and more aggressive than ever before. He decried these examples as evidence of white American’s “insane desire to humiliate” and compel black Americans through “sheer brute force” into a “position of permanent inferiority.”²¹⁷ Grimke warned his audience that overtly racist measures were no longer enacted solely by “Negro-hating-Southern legislature,” but was seemingly sanctioned by the national government, which was “supposed to represent all the people.”²¹⁸ He maintained that race improvement and uplift had failed to convince the “enemies of the race” (who he stated were more determined than ever to inhibit race progress) of the inherent equality of blacks and

²¹⁵ “National Association for the Advancement of Colored People Holds Mass Meeting to Protest Against Segregation in the District,” *Howard University Journal*, Vol.11 No.5, Oct.31, 1913, 8.

²¹⁶ *Howard University Journal*, “National Association for the Advancement of Colored People Holds Mass Meeting,” 8.

²¹⁷ “Rev. Francis J. Grimke on Fifty Years of Freedom,” *Howard University Journal*, Vol.11, No.5, Oct.31, 1913, 4. Grimke had particularly harsh words for the white men of the North and West whose fathers’ had fought to preserve the union and extend rights to blacks. Their apathy and silence on these measures signaled tacit agreement with the same rebel spirit that had led to the Civil War.

²¹⁸ “Fifty Years of Freedom,” *Howard University Journal*, 4.

whites.²¹⁹ The fight for equal rights, Grimke concluded, required black Americans to assert themselves as citizens deserving equal rights.

By the time that the Howard NAACP held its first official meeting on November 4, 1913, the student body was eager for the opportunity to be a part of their own civil rights organization. The conflict over segregation in the federal government and Rev. Grimke's sobering address about the failure of the current state of race politics engendered among the students a sense of the "vital importance" of the work of the NAACP.²²⁰ The entire Howard student body along with members of the Howard faculty and administration and prominent District residents gathered in the school's chapel for a "monster mass meeting." Samuel Allen had organized the meeting to present the student chapter's program for the coming year to the Howard University community. Its goal was to lead a national movement to establish student branches of the NAACP throughout the country. As the first student branch of the national civil rights organization, Allen stated it was the duty of the NAACP's Howard College Club to lead the "powerful" movement to organize students on the campuses of black institutions of higher education.²²¹

To encourage support for their campaign, Allen enlisted students' favorite professors and the Club's faculty advisors, Montgomery Gregory and Alain Locke, to address the audience. During his speech, Professor Gregory presented a letter from NAACP officer Joel Spingarn addressed to the Howard collegians. Spingarn applauded their "new resolve in the field of race relations," and offered his support for the student

²¹⁹ "Fifty Years of Freedom," *Howard University Journal*, 4.

²²⁰ "A Purpose," *Howard University Journal*, Vol. II No.7, Nov. 14, 1913, 4

²²¹ Students interchangeably used the term "club" and "chapter." "Monster Mass Meeting Howard Chapter of NAACP Launched," *Howard University Journal* Vol.11 No.6, Nov.7, 1913, 2.

chapter's project to organize university branches among the other black colleges and universities.²²² Alain Locke appealed to students' affinity for radical politics and spoke of similar youth movements in Europe. He also expressed his hopes that the student NAACP movement might develop into a politically oriented Young Negro Party.²²³ The mass meeting also featured speeches from the Honorable Archibald Grimke, Deans Lewis B. Moore and Kelly Miller, and Howard President Stephen Newman, who gave the last address of the evening. Newman praised the officers of the Howard chapter for their initiative. He appealed to the rest of the student body to support the campus NAACP chapter in "the cause of righteousness and democracy" and to prepare themselves so that "they may be ready for more active parts in the campaign for freedom that is being waged by the NAACP."²²⁴ Howard's NAACP student chapter was one of the most popular student groups on campus even before its first official meeting, and its membership swelled after that. Hundreds of collegians joined and pledged to support the chapter in its campaign to organize among colleges and universities.²²⁵

But organizing students elsewhere was an ambitious project, and the Howard student chapter would find it difficult to translate the success of their chapter to other campuses. Even with the backing of national leadership, and advertisements in the *Crisis*, the student chapter movement failed to become popular at schools like Fisk and Spelman.²²⁶ While Howard's progressive faculty and administration had been

²²² "Monster Mass Meeting," *Howard University Journal*, 2.

²²³ "Monster Mass Meeting," *Howard University Journal*, 2.

²²⁴ "Monster Mass Meeting," *Howard University Journal*, 3.

²²⁵ Membership in the student chapter was open to "any person of the University without distinction of race or sex who believes in the Brotherhood of Man as a practical present ideal." Constitution of the College Chapter No.1, of the NAACP at Howard University, Alain Locke Papers, Box 164-180, Folder 16, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University.

²²⁶ A local NAACP Chapter formed in Atlanta in 1916 after James Weldon Johnson conducted a major southern organizing trip. It would be three years until Nashville formed its first local chapter in 1919.

supportive of a student branch, administrators at other black colleges and universities were much more reluctant to let a radical organization like the NAACP onto their campuses. The same militant rhetoric and politics that made the NAACP popular among northern race leaders made it unpopular among many southern white administrators and the patrons of black higher education. Although black colleges and universities such as Fisk and Spelman relied on advertising in the *Crisis* to attract students to their campuses, many had conservative administrations that prohibited their students from forming their own campus branches. Moreover, students interested in doing so, could not count on local support of any kind. Without an NAACP chapter in Nashville to provide support, Fisk collegians attempts to organize on their own led nowhere.

Although its NAACP student chapter movement was largely unsuccessful, the officers of the Howard NAACP continued to try to contribute to the work of the NAACP. The chapter's next major initiative was a five-part lecture series titled "Race Contacts and Inter-Racial Relations" beginning in the spring of 1914.²²⁷ Co-sponsored by the Social Science Club and Department of the Teachers and Commercial Colleges, the series featured Howard University's own Professor Alain Locke, who delivered weekly lectures based on the aggregate of his travel and research. Topics included: the Historical and Scientific Conceptions of Race, the Political and Practical Conceptions of Race, the Phenomena and Laws of Race Contacts, the Fallacies of Modern Race Creeds, and Race Progress and Racial Culture. Howard's Board of Deans stalled the project by trying to limit the lectures to one evening instead of five-weekly sessions. Howard

²²⁷ The lectures would be published posthumously as *Race Contacts and Interracial Relations: Lectures on the Theory and Practice of Race*.

NAACP officers appealed this decision in a letter to the deans, arguing that the NAACP's national headquarters had supported the initiative. Further, the students claimed that this decision would not only handicap their outreach efforts on Howard's campus, but would also hinder the group's plans to present the lectures at other colleges and universities, which would embarrass both the Howard NAACP chapter and Professor Locke.²²⁸

Unable to persuade the board, the deans postponed the lecture series until the following year. In the meantime, Processor Locke proposed a course on race where he would incorporate his lectures. Again, he faced opposition from the administration most likely because of the perceived controversial nature of the lectures' content. Although he was comparatively progressive to other white administrators, Howard's President Stephen Newman was reluctant to draw any negative attention to the school from the Congressional Oversight Committee responsible for allocating the university's funding.²²⁹ By the time Howard collegians returned to campus for the 1915 fall semester, the Howard NAACP and the university administration reached an agreement that allowed the lecture series to proceed as originally planned under the auspices of the NAACP. The event drew members from the student body, faculty, and Washington, D.C. community, and was so popular that Locke was asked to deliver the lectures a second time in the spring of 1916.²³⁰

²²⁸ Letter to the Board of Deans from the Officers of the Howard Chapter of the N.A.A.C.P., 18 April 1914. Alain Locke Papers, Box 164-80, Folder 16, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University.

²²⁹ Leonard Harris and Charles Molesworth, *Alain L. Locke: The Biography of a Philosopher*, (Chicago:University of Chicago Press, 2008), 120.

²³⁰ Originally the Howard NAACP and Locke had hoped that the Race Contacts and Interracial Relations series would enable him to reach a larger audience with his work, presumably through the NAACP and their student outreach efforts. While this initiative never materialized, Locke did publish an abridged version of his lectures and increased his status as an emerging scholar and race leader.

When the United States declared war on Germany in the spring of 1917, the Howard NAACP chapter, like many campus organizations, halted their activities and turned to the national war effort. While students in the post-war years made efforts to revive the university's student chapter, it would be a number of years before another Howard college chapter materialized. Still, for a brief period during the Howard Renaissance, the school's NAACP chapter played an integral role in changing the political culture on campus. Howard's NAACP chapter was unlike any other student organization on campus, or in any other black institution of higher learning, for that matter. It was student-led, founded by a co-ed leadership, had democratically elected officers, and opened its membership to the entire student body, and actively promoted direct action protest in the fight for black civil rights and freedoms.

Indeed, the ideals espoused by the NAACP leadership, specifically its militant rhetoric and emphasis on democracy, liberty, and justice resonated with Howard collegians. For many students, the organization's civil rights program was an appealing alternative to the politics of accommodation.²³¹ NAACP leaders encouraged collegians to be active members in the "peaceful rebellion" against racial prejudice. In an address to the Howard student body, Joel Spingarn advocated that whenever possible, students were to "aid in thwarting the onslaught of injustice" against black Americans.²³² The NAACP's organizational model also appealed to students. The organization considered the student chapter an official branch of the NAACP and accorded it all of the duties and privileges of a regular branch. National NAACP leadership drafted a constitution and defined the students' mission, which included: the study of how to lessen racial

²³¹ Students also noted that the acquisition of property and development of black businesses and industry were vital components to the cause of race advancement.

²³² "A Purpose," *Howard University Journal*, Vol.11 No.7, Nov.14, 1913, 4.

prejudice; the advancement of colored people; the development of forms of legal redress for colored persons unjustly persecuted; the study of local, racial, and civic conditions; a discussion about how to influence local press; and the study of how to lessen racial discrimination and to secure full civil and political rights to colored citizens and others.²³³

College Women's Political Organizing and Activism: The Rise of the Deltas

While the Howard NAACP chapter was the only student organization explicitly dedicated to civil rights activism, it was not the only radical student organization to emerge during the Howard Renaissance. The Delta Sigma Theta sorority was one of the most progressive and radical student groups to be founded in the years before the First World War. Many of the Delta's founders already held important leadership positions in other student organizations: in 1914, students elected Madree Penn to the editorial board of the student newspaper, and she along with other future Deltas were among the founding members and officers in the student-led chapter of the NAACP. The Delta Sigma Theta sorority, founded in February 1913, embodied the militant spirit and political culture that dominated Howard's campus in the pre-war era. Moreover, the sorority provided an outlet for college women to engage in militant political activism and organizing. In their organizing and activism, the Deltas broke away from Victorian ideals of femininity, which relegated women to traditional feminine spheres of influence—the home, church, and community. Instead, the Deltas asserted themselves

²³³ Additionally, each member of the Club pledged him/herself to increasing the membership of the organization and to help extend the circulation of the *Crisis* as the official organ of the NAACP. Constitution of the College Chapter, No. 1, of the NAACP, Alain Locke Papers, Box 160-180, Folder 16, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University.

in the era's new protest politics. Deltas represented a new generation of “respectable” black women's leadership, and argued that women's enfranchisement and participation in the fight for political and civil rights was fundamental to the race's advancement.

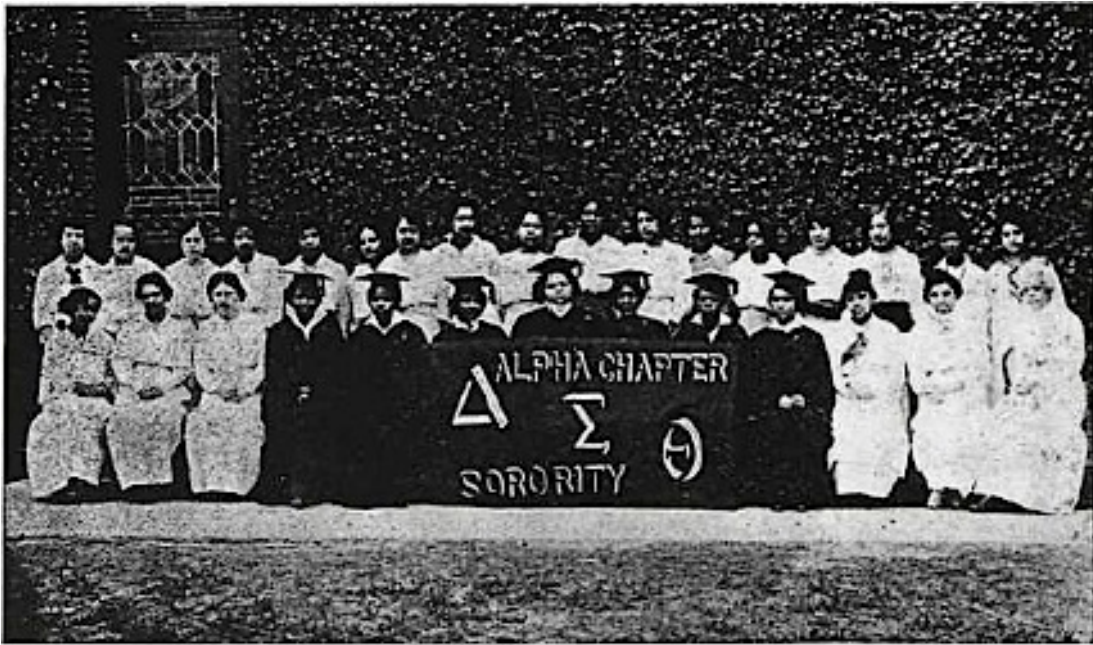


Figure 13. Howard University—Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, 1915.

Greek-letter societies first emerged on Howard's campus in 1906 when the Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity successfully petitioned the administration to establish its own chapter of the all-black fraternity.²³⁴ The students' petition was based on the argument that all of the preeminent colleges and universities. If Howard University was to be considered equal to the nation's top institutions, students reasoned, administrators should consent to Greek-letter societies at Howard. Two years later, in 1908, a group of female collegians made history when they founded the Alpha Kappa Alpha (AKA) sorority—the first black Greek-letter organization to be founded at a black college or university. Meanwhile, Fisk and Spelman banned Greek-letter and other “oath-bound”

²³⁴ The first Alpha Phi Alpha chapter was founded at Cornell University in 1905.

secret societies because administrators claimed they were undemocratic, exclusive, and a destabilizing influence on campus.²³⁵ Moreover, administrators charged that the allegiance required of students to their fraternity or sorority undermined the authority of educators.²³⁶ Administrators at Howard seemed not to share the same concerns as their peers at Fisk and Spelman, and as such, a robust Greek life developed at Howard that was unprecedented at other black colleges and universities.²³⁷

Of the Greek chapters, the Delta Sigma Theta sorority was the most politically active. The Deltas were founded by a group of active AKA sorors who were discouraged by their school's lack of "true sorority." With this critique, the dissenting AKA members sought to make reforms to the existing chapter.²³⁸ Although the details regarding the exact order of events that led to the founding of the Deltas are unclear, it is clear that by the fall of 1912 there was growing antagonism within the ranks of the

²³⁵ Until 1925, Greek-letter societies were banned at Fisk. That year though, the first fraternity chapter was established at Fisk. At Spelman, administrators declared the entire student body to be a sisterhood, and believed that outside sororities would detract from the bond. It was not until 1979 that sororities were permitted at Spelman. To a degree, the critiques levied against Greek-letter societies were valid. Initially fraternities and sororities were little more than elite social clubs, and at times caused tension among students. The organizational structure of the Greek societies also supplanted university authority. Fraternities and sororities also had greater autonomy compared to other student-run organizations; their meetings and events were held off campus and away from the watchful eyes of the faculty and the program, mission, and overall agenda of a fraternity and sorority was almost exclusively determined by its student members. While leaders at black institutions decried these characteristics associated with Greek-letter societies, William Raimond Blair author of *Baird's Manual of American Colleges and Fraternities* reported that it was precisely the independence of these organizations that appealed to college and university administrators. Indeed Baird noted that many university administrators looked to fraternities to alleviate the school's responsibility for housing students.

²³⁶ Joe M. Richardson, *A History of Fisk University, 1865-1946*, (Tuscaloosa, University of Alabama Press, 1980), 88

²³⁷ By 1920, students at Howard had founded four additional Greek organizations including the Omega Psi Phi fraternity (1911), Delta Sigma Theta sorority (1913), Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity (1914), and the Zeta Phi Beta sorority (1920).

²³⁸ "A Sorority Organized," *Howard University Journal*, Vol.11 No.16, Feb.7, 1913, 1. There appears to be some discrepancy regarding the actual number of founding members in the sorority. The Howard student paper lists twenty names, while Delta historian Paula Giddings cites twenty-two founding members.

AKA.²³⁹ Chief among the grievances was that its alumni members ran the sorority. Many of the original AKA members had graduated, yet still retained oversight of the sorority. Newer members objected, arguing that as a student organization, the sorority should be driven by student-issues. Additionally, the dissenters were interested in creating a nation-wide network of like-minded sorors and eager to establish AKA chapters on campuses across the country. Lastly, the reformers believed that the sorority should be more than a social club, and instead use its influence to effect change within black communities and engage in political activism.

The proposed reforms failed to win support among the majority of AKA members. And rather than continue to fight the sorority establishment, the dissenting members decided to cut their ties with the AKA and form a new sorority that would encompass their goals. With the conflict with the AKAs behind them, the newly minted sorority wasted no time immediately making its presence felt on Howard's campus, within the District, and in the realm of national politics. Very much a product of the political and cultural climate of the pre-War years, the Delta's looked to re-frame the mission of African American sororities to extend beyond the social aims typical of Greek life. The new sorority was committed to social justice, embraced the new civil rights activism, and sought to promote and cultivate the leadership of female collegians.

The Woman Suffrage Movement particularly inspired the Deltas. In the fall of 1912, the question of extending the franchise to women had once again become a

²³⁹ A detailed account of the events that led to the founding of the Delta Sigma Theta sorority can be found in Paula Gidding's *In Search of Sisterhood: Delta Sigma Theta and the Challenge of the Black Sorority Movement*, (New York: Amistad, 2006), 46-53.

national issue.²⁴⁰ In the wake of recent success in states like California (1911), Arizona (1912), Kansas (1912), and Oregon (1912) where the franchise had been extended to women, as well pending legislation to do the same in Ohio, Kansas, Wisconsin, and Michigan, suffragists used the up-coming presidential election to raise the question of woman's suffrage as a federal issue. Within the black community, woman's enfranchisement was a particularly important issue, not only as a matter of women's rights, but also as a counter to systemic disfranchisement of black men in the early 1900s, which had curtailed the power of the black electorate. As the power of the black male electorate diminished, many race leaders saw the future of black civil rights and political rights lie in the potential political power of black women.²⁴¹

Race leaders made black women's voting rights a central issue, and *The Crisis*, the official organ of the NAACP dedicated the entire September 1912 issue to the subject. The issue featured compelling articles from leading black suffragists like Mary Church Terrell whose article "The Justice of Woman Suffrage" argued that the current restrictions against women's enfranchisement violated women's basic right of citizenship. Terrell claimed that "the founders of this republic called heaven and earth to witness that it should be called a government for the people, and by the people," and yet "because by an unparalleled exhibition of lexicographical acrobatics the word 'people' has been turned and twisted" so that the elective franchise was withheld from one-half

²⁴⁰ During the ratification of the 15th Amendment, the question of Woman Suffrage had been at the center of a national debate about women's rights and citizenship. After women failed to secure the franchise, organizing for women's suffrage had been most successful at the state level.

²⁴¹ The question of woman suffrage had been somewhat controversial issue in the early twentieth century, but by the 1910s, support for extending the vote to black women had increased significantly. See especially: Deborah Gray White, *Too Heavy a Load: Black Women in Defense of Themselves, 1884-1994*, (New York: Norton, 1999).

of the citizens.²⁴² Others like Adella Hunt Logan offered evidence of black women as responsible voters arguing that when black women did have the ballot it was “for the uplift of society and for the advancement of the state.”²⁴³ White allies like Fanny Garrison Villard—daughter of the late abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison—and prominent race leaders like W.E.B. Du Bois also articulated their support for the enfranchisement of black women.²⁴⁴ The *Crisis* editor was especially vocal in his support of woman suffrage. In one of his editorials, Du Bois argued that black women were “moving quietly but forcefully toward the intellectual leadership of the race,” and that as voters black women would not be “a mere doubling of our vote and voice in the nation” rather, women’s enfranchisement was needed for a “stronger and more normal political life.”²⁴⁵

As its first public activity, the Delta Sigma Theta sorority planned to march in the highly publicized and controversial Woman Suffrage parade in Washington, D.C. on March 3, 1913. From its inception, parade organizers had intended for the demonstration to generate maximum public interest for the cause of woman’s suffrage by scheduling the march the day before President Wilson’s inaugural parade. A national event, the parade, co-sponsored by the National Association of Woman Suffragists and the Congressional Union for Woman Suffrage of D.C. (later the National Woman’s Party), was to feature women delegates and their supporters across the union.

²⁴² Mary Church Terrell, “The Justice of Woman Suffrage, *The Crisis*, Vol.4 No.5, 1912, 243

²⁴³ Adella Hunt Logan, “Colored Women as Voters,” *The Crisis*, Vol.4 No.5 Sep.1912, 43.

²⁴⁴ Villard was among a small number of white suffragists who supported extending the franchise to black women. Since the late 19th century there had been a deep division between white and black suffragists. See for example, Ann D. Gordon, Bettye Collier-Thomas, eds. *African American Women and the Vote, 1837-1965*, (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1997) and Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, *African American Women in the Struggle for the Vote, 1850-1920*, (Indiana University Press, 1998).

²⁴⁵ W.E.B. Du Bois, “Votes for Women,” *The Crisis*, Vol.4 No.5, Sep. 1912, 234.

As advocates of women's equal rights, the Deltas approached March Church Terrell about participating in the event.²⁴⁶ Ostensibly, the parade was to be open to all women regardless of race. As such, black suffragists, including the Deltas made plans to march alongside white suffragists from their state delegations. However, when white Southern suffragists learned that black suffragists also planned to march, they threatened to withhold their participation in the parade. When black suffragist Adella Hunt Logan learned of the Southern suffragists' opposition to the integration of the parade, she immediately organized a protest campaign.²⁴⁷ In the weeks leading up to the parade, prominent black suffragists including Logan, Mary Church Terrell, and Ida Wells-Barnett bombarded the organizers with letters and telegrams, condemning the actions of the white Southern counterparts. Ultimately the two groups reached a compromise; black delegates would march as planned in their own section, but they would be behind the state groups and male supporters of woman suffrage.²⁴⁸

The agreement was far from ideal, but the Deltas refused to let the Southern segregationists impede them from participating in the most important event in the Woman Suffrage Movement.²⁴⁹ And after securing permission from the Howard administration, with the provision that a male professor would act as an escort, the

²⁴⁶ Just that November, the head of the Women's Suffrage League of Washington, D.C. had been to Howard's campus to speak about the importance of women in politics and women's right to the ballot *Howard University Journal*, Vol.10 No.7, Nov.15, 1912, 2.

²⁴⁷ Terbog-Penn, *African American Women in the Struggle for the Vote*, 121.

²⁴⁸ In another report, the day before the Parade the *Washington Post* published an article announcing that news of black women's participation in the parade had largely been kept a secret from southern suffragists for fear of reprisal. Further the *Washington Post* stated that the women would be marching with the New York division. "Colored Women to March in the Suffrage Parade," *The Washington Post*, Mar. 02, 1913, 16.

²⁴⁹ Ida Wells-Barnett refused to segregate herself and protested by marching with the state groups from Illinois.

Deltas marched in the historic parade.²⁵⁰ March 3, 1913 marked an important day in the sorority's history. The Deltas were not only among a select group of black women activists to march in the parade, but they were also the only collegians to represent a black institution of higher education.²⁵¹ The *Washington Post* reported the Deltas were unprecedented among their peers at Howard. Howard's student newspaper also lauded the sorority's participation stating that the women had not only represented their school in a "admirable spectacle of uniformity," but more importantly they had fulfilled an important duty to show white Americans that black "citizenship rights are to be in no way abridged or treated with inferiority."²⁵² White and black news outlets reporting on the Deltas participation made them a household name among black Americans.

Among their other organizational goals, the Delta's also looked to extend their involvement in intercollegiate and international movements. After their experience with the segregationist Southern suffragists, the Deltas sought to align their interests with organizations that were more progressive on the issue of race. In line with these objectives, the Deltas sent a delegate to represent the sorority and Howard University at the Fifth Annual Convention of the Intercollegiate Socialist Society (ISS) in New York City from December 29-31, 1913. Black collegians considered socialists and the ISS in particular, to have a "fair and open attitude toward racial issues."²⁵³ Moreover, as one of the most discussed subjects of the day and "a growing factor in the life of civilized

²⁵⁰ The *Howard Journal* reported that the newly hired Professor T.M. Gregory of the English Department "did everything in his power to make entrance in the parades possible." Vol. 10 No.21, March 14, 1913, 1.

²⁵¹ Both the *Howard University Journal* and the *Washington Post* of March 2, 1913 reported that the Deltas marched in the college division of the parade. Specifically the *Post* cited noted that the division was under the direction of Miss Elsie Hill, the daughter of Congressman from Connecticut who was in charge of that particular division.

²⁵² "Howard Participates in the Suffrage and Inaugural Parades," *Howard University Journal*, Vol. 10, No.21, March 14, 1913,1.

²⁵³ , "Howard Participates," *Howard University Journal*, 5.

nations,” the impartial study of the principles of socialism was a requirement for “broad minded students.”²⁵⁴

Howard collegians first demonstrated an interest in the ISS when the *Journal* reported on the society in its Intercollegiate News Section in its November 22, 1912, edition. The rapid rate in which chapters formed across colleges and universities in the United States and Canada, including ISS chapters at prominent institutions including Yale, Harvard, Princeton, Radcliffe, the University of Chicago, and Brown, impressed students.²⁵⁵ Founded in 1905, the ISS’s mission was to “promote an intelligent interest in socialism among college men and women” and to facilitate a greater understanding of modern social, political, and economic problems from the socialist perspective.²⁵⁶ The fifth annual convention brought together students, intellectuals, and prominent socialists to discuss a number of current issues including student activities in Europe, the socialist philosophy, suffrage and socialism. Du Bois also gave a talk about the economic and political history of black Americans since the Civil War.²⁵⁷

One topic in particular, generated a great deal of discussion among the convention attendees. According to the Delta delegate, a “vague question concerning ‘inherent racial traits’” precipitated a lengthy discussion of the Negro problem in the South and race prejudice. The debate became heated when one speaker, a white Southerner, denounced the charge that there was race prejudice in the South; instead, he claimed that the real source of conflict between the races should be attributed to

²⁵⁴ “Howard Participates,” *Howard University Journal*, 5.

²⁵⁵ In 1912 there were a total of 48 ISS chapters. Eleven of those had been founded between 1905 and 1910. With the remaining chapters formed between 1911-1912. Intercollegiate News, *Howard University Journal*, Vol.10, No.8, Nov.22, 1912, 5. By 1913, the ISS had again increased its student chapters to 65.

²⁵⁶ “Delta Sigma Theta Sends Delegate to Convention of Intercollegiate Socialist Society,” *Howard University Journal*, Vol.11 No.13, Jan. 16, 1914, 1.

²⁵⁷ “Delta Sigma Theta Sends Delegate,” *Howard University Journal*, 5.

economic causes. As the only black delegate in attendance, the Delta soror reported that she had the opportunity to express her personal opinions on the matter, stating a lack of contact and understanding between the races as partly to blame for the conflict. The attendees reached a general consensus at the end of the meeting, with them agreeing that economic factors were a contributing factor in “racial friction,” and that the prejudice that existed was the result of ignorance and “not a thing to be tolerated by Socialists.”²⁵⁸ Despite the “incident,” the Delta representative described her experience at the conference as being a positive one, and stated that she had been “cordially received at all the meetings of the ISS and hope was expressed that the students of Howard would affiliate more closely with the Society.”²⁵⁹

The Delta soror’s willingness to engage in the potentially dangerous debate over the causes of racism at the ISS conference exemplified the type of activism and public presence the sorority advocated for black women. At a time when most middle-class black women sought to earn the benefits and courtesies that respectable womanhood conferred on their white counterparts, the Delta’s envisioned respectable black womanhood as extending beyond bounds of home, church, and community. While they extolled women’s work in these traditional realms, they also believed that respectable women could, and should, have a voice in the important political discussions of the day. Moreover, as the only black delegate to attend the ISS conference, the soror exemplified the type of leadership power female collegians had attained at Howard during in the Renaissance-era. And when she returned to campus the soror was hailed by her peers for having dutifully represented her school and the interests of the race.

²⁵⁸ “Delta Sigma Theta Sends Delegate,” *Howard University Journal*, 1.

²⁵⁹ “Delta Sigma Theta Sends Delegate,” *Howard University Journal*, 5.

The participation in the ISS convention concluded an impressive inaugural year for the Delta Sigma Theta sorority. Upon returning to campus, interest in socialism and the ISS especially, continued among Howard collegians. In fact, after the soror returned from the ISS conference, members of the existing Social Science Club which had been founded during the Howard Renaissance decided to affiliate their club with the Intercollegiate Socialist Society after. And in 1916 an official ISS student chapter was formed at Howard.²⁶⁰ More importantly, though, the Deltas succeeded in reaching their three original founding goals: to establish a sorority that would be driven by student-led initiatives, to function less as a social group and be more engaged in political action, and become a student organization that organized beyond Howard's campus and cultivate relationships with other like-minded intercollegiate organizations. Through their work, the Deltas set an important precedent for female collegian's leadership and activism that would continue through the war years and beyond.

Conclusion

Between 1909 and 1916, students transformed Howard University from "an old conservative moss-grown institution" to an "active progressive center of American Negro Education."²⁶¹ The Howard Renaissance marked an important era in the history of black students organizing and activism. During these years, students at Howard organized for greater autonomy and participation in campus life by establishing a student-government that would enable them to participate in the administration of student discipline. Howard collegians also championed the democratic process, and emphasized the importance of the political participation of all students by extending the

²⁶⁰ Notice of the Social Science Club's affiliation with the Inter-Collegiate Socialist Society was posted under the "Campus Briefs" section of the *Howard University Journal*. Vol. 11, No.25, 3.

²⁶¹ *Howard University Journal*, Vol. 10 No.1 Oct. 4, 1912, 5.

vote to women on the athletic council, and opening up the election of the *Journal's* editorial board to all members of the College of Arts and Sciences.

The Howard Renaissance also reflected a shift that was taking place among race leaders who looked to a protest style of politics to advance the cause of the race. The influence of the Washingtonian accommodationist politics no longer resonated with the new generation of militant leaders. Respectable black men and women throughout the country were beginning to employ militant tactics, and agitate for the civil, political, and economic rights due to them as citizens of the United States. In response to these changing attitudes, Howard collegians founded their own college chapter of the NAACP, and sought to extend the influence of this radical organization to other black institutions of higher learning. The overwhelming enthusiasm and support for the school's NAACP chapter made it the largest student organization on campus. Additionally, the founding of the Delta Sigma Theta Sorority also signified a major advance in black women's leadership and organizing. Unwilling to be relegated to the sidelines in the fight for citizenship rights, the Deltas stood with other suffragists and demanded women's enfranchisement. And rather than staying within the bounds of traditional feminine spaces, through their participation in the ISS, the Deltas publicly communicated their own political ideals and desires.

Students at Howard capitalized on the advantages they had over their peers at Fisk and Spelman, whose paternalistic administrators continued to promote a gradual course of race advancement. The predominance of progressive black administrators and educators provided support for Howard student's initiatives. Further, Howard collegians benefited from their geographic location. Indeed, the politically charged atmosphere in

the District and the support of an active and politically engaged black community contributed to the changes brought about on Howard's campus during these years. America's entry into the Great War, however, brought about significant changes to black collegiate culture as the fight for freedom and democracy on the home-front extended to all black institutions of higher learning. Students at Fisk, Spelman, and Howard demonstrated their patriotism and offered their services in behalf of their country. Chapter three turns to the subject of students war-time organizing and explores the contradictions raised by the country's war aims to extend democracy abroad with the stark racial inequality experienced by black collegians on the home-front.

Chapter 3

Doing their “Bit”: Collegiate Activism and Campus Life During the First World War

Introduction

“Fisk University is at war,” declared Fisk University’s president, Fayette Avery McKenzie in his opening address for the 1918-1919 academic term.²⁶² While he was given to hyperbole on occasion, McKenzie’s declaration that Fisk was at war reflected the vast changes in collegiate life since the U.S. had entered the First World War.

Immediately following President Woodrow Wilson’s official declaration of war on Germany in April, 1917, black colleges and collegians swung into action mustering the black community’s response to the preparedness movement and mobilization efforts. Black college men at Fisk and Howard volunteered by the hundreds to serve in the United States army, and they led the movement to establish a training camp for black officers. Female collegians at Fisk, Spelman, and Howard joined the ranks of thousands of women who served the country as volunteers in their local YWCA and Red Cross organizations.

As the U.S. entered its second year of war, the War Department intensified its efforts to prepare all potential soldiers for service by expanding military programs to educational institutions. Fisk along with Spelman and Howard as well as other black colleges and universities across the country were conscripted by the War Department to do their “bit for the country.” Black college men also served their country in uniform in a number of ways. Many collegians interrupted their education when they were called to serve on the battlefields in Europe, or as military training officers in camps throughout

²⁶² “Fisk University is at War, Says President McKenzie,” *Fisk University News*, Vol. IX No.2 October, 1918. 17

the country, or by volunteering to enlist in the Students' Army Training Corps. Meanwhile, black college women did their "bit" to win the war on the home-front, playing a central role in administering the War Department's domestic programs including the War Work Campaign, food and fuel conservation, and raising funds through liberty loan and bond drives.

Civic duty, patriotism, and loyalty to the nation motivated black students' wartime service. Black Americans had a long and proud tradition of military service to their country in times of war through the colonial period, the U.S. wars for expansion, the civil war, Spanish-American war, and latest Mexican-American war. Black collegians believed it was their responsibility to continue this legacy, by both serving their country and leading the preparedness and mobilization efforts. The war years also marked an important turning point in the twentieth century black freedom struggle. The conflict in Europe over imperial expansion and the exploitation of the colonized peoples of Africa and Asia resonated with black race leaders who saw parallels between the war and their own domestic struggles. Black Americans were engaged in a battle on two fronts—to make the world safe for democracy and freedom and to make the United States safe for the "Negro."

War and the Color Line

"The present war in Europe," *Crisis* Editor W.E.B Du Bois asserted, "is one of the great disasters due to race and color prejudice." Most accounts of the causes of the European war attributed the conflict to "race rivalry" or "national jealousy" between competing nations. Du Bois, instead insisted that the war illustrated the great tragedy of

modern society—“the universal belief among dominant cultures in the inferiority of darker peoples and a contempt for their rights and aspirations.”²⁶³ He further argued that it was a mistake for “any colored persons, and persons interested in them” to “suppose that the present war is far removed from the color problem of America.”²⁶⁴ And according to Du Bois, “American race prejudice and color hatred” thrived as a result of the global climate of racial hostility.²⁶⁵

For most Americans, who were safely on the other side of the Atlantic, the causes of the war and the problems of the European nations seemed far removed from their daily lives. Determined to keep the country out of the war, Woodrow Wilson issued a declaration of neutrality in 1914, and called on “every man who really loves America” to “act and speak in the true spirit of neutrality.”²⁶⁶ Black race leaders and journalists on the other hand, were quick to perceive the parallels between the subjugation of colonial peoples in African and Asia and black America’s own domestic struggles and declared their support for the Allied cause. For black Americans, the European conflict was part of a larger global epidemic of racial violence and intolerance—an imperial war over conquest of the “darker races.”²⁶⁷

The war in Europe provided the perfect platform for race leaders to critique America’s race problem. As Wilson lauded the American people’s “passion for peace” and called on the American citizenry to bond together during this period of international

²⁶³ *The Crisis*, Vol.9 No.1, Nov.1914, 30.

²⁶⁴ *The Crisis*, 30.

²⁶⁵ *The Crisis*, 28.

²⁶⁶ Woodrow Wilson, *Message to Congress*, 63rd Cong., 2d Session., Senate Doc. No.566 (Washington, 1914). Woodrow Wilson also sought to elevate the country’s status as a democratic and moral leader among the nations’ of the world, and to ensure that the U.S. would have a prominent place in the post-war peace talks. Maintaining a strict policy of neutrality was thus essential to Wilson’s post-war plans

²⁶⁷ Wilson, *Message to Congress*.

crisis, race leaders wrote about the divisive nature of American race relations.²⁶⁸

Liberty, freedom, and equality were elusive ideals for black citizens whose lives were confined by the ever-present system of Jim Crow segregation laws, disenfranchisement, and a lack of economic opportunity. While the President celebrated “individual liberty” and “free labor” and “uncensored thought” as the nation’s greatest virtues, black Americans were quick to assert that these rights extended only to white citizens. For example, while war industries brought prosperity to large numbers of American citizens, much of the South’s laboring force continued to toil as sharecroppers in slavery-like conditions and workers in the North were shut out of unions and skilled labor positions.²⁶⁹

Black Americans also decried the violent system that was used to uphold and enforce white supremacy. Particularly appalling to race leaders was the American public’s horrified reaction to news reports of brutalities overseas, which black observers could not help but compare with their seeming indifference to their own country’s deplorable record of violence and the on-going atrocities committed against their own citizens. In an especially critical article, a journalist for the *Chicago Defender* noted that “while we are reading of the horrible occurrences in connection with the war in Europe and deploring a phase of modern civilization, which resorts to national murder to right its alleged wrongs, there comes over the wires from the South, reportedly, tales of hanging, unauthorized by the law.”²⁷⁰ Between 1914 and 1915, more than one hundred

²⁶⁸ Woodrow Wilson, “Third Annual Message,” December 7, 1915, Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, <http://presidency.uscb.edu/ws/?pid=29556>.

²⁶⁹ Black newspapers refused to remain silent on these issues as Chad L. Williams writes that on the eve of America’s entry into the First World War, for black Americans citizenship was in name only. Chad L. Williams, *Torchbearers of Democracy: African American Soldiers in the World War I Era*, (Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 17.

²⁷⁰ “Our Own House,” *The Chicago Defender*, 8.

black Americans had been lynched, and the “stain” of these murders not only rested on the men who committed the actual crime, but “on the community where the scene takes place and on the whole nation.” If the United States was to have any moral authority to lead the post-war reconstruction of Europe, the *Defender* argued, it was imperative that the country get its “own house in order.”²⁷¹

Still, despite the myriad ways black citizens were both politically and economically disenfranchised, race leaders were optimistic that the war could improve the lives of black Americans. Their confidence that the war could, and would expand the rights of black citizens was neither unrealistic or without precedent. Throughout Europe, the war had ravaged destruction upon colonial racism, forcing embattled nations to turn to their colonial subjects for military support. Reports from the battlefields revealed that both the French and English armies had opened their ranks to black soldiers. The French had mobilized approximately 150,000 West African troops.²⁷² The English too had also begun to enlist colonial subjects into their forces, even admitting a black soldier into the army’s most exclusive military regiment—The Coldstream Guards.

Closer to home, African Americans saw the Canadian army ease its restrictions on black enlistees. As early as 1915 black Canadian soldiers could be found fighting for “King and Country” in the 106th Battalion, Nova Scotia Rifles.²⁷³ And on March 28, 1917, the No.2 Construction Battalion—Canada’s first and only Black Battalion—

²⁷¹ “*Our Own House*,” *The Chicago Defender*, 8.

²⁷² Adriene Lentz-Smith, *Freedom Struggle: African Americans and World War I* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2011), 36-37.

²⁷³ While most black volunteers were prohibited from enlisting in the Canadian Expeditionary Force, there were a number of individual local regiments that allowed black soldiers to enlist. Calvin W. Ruck, *Canada’s Black Battalion: No. 2 Construction, 1916-1920* (Society for the Protection and Preservation of Black Culture in Nova Scotia, 1986), 31

departed from Nova Scotia, Halifax to England.²⁷⁴ Other nations followed suit including Brazil, India, and Egypt among others “race men” were found to be “soldiers of mark and merit, ranking in military importance [and] in official life.”²⁷⁵ Just as the European conflict had resulted in citizenship rights for peoples of color throughout the world, black Americans believed they too could leverage the potential threat of war to demand greater equality of their country.

“Up, brother, our race is calling:” The Officers’ Training Camp Movement

Military service was inextricably linked to the larger struggle for citizenship rights. The first opportunity to test the country’s commitment to equality and democracy arose in 1915 when the President made the decision to initiate a nation-wide preparedness movement. “If our citizens are ever to fight effectively upon a sudden summons,” Wilson argued, “they must know how modern fighting is done...and the government must be their servant in this matter, must supply them with the training they need.”²⁷⁶ Wilson’s appeal for preparedness provided race leaders with the opportunity to advocate for the elimination of Jim Crow practices in the army. “Now that the whole country favors preparedness” argued one journalist, the country should “welcome the return of the race in arms so that this group of people will be ready to take on this new

²⁷⁴ Permission to form the battalion was official granted in July 1916. It took almost a year to recruit enough volunteers. Many black Canadians were hesitant to join because of the Canadian army’s unofficial segregation policy, and because of the segregated nature of the battalion. Only a few of the men in the No.2 Construction Battalion were assigned to line units and fought in battle. Among the 624 men who enlisted, 19 were officers and approximately 165 black Americans. An agreement between Canadian and American authorities was reached which enabled black Americans into the Canadian Army. *Ruck Canada’s Black Battalion*, 24-28.

²⁷⁵ “A Just Return For Our Money is Demanded,” *The Chicago Defender (Big Weekend Edition) (1905-1966)*; Nov 6, 1915, 5.

²⁷⁶ “Third Annual Message,” *The American Presidency Project*.

preparedness.”²⁷⁷ Using the Wilson’s language of national unity and equality, race leaders called upon the government to remove the army’s policy of segregation and open up the military schools at West Point and Annapolis to black youth.

Looking back at black Americans’ record of service to their country, the black press noted that neither a shortage of skill, nor a lack of loyalty had ever been the cause of the exclusion of black Americans from the military. Instead it was the “virus” of race prejudice that had disarmed black men.²⁷⁸ The government could hardly “discriminate against one part of its citizenship in times of peace and expect them to be up to the standard in times of trouble.”²⁷⁹ Denying black youth entry to military schools also deprived the race of the mental, moral, and physical benefits that “military discipline” provided. Further, race leaders argued, military training would decrease “crime among youthful bandits,” and “would make for stronger manhood and an insurance policy for peace.”²⁸⁰ “What power has congress, the president or any official elected by the people,” asked one journalist, “to refuse the sovereign voter equal recognition in any public institution?”²⁸¹ There were gross inconsistencies in the government’s treatment of black citizens: if they were to be taxed “equally with all other races,” then it stood that black Americans should benefit equally from the programs into which they paid. Military training schools, which were funded by the public, systematically discriminated against black youth, and as tax paying citizens, black Americans demanded a return on their investment.

²⁷⁷ “South Must Arm Race Men,” *The Chicago Defender*, , 3.

²⁷⁸ “South Must Arm Race Men,” *The Chicago Defender*, 3.

²⁷⁹ “United States May be Forced into Great War”, *The Chicago Defender (Big Weekend Edition)* (1905-1966); Feb 27, 1915,1.

²⁸⁰ “South Must Arm Race Men,” *The Chicago Defender*, 3.

²⁸¹ “A Just Return For Our Money,” *The Chicago Defender* 5.

The struggle to achieve equality in the military reached a turning point in January 1917, when NAACP Chairman Joel E. Spingarn, along with black collegians, faculty and administrators across the country launched a national movement for the training of black officers.²⁸² Previous attempts to establish similar training for black officers had been limited to state armies. For example in November 1915, the 8th Regiment Armory in Savannah Georgia was opened for the training of black military officers. All graduates of high school or college were eligible, and the cost of the training along with all uniforms and equipment would be provided by the state for all enlistees.²⁸³ The training school was advertised as an “excellent opportunity for the young men to serve their race and country by being familiar with the art of defense.” Failing to enlist, the organizers warned, would condemn “our brothers” to “serve on the battlefield under the spirit of Jim Crowism.” Lastly, the organizers further appealed to potential enlistees to become part of this “great movement for freedom and manhood,” noting that their “education can serve no higher purpose than to train for the leading of your brothers from the awful drudge of Southern slavery to a status of recognized honor.”²⁸⁴

By the fall of 1916 the preparedness movement was in full swing. As arrangements were being made to organize a federal army, questions arose about the place of black men in the military. The idea of universal military service and the War Department’s recent decision to offer reserve training camps for officer candidates precipitated debates about citizenship, equality, and military service. James Vardaman,

²⁸² NAACP Chairman Joel E. Spingarn, who had attended several of the training camps during the fall, initiated an effort to obtain officer training for blacks.

²⁸³ “Race Officers to Man the South,” *Chicago Defender*, Nov. 13, 1915, p.1.

²⁸⁴ “Race Officers,” *Chicago Defender*, 1.

the outspoken junior senator from Mississippi led the effort to ban black enlistees and officers from military service. Vardaman, along with several other Southern politicians, ardently opposed arming black men, claiming that enlistment black soldiers posed an imminent threat to the southern way of life.²⁸⁵ Although Vardaman had support from the War Department, he was only partially successful in his efforts to bar black men from service. Black volunteers would be permitted to join the enlisted ranks, but black officer candidates would be excluded from the reserve officers' training camps.²⁸⁶

The War Department's initial decision to exclude black candidates from the reserve officers' training camps resulted in the almost total absence of black officers from the military. Joel Spingarn, who had left his position with the NAACP after he had been commissioned as an intelligence officer and had attended several of the training camps, was outraged by the banning of black officers from training camps. Spingarn, who was a committed integrationist, initially argued for the inclusion of black candidates in training camps. He quickly learned, however, that both the Wilson Administration and War Department were opposed to racial integration of any kind in the military. Accordingly, Spingarn decided that the most pragmatic approach to securing opportunities for black officers would be to lobby for separate camp for black officer candidates.²⁸⁷ Spingarn next approached General Leonard Wood about the idea for the separate camp for black officer candidates. Wood responded that he would

²⁸⁵ For more about Black Americans' struggle for the right to fight see especially Nina Baym, *Loyalty in Time of Trial: The African American Experience During World War I*, (Roman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2011).

²⁸⁶ The National Preparedness Act 1916, introduced several four-week reserve officers' training camps. Hal S. Chase, "Struggle for Equality: Fort Des Moines Training Camp for Colored Officers, 1917," *Phylon* 39 4, 4th Qtr. 1978: 298. Complicating things was that in the spring of 1917, there were claims that German spies had infiltrated black communities and were encouraging disloyalty among black Americans.

²⁸⁷ Chase, "Struggle for Equality," 299.

support the camp provided Spingarn could secure the signatures from two hundred college-educated men.²⁸⁸ Buoyed by the general's favorable response, Spingarn embarked on extensive recruitment campaign that included letter writing, speaking engagements, and lobbying to secure eligible candidates to commit to attending the training camp.²⁸⁹

Spingarn anticipated that the camp would be controversial and that convincing the black public to support a segregated camp training would be particularly challenging. Winning the support of the black collegiate community was thus crucial for Spingarn to move forward with his plans. Not surprisingly, Spingarn's first stop was at Howard University. Known nationally as a leading institution in black higher education, and for its progressive faculty and administrators, Howard was an obvious partner for Spingarn. Equally important, Howard's student body had a reputation for its activism and commitment to the fight for citizenship rights. Moreover, Howard students had an established relationship with the former NAACP Chairman that spanned back to the spring of 1913 when Spingarn had been instrumental in helping the collegians organize the first and only college chapter of the NAACP. Lastly, the university's proximity to the federal government provided the ideal location to launch the protest on the War Department and White House.

Spingarn, Howard University's dean George W. Cook, Professor Montgomery Gregory and the president of the student body George E. Brice worked together to develop an organizational strategy to generate support for the training camp. Despite critiques from the black press about black Americans voluntarily segregating

²⁸⁸ James Rawn, Jr., *The Double V: How Wars, Protest, and Harry Truman Desegregated America's Military*, (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2013) 37, Chase, "Struggle for Equality," 299

²⁸⁹ Rawn, *The Double V*, 37.

themselves in an army camp, acquiring enough volunteers proved less difficult than Spingarn initially thought, as many students at Howard were graduates of the Washington High School Cadet Corps, and believed their training qualified them to become officers.²⁹⁰ Howard University thus became the chief recruiting center and official headquarters of the officer's training movement. The leaders of the movement for the training camp officers w agreed that Cook and Montgomery would use their connections to secure support among faculty and administrators from other institutions, while the students would campaign among their peers.²⁹¹ Dean Cook also wrote an open letter in the *Howard University Journal* appealing to the student body to demonstrate their patriotism and sign up for the camp. Meanwhile, George Brice lobbied the University's extensive alumni and fraternal networks to muster support for the camp, beginning with his own fraternity the Omega Psi Phi.²⁹² And while traveling as a member of the Howard University basketball team, Brice advertised the camp to the opposing team's players.²⁹³ Finally, with the assistance of Professor Montgomery and Dean Cook, the students formed the National Committee of Negro College Men and a room in the basement of the university chapel was converted for their purposes.²⁹⁴

Despite growing support among the black collegiate community, the training camp movement faced intense opposition from the black press. The movement

²⁹⁰ Rayford Logan, *Howard University The First Hundred Years, 1867-1967* (New York: New York University Press, 1969),180.

²⁹¹ Dean George Cook was instrumental in getting the support of Morehouse College President John Hope, Wilberforce and Fisk University.

²⁹² Recruiting occurred among Howard's other fraternities including the Alpha Phi Alpha, Kappa Alpha Psi, and Phi Beta Sigma. Additionally, the Alpha Phi Alpha actively recruited collegians at Cornell and Amherst. Chase, "Struggle for Equality," 301.

²⁹³ Chase, "Struggle for Equality," 301.

²⁹⁴ Rayford Logan notes that the Central Committee of Negro College Men also consisted of students from Lincoln (PA), Fisk, Atlanta, Morehouse, Morgan, Virginia Union, Columbia, Harvard, Yale, and Brown. Logan, *Howard University*, 180.

sustained a serious setback after Joel Spingarn published an article in the *New York Age* on February 15, 1917, soliciting “educated colored men” to seize the opportunity presented by the military to “become leaders and officers instead of followers and privates.” The black press was especially critical of what they saw as Spingarn’s capitulation to Jim Crow. While the NAACP Chairman professed, “I do not believe that colored men should be separated from other Americans in any field of life” he also argued that “the crisis is too near at hand to discuss principles and opinions, and it seems to me that there is only one thing for you to do at this juncture, and that is to get the training that will fit you to be officers.”²⁹⁵ Not even Spingarn’s connection to the NAACP, which placed him in good standing among the majority of black Americans, could prevent him from becoming the object of scorn, as the black press around the country responded in outrage to the separate “military training camp for colored men.”

The controversy around the separate officers’ training camp raised larger questions about patriotic duty, citizenship rights and whether black Americans ought to serve a country that failed to uphold its basic democratic principles. And as the debate played out in the pages of black newspapers across the country, both sides provided compelling arguments about the issue of race pride, self-determination, and the political implications of the camp. Opponents of the camp including the editors of the *Baltimore Afro-American* were “astonished and shocked” by Spingarn’s open support of “a special and distinct Jim Crow camp for colored men.”²⁹⁶ The *Afro-American* conceded that it was time that “the educated colored men of this country should be given opportunity for

²⁹⁵ “No, Thank You, Dr. Spingarn.” *Baltimore Afro-American*, February 24, 1917, 4.

²⁹⁶ *Baltimore Afro-American*, “No, Thank You, Dr. Spingarn,” 4. Black newspapers across the country during the months of February and March continued to publish response pieces to Spingarn’s article, including the *Chicago Defender*.

leadership,” and that black officers should lead black regiments. Yet, they refused to support any plan where black men voluntarily segregated themselves in Jim Crow camps. As the *Afro-American* noted, black Americans were already forced by law to comply with separate schools, residential sections, and segregated transportation. As long as military service remained voluntary, the editors insisted that the “one thing” that all black Americans could do was not volunteer for segregated military service—at least not so long as black Americans still had the “power to elect whether or not we will fight of the United States.” “If the United States wants the brains and brawn of the educated colored men,” the editors questioned, “why not open West Point and Annapolis to him?”²⁹⁷

William Pickens, Jr., Dean of Morgan College, was among the first public leaders to lend his support to the movement’s cause.²⁹⁸ Pickens acknowledged that a separate camp was far from ideal. But since separate black military units already existed, he argued a “distinct training camp for colored officers” seemed not only “logical” but offered “a decided advantage to the promotion and rise of colored men in the army.”²⁹⁹ Supporters of the camp urged the black community to see the camp as “an expedient for a great crisis.” Spingarn published his own article outlining the merits of the camp. Black Americans, he argued should not see the camp as submitting to Jim Crow policies, but instead as an important step in dismantling the army’s segregation policies. In his own words Spingarn explained, “this project is intended to fight

²⁹⁷ “No, Thank You, Dr. Spingarn,” *Baltimore Afro-American*, 4.

²⁹⁸ In a letter written to the *Afro-American* Dean Pickens voiced his agreement with the editors’ “relating to the interest of the colored people” “But the matter of the training camp,” he explained “strikes me somewhat differently in its wisdom and expediency from the way in which it struck the editors of the *Afro-American*.”

²⁹⁹ “Dean Pickens for Training Camp” *Baltimore Afro-American*, March 17, 1917, 1.

segregation and not encourage it.” With enough “men fit to be officers...we could fight for a wide-open army...”³⁰⁰ Spingarn further argued that, “army officials want the camp to fail,” and their refusal thus far “to set a time or place until two hundred men” applied was a strategic move to hamper the recruitment process. Volunteering for the camp also meant standing up to those Southern politicians like Senator James K. Vardaman who opposed universal military training. “Nothing frightens it [the South] more” Spingarn wrote, “than the thought of millions of colored men with discipline, organizing power, and a dangerous effectiveness.”³⁰¹

Finally, George Brice the Howard University student body president and leading member of the student-arm of the training camp movement, was given the opportunity to express his opinion in the *Afro-American*.³⁰² With the United States’ entry into the World War imminent, Brice argued that blacks needed “to prepare ourselves in order that we may serve our country well.” According to Brice, detractors of the officers’ training camp were basing their critiques “upon idealistic rather than upon practical grounds.” Advocating expediency, Brice called upon his peers to “prepare ourselves to be men and soldiers” and to take their places in the “ranks instead of serving as human breast plates” for “those who have taken advantage of that which is now offered us.” Deploying strong rhetoric, Brice argued that military service was deeply connected to citizenship, duty, and manhood and called upon his peers to “be large enough to do our duty,” even if “in this crisis the white man is too small to forget his prejudices.”³⁰³

³⁰⁰ “Dr. J.E. Spingarn Gives His Reasons in a Nutshell,” *Baltimore Afro-American*, March 17, 1917, 4.

Spingarn made a similar argument in a private letter sent to

³⁰¹ *Baltimore Afro-American*, “Dr. J.E. Spingarn Gives His Reasons,” 4

³⁰² Although the editors of the *Afro-American* continued to oppose the camp, out of respect for Brice they gave him the courtesy to explain his favorable position on the camp.

³⁰³ George Brice, “The Forum,” *Baltimore Afro-American*, March 17, 1917, 4.

By the end of March 1917, plans for the officers' training camp were almost complete. Although a vocal contingent of the black press remained opposed to the idea of a "Jim Crow" camp, the officer's training movement had largely succeeded in swaying public opinion to obtain the mandatory volunteers.³⁰⁴ The volunteers represented the best that the talented tenth had to offer. As the *Crisis* reported, "every business and profession is represented, including law, medicine, the ministry, dentistry, high-school and college teaching (including one president!), government service, banking, journalism, etc." According to the country's leading black publication, black Americans could be proud of the candidates they had put forth as they constituted not just a "fine body of men" but the officer candidates were "as fine as any body in the country regardless of race, creed, or color."³⁰⁵

Before the final plans for the officers' training camp were completed, President Wilson issued a declaration of war on Imperial Germany on April 6, 1917. As he made his official statement to the nation, President Woodrow Wilson affirmed that the United States would "fight for the thing which we have always carried nearest [to] our hearts—for democracy, [and] for the right of those to submit to authority to have a voice in their own Governments, and to "bring peace and safety to all nations and make the world itself at last free."³⁰⁶ Of the American people, Wilson demanded that "men and women

³⁰⁴ Howard University reported that seventy-three students had formally signed enrollment papers to join the camp. "Howard University in the War", *Howard University Catalogue* 1917-1918, 37. The May 1917 edition of the *Crisis* reported that as of April 5th, 281 applications were received. Eighty-one were undergraduates of Howard University, forty-six from Hampton, and three from Fisk. (p.37)

³⁰⁵ *The Crisis*, Vol. 14 No.1, May 1917, 37. *The Crisis* also noted that "every business and profession is represented, including law, medicine, the ministry, dentistry, high-school and college teaching (including one president!), government service, banking, journalism, etc." "Nearly all have had college training, and many have military experience of some sort."

³⁰⁶ Woodrow Wilson, "Address to a Joint Session of Congress Requesting a Declaration of War Against Germany," April 2, 1917. Online by the Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*.

everywhere” see to it that the laws of the United States “are kept inviolate” and “its fame untarnished.” Wilson concluded his speech with a warning to the American public. “I can never accept any man as a champion of liberty, either for ourselves or for the world,” he declared, “who does not reverence and obey the laws of our own beloved land, whose laws we ourselves have made.”³⁰⁷

For many black Americans, the President’s impassioned speech held the promise that their loyalty and patriotism during the nation’s time of great need would bring about the expansion of their democratic and citizenship rights. They were quickly disabused of this idea though, as the War Department proceeded to mobilize military forces. Lacking the required infrastructure, the War Department took proprietorship over all the preexisting privately run Officer Training Camps. The War Department’s reluctance to provide officer training for black candidates before the war continued as official policy even after the government’s took control over the officer training camps. The government opened several more, creating a total of fourteen, all of which were for white officers. With no provisions for the training black officers, it became clear that the president’s speech was little more than rhetorical propaganda.³⁰⁸

The exclusion of black candidates from the military’s Officers Training Camps represented a setback for the members of the African American training camp movement. But they were not ready to claim defeat. The Central Committee of Negro College Men was determined to have the government provide training for black officer candidates. A committee of thirty-two Howard undergraduates took the lead in

³⁰⁷ Kelly Miller, *Kelly Miller’s History of the War for Human Rights*, (Washington, D.C.: Austin Jenkins Co., 1919), 528.

³⁰⁸ Emmett J. Scott, *Scott’s Official History of the American Negro in the World War*, (Chicago: Homewood Press, 1919), 84.

organizing the final phase of the training camp movement. First the collegians were granted permission from school officials to take a leave of absence from their studies with full academic credit for their work up to that point. Freed from their academic responsibilities, the committee of thirty-two operated directly from the Central Committee of Negro College Men's office—previously established in the university's chapel—and organized themselves into sub-committees to manage the various organizing tasks. Floods of telegrams and letters arrived from men indicating their desire to enroll in a training camp for black officers. The office of the Central Committee of Negro College Men was open twenty-four hours a day as the Howard students worked “in shifts...day and night to receive and give any information vital to the success of the movement.”³⁰⁹

The collegians, along with faculty members, planned a comprehensive national campaign to force the War Department to authorize a separate camp for black officers.³¹⁰ The strategy the Committee devised was two-pronged and included: (1) putting pressure on Representatives, Senators, and officials in the War Department to force Secretary of War Newton Baker to endorse the camp; and (2) mass organizing amongst the black community. Designated members of the Central Committee of Negro College Men including Howard students were dispatched to the Capitol to lobby members of Congress. The students rode the streetcar down 7th Avenue from the University to the Capitol and met with representatives. The committee was successful in soliciting the support of over three hundred members of Congress--all of whom were

³⁰⁹ “Howard University in the War,” *Howard University Catalogue*, 38.

³¹⁰ In addition to faculty from Howard University, faculty and administrative representatives from other black colleges also joined the Central Committee of College men including Carter W. Wesley from Fisk University. Chase, “Struggle for Equality,” 304.

previously unaware that black men had been banned from the officers' training camps.

After meeting with the Congressman, the representative from the Central Committee of

Negro College Men would leave behind a card with the following information:

TRAINING CAMP FOR NEGRO OFFICERS

Our country faces the greatest crisis in its history; the Negro, as ever, loyal and patriotic, is anxious to do his full share in the defense and support of his country in its fight for democracy. The Negro welcomes the opportunity of contributing his full quota to the Federal Army now being organized. He feels very strongly that these Negro troops should be officered by their own men. The following presents the facts upon which we base our request for an officers' reserve training camp for Negroes.

- 1 (a) Fourteen officers' training camps are to be opened on May 14, 1917, to provide officers for the new Federal Army.
- (b) No officers are to be commissioned unless they receive training in one of these fourteen training camps;
- (c) The War Department has stated that it is impracticable to admit Negroes to the fourteen established camps;
- 2 (a) The Negro is able to furnish his proportionate quota in this army.
- (b) It seems just that the competent and intelligent Negroes should have the opportunity to lead these troops;
- (c) One thousand Negro college students and graduates have already pledged themselves to enter such a training camp immediately;
- (d) In addition, men in the medical profession desire to qualify for service in the Medical Corps, and there are other competent men ready to qualify for other specialized corps provided for;
- (e) Record of Negro officers and troops warrant the provision for Negro officers to lead Negro troops.
 Lieut. Col. Young, Major Loving
 Capt. Davis Major Walker
- 3 Therefore the Negro race requests the establishment of an officers' reserve training camp for Negroes.

CENTRAL COMMITTEE OF NEGRO COLLEGE MEN.³¹¹

The solicitation campaign proved to be a great success and the War Department was flooded with phone calls and letters from Congressmen and other leading white citizens. As a result, the War Department was forced to negotiate with the Committee. The terms were simple, if the Central Committee could furnish the signatures of one thousand qualified men—college men in their junior or senior year—within a designated time period, the War Department would open a camp for colored officers.

With the agreed upon conditions from the War Department, the Central Committee set about organizing support within the black community. Among their first goals was to drum up support for their campaign within the black community. Local Washington, D.C. advocates including Archibald Grimke—president of the D.C. chapter of the NAACP—were instrumental to the movement’s final phase. Although Grimke had initially opposed any segregated camps, he threw his full support to the cause and helped organize the Committee of One Hundred. Bringing together several of Washington, D.C.’s most influential black citizens, the Committee of One Hundred also solicited members of Congress on behalf of the training camp. A Committee of Ladies, consisting of members of the District’s elite female citizens such as Mrs. Arthur M. Curtis and Mrs. George Cook the wife of Howard University’s dean George Cook also solicited support among clubwomen.³¹²

The national office of the NAACP also offered institutional support from James Weldon Johnson and *Crisis* editor W.E.B. Du Bois, who advanced the cause of the

³¹¹ The members of the committee who signed their names to the card included: Frank Coleman, Chicago; W. Douglas, Lincoln; W.A. Hall, Union; M.H. Curtis, Howard; T.M. Gregory, Harvard; C.H. Houston, Amherst; L.H. Russell, Cornell; C.B. Curley, General Secretary, Howard University. Scott, *Scott’s Official History of the American Negro in the World War*, 88-89.

³¹² Chase, “Struggle for Equality,” 305.

camp through the monthly distribution of *The Crisis*. The monthly magazine provided readers with compelling articles published by the race's leading voice. "Give us Negro officers for Negro troops," wrote Du Bois in the May 1917, editorial. On behalf of the NAACP, Du Bois called on his "colored fellow citizens to join heartily in this fight for eventual world liberty." He "urge[d] them to enlist in the army; to join in the pressing work of providing food supplies; to labor in all ways by hand and thought in increasing the efficiency of our country." Appealing to his readership, Du Bois proclaimed that "justice and right calls for the admission of Negroes to the civilian training camps on the same terms as white men." Finally he asked his constituency to support the cause "despite our deep sympathy with the reasonable and deep-seated feeling of revolt among Negroes at the persistent insult and discrimination to which they are subject even when they do their patriotic duty."³¹³

Du Bois' pleas expressed the sense urgency that movement organizers faced. The Central Committee had only ten days to provide the names of one thousand "capable men" as part of the War Department's stipulations for establishing the camp.³¹⁴ In order to secure the necessary signatures, the students at Howard were forced to muster all their resources and attention to recruiting potential candidates. The result was a mass grassroots organizing campaign among the students at black colleges. Mass meetings were held at Howard to raise funds to send student delegates to college campuses including Hampton, Virginia Union, Lincoln, Atlanta, Fisk and other schools in the South. When the initial travel funds ran out, the Howard collegiate community rushed to the Central Committee's aid. The students held a benefit concert was given in

³¹³ "Editorial: Resolutions of the Washington Conference," *The Crisis*, Vol. 14 No.1 May 1917, 59-61.

³¹⁴ "Howard University in the War," *Howard University Catalogue*, 39

the Howard Chapel and the University's Dramatic Club put on a performance of "Disraeli" at the Howard Theater donating all the proceeds to the cause.

By the first week of May, the Central Committee of Negro College Men had secured more than 1,500 names to present to the War Department.³¹⁵ The Secretary of War then submitted the list of names to the War College to be approved. In the meantime, the Committee continued to reach out to all their sources to influence a positive decision from the War College. During that time the War Department released a statement on May 19, 1917 that they had decided to raise the age limit for the camp from 18 to 25, and instead, would only accept enlistees between the ages of 25 and 40. While this announcement was met with disappointment from the hundreds of undergraduates who had already volunteered, the Committee nonetheless continued with their recruitment efforts and "augmented its already widely advertised propaganda by numerous press articles."³¹⁶

After a month of waiting, on June 7, 1917 the War Department finally announced that a camp for the training of black officers would be established at Fort Des Moines, Iowa, 15 June. The camp would host 1,250 men for the duration of three months.³¹⁷ The Central Committee of Negro College Men immediately issued a press release noting the significance of the announcement, "stop but a moment, brother, and realize what this means...our due recognition at last." Addressing their detractors who argued that the Committee had sacrificed "principle for policy" the Committee

³¹⁵ Scott, *Scott's Official History*, 87.

³¹⁶ Letter from Howard University as written in *Scott's Official History*, 88.

³¹⁷ Before Des Moines, Iowa was selected as the location for the officers' training camp, both Howard and Hampton were in contention to host the camp. Howard was ultimately rejected because of its location in the busy capitol had the potential to distract the trainees. Hampton lost its bid after Howard University president Stephen Newman and Dean Cook lent their support to Fort Des Moines. Chase, "Struggle for Equality," 305-306.

members argued that the camp was “less ‘Jim Crow’ than our newspapers, our churches, our schools.” The Committee leaders argued that with the camp in place, the black community’s focus should now turn to facing the “challenge hurled at our race.” Given the “terrible responsibility” resting upon the officer candidates, the Committee refused to “mince matters: the race is on trial” and “particularly the worth of its educated leaders.” “Just think for a moment how serious the situation is,” the Committee members argued, “we must succeed.” The race “needs every one of its red-blooded, sober minded men...up, brother, our race is calling.”³¹⁸

The struggle to establish the Officers’ Training Camp was one of the first student-led initiatives on a national-scale. Black collegians stormed the stage of national politics in the name of racial justice. And in waging war against discrimination, they created a space for the leadership, ideas, and opinions of black youth. Throughout the training-camp movement, black collegians articulated “the principles of virtue and courage learned in the academic halls.”³¹⁹ The struggle to obtain the camp reflected the “perpetual dilemma” of living in Jim Crow America—black men had to battle for the right to fight for their country. In this effort though, black collegians publicly declared their fitness for both military service and as citizens of the United States. Before the camp opened, the War Department revised its entrance requirements, such that only men between 25 and 40 were included, meaning that many of the student organizers and leaders were disqualified from participating. Still, despite their exclusion from the

³¹⁸ Scott, *Scott’s Official History*, 88

³¹⁹ Scott, *Scott’s Official History*, 88

Officers' Training Camp, the students celebrated their efforts as a major achievement in the larger struggle for black equality.³²⁰

The Second Line of Defense: Black College Women's War Work and Activism

As the nation prepared for war in the spring of 1917, black college women joined the ranks of America's domestic army. The mobilization of American women, and middle-class women in particular, was an essential part of the country's domestic war strategy. Government officials declared that women were essential to the country's arsenal in the world's fight for freedom and democracy. As the "guardians of the national health" and "spenders of the national wealth," women held "much of the power and influence" of the nation.³²¹ They were essential to the war effort, the government understood, because winning the war would require not only amassing a great army but also marshaling the country's resources on the home front. The politicization and militarization of women's everyday work such as community service, health, and home economy were held to be matters of "supreme military consideration." Accordingly, in early April 1917 the United States War Department initiated a targeted campaign aimed at middle class women to enlist their support in the maintaining the morale and morals on the home front.³²²

The government's wartime message of service, sacrifice, and patriotic duty resonated with black college women's Talented Tenth identities. Students at Spelman, Fisk, and Howard eagerly enlisted in the national war-project and formed a crucial core

³²⁰ At the conclusion of the training camp 659 candidates had received army commission, ninety-five were graduates of Howard (including 8 faculty),

³²¹ Theta Quay Franks, *The Margin of Happiness: The Reward of Thrift* (G.P. Putnam's Sons: The Knickerbocker Press, NY, 1917), 3

³²² Franks, *The Margin of Happiness*, 3.

of the country's second line of defense. During the war years the enrollment of female students at Fisk, Spelman, and Howard rose dramatically as young, patriotic black engaged women sought to educate themselves for the larger purpose of serving their country and communities. Black college women served their country on the home front by working to "preserve the health and morals" and "morale of those left at home" and to "fan into flame the sparks of patriotism in the breasts of those whom the country denied the privilege of bearing arms."³²³

The opportunities for black college women to serve their country were largely circumscribed by their age, race, and gender. Black women pushed aside racial slights and prejudice in the name of patriotism to work with organizations like the Red Cross and YWCA.³²⁴ As Alice Dunbar-Nelson recalled black women "put pure patriotism above the ancient creed of racial antagonism" and "hurled themselves joyously" into the "maelstrom of war activity." Black women, she continued, "accepted without a murmur the place assigned them in the ranks" and stood out "in splendid relief" as "a lesson to the entire world of what womanhood of the best type really means."³²⁵ It was with this same patriotic verve that many college women served their campuses, communities, and country.

Privately funded "interracial" organizations like the Red Cross provided the infrastructure and programs that black collegians could easily tap into. For example a group of Howard co-eds led by Miss Hallie Queen, met with three faculty members on

³²³ Alice Dunbar-Nelson, "Negro Women in War Work", in *Scott's Official History*, 375.

³²⁴ Both the Red Cross and YWCA excluded black women from their overseas work. The YWCA sent a small number of black women—including Addie Hunton and Kathryn Johnson to aid in the relief efforts for black servicemen. See: Two Colored Women and the American Expeditionary Forces. For more about black women's volunteer work with the YWCA and Red Cross see especially: Nikki Brown, *Private Politics and Public Voices, Black Women's Activism from World War I to the New Deal*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 66-83.

³²⁵ Alice Dunbar-Nelson, *Scott's Official History*, 374-375.

March 21, 1917 to discuss the ways in which the college women could participate in the preparedness movement.³²⁶ The students proposed forming a campus auxiliary unit of the Red Cross. The following day, the students received word that their proposal had been accepted and their unit would be an auxiliary of the District of Columbia Chapter of the American Red Cross.³²⁷ Similar auxiliaries were also established at Fisk and Spelman that spring.³²⁸ A group of female collegians at Fisk, at the suggestion of student Ernestine Edwards began preparing each day for work as Red Cross nurses. President McKenzie reported that “these patriotic, self-sacrificing girls have realized that in such a crisis of our nation calm, cool-headed women could do much to relieve the situation.”³²⁹

The Red Cross Society provided all auxiliary units with a list of urgent tasks. The members of the auxiliaries selected from among these tasks, taking responsibility for making surgical dressings, hospital supplies, refugee clothing, and other knit goods like socks—which were sent to the soldiers and civilians in France.³³⁰ Campus auxiliary units also put together comfort kits for soldiers who were being shipped out to the front lines and for those wounded in hospitals. The comfort kits were made exclusively at the expense of the Red Cross worker and were filled with articles chosen by them women

³²⁶ *The Crisis*, Vol.14 No.2, June 1917, 85. Two Red Cross divisions were formed in D.C., among black women. One was known as the Harriet Tubman Branch and the other at Howard University.

³²⁷ Logan, *Howard First Hundred Years* 183, Walter Dyson, *Howard University, The Captstone of Negro Education, a History: 1867-1940*, (Washington, D.C.: The Graduate School, Howard University Press, 1941), 73. In general there is little written about female collegians’ war work. While both Spelman and Howard officials did record their students’ war work, there is almost no mention in the Fisk school publications of their female collegian’s war efforts.

³²⁸ Although the Red Cross had no official policy of segregation, the majority of black women in the South joined independent auxiliaries to the local white-run branches.

³²⁹ Cynthia Neverdon-Morton, *Afro-American Women of the South and the Advancement of the Race, 1895-1925*, (Knoxville, The University of Tennessee Press, 1989), 58. The April 1917 edition of the Fisk University News reports that the students received instruction in “First Aid,” in care of patient, and particularly in making bandages and how to bandage different parts of the body.

³³⁰ American Red Cross, *The Work of the American Red Cross, Report by the War Council of Appropriations and Activities from Outbreak of War to November 1, 1917*, 66-68.

who created them, which often included socks, shaving supplies, tobacco, handkerchiefs, writing materials, and games.³³¹ Student volunteers found other ways to assist the Red Cross. Some put their education to use by assisting with the administration of Home Nursing and Dietetics classes offered to local black women.³³² During their summer vacation many Spelman students volunteered with the Red Cross units in Atlanta or their hometowns.

Like the Red Cross, the YWCA stood out among the private relief agencies in its willingness to welcome black volunteers. In June 1917, the YWCA organized a Colored Work Committee, under the organization's War Work Council to administer programs and serve the needs of black women and families affected by the war.³³³ The bulk of the war work of the YWCA fell under three categories: it ran hostess houses on army bases for the women and families visiting servicemen, it created on-base recreation centers, which provided wholesome activities for servicemen and women; and it also established civilian industrial centers for working women and girls.³³⁴ Though the YMCAs National Board emphasized the need to minister to the black community, black YWCA workers operated with limited personnel and funds—receiving a fraction of the YWCA's large war chest.³³⁵ The war exacerbated the internal issues of race that had always existed within the segregated YWCA. Prior to the war,

³³¹ American Red Cross, *The Work of the American Red Cross*, p.68

³³² Alice Dunbar-Nelson, "Negro Women in War Work.," *Scott's Official History*, 376-378.

³³³ A separate Colored War Work Council was organized in June 1917. Though the Council's staff was small—there were twelve National workers, three field supervisors, and forty-two centers with sixty-three paid workers.

³³⁴ For example, local black YWCA's provided assistance with housing and employment to the girlfriends, wives, and families who relocated to cities across the south to be with their servicemen. YWCA's also were responsible for maintain In addition, Local black YWCA's assisted with finding suitable housing and employment.

³³⁵ For more on race relations and the YWCA see especially, Nancy Marie Robertson, *Christian Sisterhood, Race Relations, and the YWCA, 1906-46*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007).

black YWCA chapters had operated independently, and received very little funding or institutional support from the largely white-run National Board or local YWCA headquarters. And throughout the war, black women's war work occupied the lowest run on YWCA's "ladder of administrative hierarchy."³³⁶

Despite these obstacles, black YWCAs workers met the large demand for their services by leveraging the resources of local social welfare networks.³³⁷ In cities with large black populations such as Nashville, Atlanta, and Washington, D.C., YWCA secretaries drew on the support of clubs and societies including black college women's organizations, which were already providing essential community services. Student YWCA branches at Fisk, Spelman, and Howard readily volunteered their services to "helping to safeguard the moral life of women and girls as affected by war conditions."³³⁸ For their part, student YWCA chapters largely focused on maintaining their current campus and community ministry as well as assisting their local black YWCA branches implement their programs through extensive fundraising efforts.³³⁹

In August 1917 the Emergency Circle for Negro War Relief was founded. Unlike the Red Cross or YWCA, the Circle for Negro War Relief specifically addressed the disparities in direct war relief and aid for black servicemen and their families. As Alice Dunbar-Nelson recalled, "though the various organizations for war relief were doing all that was humanly possible for the soldiers of both races, they were inadequate

³³⁶ Brown, *Private Politics*, 81

³³⁷ Brown, *Private Politics*, 80-82. Brown asserts: "African American women championed their own causes. Otherwise, programs for African American women would not have been initiated, especially within white women's organizations.

³³⁸ Scott, *Scott's Official History*, 379

³³⁹ Logan, *Howard First Hundred Years*, 183 Logan notes that female collegians at Howard raised \$2,250 for war work societies including the YMCA, YWCA, the Knights of Columbus, and the Salvation Army.

for all the needs of the Negro soldier and his family.”³⁴⁰ The organization’s overarching goal was “reaching the unreached.” Founded by Emilie Bigelow Hapgood, a white reformer from New York, the organization counted among its members, advisors, and top administrators several prominent race leaders—both men and women—including W.E.B. Du Bois, James Weldon Johnson and his wife Grace Nail Johnson, and Mary McLeod Bethune.³⁴¹ With endorsements from the black community’s most respected leaders, the Circle for Negro War Relief became instantly popular. Howard University’s women students were among the first to organize a unit. In the fall of 1917 the residents of Miner Hall—the women’s dormitory—organized a unit of the Circle for Negro War Relief. Similar units were organized around the country including Spelman and Fisk, and by mid-1918 there were fifty chapters in twenty-five states.³⁴²

The Circle for Negro War Relief differed from other relief organizations in that it “followed a proactive formula” to give aid to black families. Rather than the national headquarters setting the agenda, local units assessed the needs of their communities, determined the course of the relief work and were assured that their efforts would directly impact black soldiers and their dependents.³⁴³ Advertisements for the Circle for Negro War Relief underscored the autonomy that units had with each club “working in its own neighborhood in whatever way seems best, yet all under National supervision.”³⁴⁴ The Circle for Negro War Relief circulated a newsletter amongst units to promote and share successful strategies and the work of its members. There were few

³⁴⁰ Scott, *Scott’s Official History*, 387

³⁴¹ Brown, *Private Politics*, 38. Other notable leaders included Colonel Charles Young, George Foster Peabody, and Arthur Spingarn.

³⁴² Hamilton, *Torchbearers of Democracy*, 100. Hamilton notes that sixty branches were established within the first few months of its creation.

³⁴³ Brown *Private Politics*, 38. Unit organizers also contacted army base camps to establish the needs of black soldiers. The organization then reached out to local volunteers and asked them to send materials.

³⁴⁴ *The Crisis*, Vol. 15- No.6, April 1918, 304

requirements for membership: instead, advertisements for the relief society explained to potential unit organizers, “all you have to do is to get a few people to join you...in your club, lodge, your church, your office, your neighborhood, your school, or wherever people congregate.” The only prerequisite was “a small group of people who can see each other at regular intervals.”³⁴⁵ Once a unit was formed, it received a Charter from the Board of Directors and became officially affiliated with the National Headquarters. Organizing a unit enabled women, and especially college women who might not otherwise have the opportunity, to “be a leader” within a national organization.

Beyond their work in war relief organizations, female collegians also supported the war effort by participating in government war-programs. Within the first few months of the war, the federal government realized that food production and conservation was of high military importance, and that food producers and consumers would be integral to the country’s war efforts.³⁴⁶ The government appealed to American women’s sense of domesticity and womanhood to engage them in the nation-wide food conservation movement stating.³⁴⁷ “Food will win the war,” became the mantra of the food conservation movement and each woman was to enlist in the ranks of the “Army of American Housewives.”³⁴⁸

By 1918, the United States Food Administration had launched a nation-wide food program directly aimed at food conservation. While American men fought on the battlefields in France, for American women on the home front the kitchen was the battlefield. Armed with knives and forks, the country’s women were to fight against the

³⁴⁵ *The Crisis*, April 1918, 304

³⁴⁶ Ida Clyde Gallagher Clarke, *American Women and the World War*, (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1918), 62

³⁴⁷ Clarke, *American Women and the World War*, 65.

³⁴⁸ Clarke, *American Women and the War*, 62.

waste of essential foodstuffs. Black Americans, and especially black women championed the cause of food conservation. Director of the Negro section of the U.S. Food Administration, Ernest T. Attwell, encouraged food conservation among African Americans as a means of racial advancement. “No racial group will benefit more,” he argued, than black Americans “if the ideals for which we are fighting are achieved.”³⁴⁹ Attwell further encouraged black Americans to support the food conservation program by stating that “the program of the United States Food Administration with its doctrine of food economics, saving, production, conservation offers our race a larger opportunity to contribute in real service toward helping to secure victory for the great cause which includes the ideals of world democracy, of freedom, and liberty than in any other direction or activity.”³⁵⁰

The food conservation movement’s emphasis on sacrifice, thrift, economy, and intelligent home economics appealed to black women’s sense of respectable womanhood, and for black college women, these very principles were at the cornerstone of their educational enterprise.³⁵¹ At both Fisk and Spelman college women already raised livestock and worked in the schools’ gardens growing produce to supplement food for the boarding department as part of their practical training. Thus not surprisingly it was the female students at Fisk, Spelman, and Howard, who led their school’s Food Conservation programs.³⁵² When the food rations came into effect, Fayette McKenzie of Fisk confidently declared that his students were prepared to stand

³⁴⁹“Food Conservation Movement Being Pushed Among Negroes,” *Spelman Messenger*, Vol.35 No.2, November 1918, 6.

³⁵⁰ “Food Conservation Movement,” *Spelman Messenger*, 6.

³⁵¹ “Home Economics School Creed,” *Spelman Messenger*, Vol.34 No.8, May 1918, p1. “President’s Annual Report to the Trustees of Spelman Seminary, 1918,” *Spelman Messenger*, Vol.34 No.7, April, 1918, 2.

³⁵² “Fisk’s Answer to the Call,” *Fisk University News*, Vol.VII, No.15, April, 1917, 9.

strong in the “second line of defense,” and pledged that the university would “raise more crops this year than perhaps in all the years of the half-century past.”³⁵³

Spelman students were particularly invested in taking up the mantle of food conservation. As the preeminent black women’s college, Spelman stood as the standard-bearer for young black womanhood, and the students there took their responsibility to lead in the war work seriously. Though the war “has tested the hearts of teachers and students,” Tapley reported to the Board of Trustees, Spelman women “have answered the call of their country and are doing their part in making the world a safe place in which to live.”³⁵⁴ Specifically, President Tapley commended her students for meeting the challenges of the war through their “sacrificial living.” In addition to rationing coal and electricity, students strictly adhered to the city mandated “meatless” Tuesdays and “wheatless” Wednesdays.³⁵⁵ Students also used the *Spelman Messenger* to spread the message of food conservation to the larger black community. Each month the school newspaper was filled with recipes and helpful tips for reducing waste and conserving food. Students also published recipes for making “Victory bread” and “Victory meals.” An “American Victory meal,” the *Messenger* explained was one “in which there is little or no beef, pork, lamb or mutton” and, which “is in accordance with the request of the United States Food Administration relative to wheat, meat, fats, and sugar” rations.³⁵⁶ To make the preparation of “Victory Meals” easier for black women, the *Messenger* also included helpful information on the ways that women could substitute the rationed

³⁵³ Fisk’s Answer to the Call,” *Fisk University News*, 9

³⁵⁴ “President’s Annual Report,” *Spelman Messenger*, Vol.34, No.7 April, 1918, 2.

³⁵⁵ “The Spell of Spelman,” *Spelman Messenger*, Vol.34 No.4 January, 1918, 1. One student notes that the in the city of Atlanta, Tuesdays were designated meatless days, and Wednesdays were wheatless. In addition to food conservation, Spelman had also conserved coal, turning out all lights on campus by 10pm sharp.

³⁵⁶ “President’s Annual Report,” *Spelman Messenger*, 2.

products in their everyday cooking. For example, the May 1918 edition included a four-point shopping guide outlining specific foods to purchase and the recommended quantities for each member of the family.³⁵⁷

Where issues like food conservation and relief for soldiers and their families fell squarely within women's domain, participating in the government's financial campaigns was initially seen beyond the purview of traditional women's war work. Between 1917 and 1919 the Treasury Department organized five National Liberty Loan drives and several War Stamps Savings campaigns to help offset the financial costs of the war.³⁵⁸ After the first Liberty Loan drive, which was incredibly successful due in large part to the support of American women; it was the "quick response of the women of the United States" to the loan drives that soon "associated women with the work." Approximately one-third of all purchasers—or one million women—purchased U.S. Treasury bonds during that first Liberty Loan drive.

They saw the Liberty Loan Campaigns "financial measure[s] required for the raising of money to pay for the food, clothing, shelter and maintenance of American soldiers" that "seemed naturally apart from the usual work of women in war time."³⁵⁹ The overwhelming participation of women shocked observers at the time. What set these campaigns apart from other wartime initiatives was that they were part of a governmental program that was open to any and every citizen in the United States. Moreover, to purchase a Liberty bond was to claim a financial stake in the war. That any woman, regardless of color, could purchase a Liberty bond and in doing she not only registered her patriotic sacrifice, she claimed a financial stake in the war. To

³⁵⁷ *Spelman Messenger*, Vol.34 No.8, May 1918, 1

³⁵⁸ There were a total of five Liberty Loan drives.

³⁵⁹ Clarke, *American Women and the World War*, 107.

purchase a Liberty bond was to make a direct investment in the “blessings of American freedom” and in the “fight for those ideals of government that mean genuine freedom of womanhood.”³⁶⁰

Black Americans purchased more than \$250 million in Liberty bonds and War Savings Stamps.³⁶¹ As was true of several other war initiatives, it was black women who “were foremost in all the financial campaigns.”³⁶² In their work with the Red Cross, Y.W.C.A., and relief societies college women participated in numerous fund raising campaigns. And during the National Liberty Loan campaigns, college women took the lead in purchasing and promoting the sale of Liberty bonds. Just as college men’s military service served as a public display of their loyalty and patriotism, Liberty bonds provided an important record of college women’s sacrifices and their investment in the ideals for which the war was being fought. As both literal and symbolic stakeholders in the winning of the war, college women further claimed the rights of American citizenship with the sale of each Liberty bond.

Collegiate Life on the Home Front

The First World War had an immediate and profound impact on collegiate life. Upholding the integrity of American higher education was an important part of demonstrating the country’s resiliency and strength—an idea affirmed by President Wilson in a statement in which he declared that it was of the “very greatest importance” that all schools continue to operate at their normal efficiency as a matter “affecting both

³⁶⁰ Clarke, *American Women and the World War*, 114.

³⁶¹ Mjagkij, *Loyalty in Time of Trial*, 122.

³⁶² Scott, *Scott’s Official History*, 453.

our strength in the war and our national welfare and efficiency when war is over.”³⁶³ As representatives of leading institutions of black higher education, administrators at Fisk, Spelman, and Howard were anxious to demonstrate their leadership and ability to meet the demands of the national war emergency. By the war’s end, almost all aspects of collegiate life had been reorganized for the purposes of war.

When the doors to Fisk, Spelman, and Howard opened for the start of the 1917-1918 academic year, students came. Initially, administrators had anticipated that the war would negatively impact admissions. But by the end of the registration period the enrollment numbers of both male and female students not only met, but exceeded pre-war levels. Howard reported that “Clark Hall was full of young men and Miner Hall after taking in more young women than ever before was obliged to turn away a score of applicants for lack of rooms.”³⁶⁴ Spelman and Fisk too, reported similarly high enrollments among women applicants; with the latter institution declining applications even after the university had rented a neighboring house to ease the overflow from overcrowded Jubilee Hall.³⁶⁵ At Spelman administrators refused to turn students away, declaring that there would be “no shutting down here because of war conditions.”³⁶⁶

Fuel and food rations further required every student to sacrifice his or her comfort for the greater good of the collegiate community. In her annual report, Spelman president Lucy Hale Tapley noted that “the problem of food, fuel, and other provisions has been a grave one...however, our needs have been met and there has been no suffering or even discomfort.” Tapley saw the challenges brought about by the war as

³⁶³ “A Message from the President,” *Spelman Messenger*, Vol. 35 No.1, Oct.1918, 2

³⁶⁴ “Howard University In the War,” *Howard University Record*, Vol.12 No.4, May, 1918, 5-6.

³⁶⁵ “The President’s Report,” *Fisk University News*, Vol. VIII No.4 January 1918, 12.

³⁶⁶ “The Spell of Spelman,” *Spelman Messenger*, 1.

an opportunity to teach students “the beauty of unselfish lives spent for others.”³⁶⁷

Students at Spelman spent their nights throughout the war without electricity. Even though the city of Atlanta’s principal source of electric energy came from waterpower, each night at 9:30 the lights flickered alerting all on campus that the lights would be out in a half-hour. Administrators were equally strict about the usage of coal, and by 10 pm the radiators were turned off.³⁶⁸ Meanwhile, uncertainty about continued funding for black colleges and universities and the rising operating costs required administrators to adopt austerity measures and cut all unnecessary expenditures. At Fisk for example, president McKenzie announced in his annual report that the school had “deemed it wise to eliminate” all unnecessary extra-curricular activities for the duration of the war, including inter-collegiate athletics.³⁶⁹

Besides the surge in student registration and the minor inconveniences of food and fuel rations, collegiate life changed in more dramatic ways during the first year of the war. Most notable was the militarization of black college campuses. Students at Fisk and Howard were already accustomed to a regimented lifestyle organized largely in a familial manner. Beginning in the early 1900s, historian Martin Summers notes, concerns about the overall physical conditions of male students had led black colleges like Howard to incorporate “a martial component into the overall pedagogy.”³⁷⁰ For example, in 1903 Howard’s Board of Trustees approved military drill with equipment supplied by the War Department. The completion of the process of “militarizing”

³⁶⁷ “President’s Annual Report,” *Spelman Messenger*, 1.

³⁶⁸ “The Spell of Spelman,” *Spelman Messenger*, 1

³⁶⁹ *Fisk University News*, “The President’s Report,” 11. McKenzie had a larger goal of reforming college athletics at Fisk. He saw athletics as corrupt and bringing out the worst in students.

³⁷⁰ Martin Summers, *Manliness and It’s Discontents: The Black Middle Class and the Transformation of Masculinity, 1900-1930*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 252

student life occurred with the institutionalization of military drill through Fisk and Howard's "partnership with the U.S. armed forces."³⁷¹

The process began subtly, with Fisk and Howard introducing new courses that would provide students with practical training in the new war industries. Additionally, both schools introduced compulsory military training for all male students at the beginning of the year. Students at Fisk drilled for one hour each week, while at Howard they trained daily. Many young men at these institutions had already enlisted in the Officers' Training Camp, and more still expected to be drafted or receive officer commissions. The military exercises, educators explained were intended to help make the students' transition to the "soldier life a little easier when the call comes."³⁷² Moreover, educators hoped that the extra training would help those students drafted into the military to be more effective and thus "bring more quickly such promotion as their general education will justify."³⁷³

In November 1917, Howard University became the only black institution of higher education to offer instruction in radio work for the United States Signal Corps. This branch of service was seeking radio operators as well as "experts in the operation of gas engines and motor generators, motor truck drivers, telegraphers, switchboard men, linemen, electricians, etc." It was even speculated that some of the men who enlisted in the Signal Corps would be "promoted to the handling of flying machines in the aviation section."³⁷⁴ The Federal Board of Vocational Education approached Howard's president Stephen Newman about the possibility of offering the training

³⁷¹ Summers, *Manliness and It's Discontents*, 252.

³⁷² "The President's Report," *Fisk University News*, 11.

³⁷³ "The President's Report," *Fisk University News*, 11.

³⁷⁴ "Seniors and Juniors of Fisk University Leave Class to Volunteer in United States Signal Corps," *Fisk University News*, Vol. VIII, No.4 January, 1918, 27-28.

through the School of Manual Arts and Applied Sciences. The university president immediately replied in the affirmative, and on November 19, a course was established for the training of radio operators. Sixty-five students initially enrolled in the new radio school. As word spread about the radio school to other black colleges and institutions, enrollment more than doubled with 135 students graduating by the course's end in April 1918.

Among the members of the first graduating class were seven students from Fisk. Like their peers, these students sought to take advantage of the "new phase of [military] service" for black Americans. On Friday December 14, four seniors and three juniors announced to the school that they were leaving their studies to volunteer for the Signal Corps.³⁷⁵ The seven students, joined by university president F.A. McKenzie had gone down to the recruiting office early Friday morning to volunteer. They were then given examinations, told they had been accepted, and received orders that they would be leaving for Washington, D.C., by five o'clock that same evening. The Fisk News reported that the "University was deeply stirred when news reached campus that the men had volunteered." To celebrate the volunteers, who were to be among the first of an entire generation of black Americans to serve in the Army's Signal Corps, President McKenzie suspended all classes for the rest of the day. According to the school newspaper, the students were especially touched by McKenzie's "consideration for the human side of the affair." The strict rules concerning male and female interactions were abandoned for the day, he allowed the seven volunteers to go straight from the recruiting office to the women's dormitory "so that all of the girls would be certain to have an opportunity" to see them before they left. Finally, McKenzie secured approval

³⁷⁵ "Seniors and Juniors of Fisk University Leave Class" *Fisk University News*, 26.

from city officials for the students and faculty to accompany the men to the train station to see them off. Included in the assemblage of well-wishers was a small group of Fisk co-eds who accompanied by a “special chaperone,” were there to “represent the women’s love and interest in the welfare of the volunteer boys.”³⁷⁶

The introduction of compulsory military training and the founding of Signal Corps’ radio school was only part of the ongoing “militarizing” of black college campuses. As the war continued overseas with no signs of an armistice in the foreseeable future, the United States War Department began making plans to utilize the resources of the “student forces of the land” in preparation of a protracted war. On February 10, 1918 Congress created the Committee on Education and Special Training to administer new training programs. The National Training Detachment was one of the first of the new programs to be organized. The program initially excluded the participation of black Americans until Emmett J. Scott, the Special Assistant to the Secretary of War and officials at Howard intervened. Scott argued for the inclusion of black students, noting that the United States military had already instated black soldiers, and many more would be called to serve.³⁷⁷ In the early spring of 1918, Howard University’s School of Manual Arts organized the first “colored unit of the National Army Training Detachment” which offered courses from April to September in radio operations, carpentry, and electrical mechanics to 450 soldiers.³⁷⁸

³⁷⁶ “Seniors and Juniors of Fisk University Leave Class,” *Fisk University News* p.26

³⁷⁷ Charles Johnson, Jr., *African Americans and ROTC: Military, Naval and Aerospace Programs at Historically Black Colleges, 1916-1973*, (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2002), 10.

³⁷⁸ *Howard University Catalogue*, 1919-1920, 33. The National Army Training Detachments were renamed after the Student Army Training Corps was officially inaugurated, and became known as the Vocational or “B” Section.

The initial success of the National Army Training Detachment encouraged the government to expand their training efforts and in March 1918, established the Students' Army Training Corps (SATC). Like its predecessor, the SATC offered training for officer candidates as well as enlisted personnel in specialized trades but the new program was expanded to college campuses across the country with the goal of creating a reserve of trained officer candidates who were outside the current draft age. As collegiate institutions began to organize SATC detachments, reports circulated that black collegians at certain predominantly white institutions in Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Nebraska were denied entry into the programs. These accusations resulted in the War Department's Col. Robert I. Rees issuing a statement officially condemning all discrimination based on color. Despite the War Department's official denunciation of discrimination, however, the agency did not challenge the admission regulations at any collegiate institution that did not already admit black students.

Race leaders were determined to ensure that the opportunities afforded by the SATC would be extended to as many black youth as possible, so they petitioned the War Department to hold an instruction camp during the summer to train black faculty and students. In May, the War Department announced that during the months of August and September Howard University would be hosting an experimental training camp. The Students Army Instruction Camp—a division of the SATC— was staffed entirely by graduates of the Fort Des Moines Officers' Training Camp and attracted four hundred and fifty-seven representatives from seventy-three black colleges from across the United States. The three hundred and twenty men who graduated from the training camp on September 14, 1918 were qualified military instructors, trained to establish

SATC units on their own campuses.³⁷⁹ Of those who graduated, 320 were qualified as sergeant instructors, and 101 were recommended for additional training at officer training camps.³⁸⁰

The SATC summer training camp was heralded as a major success. Military officials who came to inspect the camp and were impressed by the quality of training the troops received and the level of efficient cooperation from university officials. The educators who attended the training camp were similarly pleased with the outcomes, and each left with a new mission to further incorporate both the practical and physical training features of the SATC into their schools' curriculum. For the student trainees, the camp created an unprecedented opportunity by bringing together hundreds of black youth from across the country. The shared experience of the being part of an experimental program fostered camaraderie among the trainees that lasted beyond the end of camp—evidenced by their formation of the Negro Student Army Association.³⁸¹ During the commencement ceremony, the graduates, who had already organized themselves as the Negro Student Army Association, presented Howard University with a bronze plaque commemorating the historical significance of the training camp. On the plaque's inscription the graduates pledged to uphold “the unsullied example of our patriotism in the past” and that the “younger generation” who was engaged “in the war for democracy” would “earn well their share of tribute for its victorious establishment everywhere.”³⁸²

³⁷⁹ *Howard University Catalogue*, 1919-1920, 33.

³⁸⁰ Johnson, Jr. *African Americans and ROTC*, 14.

³⁸¹ Johnson, Jr., *African Americans and ROTC*, 14.

³⁸² Logan, *Howard University and the First Hundred Years*, 182. According to Logan, the plaque was placed on the eastern entrance to the University Center, which overlooked the Reservoir.

That summer, Fisk University's campus was similarly commandeered for military purposes. On June 26, 1918, Fayette McKenzie received a telegram from the War Department inquiring about the possibility of the university opening a receiving camp for five hundred drafted men who were en route to the vocational units established at other black collegiate institutions. McKenzie replied immediately that Fisk was "eager and ready" to begin receiving the draftees, and that they could be accommodated as early as July 1. University staff and administrators immediately began preparing for the 600 anticipated soldiers as well as the usual 300 students who boarded on campus.

Throughout the month of July, Fisk's campus and facilities underwent extensive renovations so that by the time the first soldiers arrived in August, "a revolution" had been "made in almost every phase" of campus life. First, the old training school annex was repaired to accommodate the military officers and became the de facto military headquarters. Next, Livingstone Hall, which had previously housed the preparatory school students, was renovated for the incoming "Sammies." The building was stripped of all furniture and rearranged into "neat and orderly barracks." A canteen, which served cool drinks and ice cream, was constructed in the basement to add to the "comfort and happiness of the men." Bennett Hall, which now housed both the male preparatory and college students, was likewise organized into barracks, with three and four beds in each room. The YMCA room remained untouched, and two large living and study rooms were furnished and set aside for the recreation and use of male boarders.³⁸³ Lastly, school officials upgraded the dining facilities in Jubilee Hall, the

³⁸³ Faculty who previously had accommodations in Livingstone Hall transferred to Bennett Hall and the Teacher's Home.

women's dormitory. A separate mess hall for the officers was constructed on the first floor, while students would eat in the basement.

As word spread among the Fisk community of the impending arrival of the soldiers many parents voiced their concern about the impact the receiving camp would have on Fisk students. In particular many parents wondered "is Fisk safe for girls?" Tales from army camps around the country detailed the illicit relationships that occurred between men in uniform and the young women who lived in close proximity to the camps. With the impending arrival of 600 soldiers to Fisk's campus, parents' feared the potential "lure of the khaki." To assuage the parents' fears, Fayette McKenzie published a response to a letter from one particularly anxious father who was considering removing his daughter from the university. In his letter McKenzie assured the father that his concern was "a perfectly natural one" yet he believed that the proper precautions had been taken by the University faculty and staff so as to make the campus "a safe one for the lady students." McKenzie guaranteed that the soldiers assigned to Fisk's campus were of "high in ability and character" that the army camp would exist as an entirely separate institution from the University.

Even with president McKenzie's assurances that the university and Army camp would remain wholly separate institutions, additional safeguards were implemented nonetheless "to protect against even the occasional dangers common to army camps." To that end, McKenzie promised that the university would maintain a rigid disciplinary regime. The women students would lead an "efficient, busy school life, centered about Jubilee Hall." Meanwhile, the male students would be restricted to the men's campus about Bennett Hall as McKenzie noted, "our own boys will be under military

discipline,” adding that “they and the girls will be too busy for the former amount of social life.” McKenzie concluded his letter stating “this is a time when every patriotic citizen must fall into line and into step without delay and without complaint,” and “if any student failed accommodate him or herself to the new rules and regulations the could expect an “early invitation to return home.”³⁸⁴

On August 28, 1918 colleges and universities across the country, including Fisk and Howard, received notification that the War Department was introducing a Collegiate or “A” section of the Students’ Army Training Corps.³⁸⁵ The recruitment of college-educated men was part of a larger program to increase the military’s manpower by two million men by July 1, 1919. Section “A” was to begin by October 1, 1918 and was organized on a trial basis for the 1918-1919 academic year for the purpose of training 200,000 new officer candidates. The notice urged “all young men, who were planning to go to school this fall” to “carry out their plans and do so” and “go to the college of his choice.”³⁸⁶

Enlistment in the SATC was entirely voluntary. All male students between the ages of 18 and 21 who enrolled in a collegiate program were eligible to enlist.³⁸⁷ To encourage enrollment in the SATC the War Department opened up the program to all

³⁸⁴“Is Fisk Safe for Girls?” *Fisk University News*, Vol. IX, September 1919, No.1, 3-4.

³⁸⁵ Plans to extend the already successful SATC to men enrolled in collegiate institutions had begun as early as June 1918. To prevent a shortage in officer candidates, the Committee on Education and Special Training began discussing the possibility of organizing colleges for the purpose of training student-soldiers. The passage of the “Manpower Bill” on August 31, 1918, authorized the expansion of the draft to men ages 18-45. The bill contained a section authorizing the Secretary of War to contract with educational institutions to help carry out the mobilization process. For more on the origins of the SATC see the Advisory Board, “Committee on Education and Special Training: A Review of Its Work During 1918” War Department, Washington, D.C., June 1919, 13-14, 22-27.

³⁸⁶ “Committee on Education,” Advisory Board, 75.

³⁸⁷ “Committee on Education,” Advisory Board, 25.

college-age men who met the entrance requirements of their desired school.³⁸⁸ Even those students who were under the legal enlistment age of eighteen were encouraged to enroll in their schools' training unit.³⁸⁹ Once admitted to the SATC, the registrant was immediately placed on active-duty as a soldier in the Army of the United States. SATC cadets were assigned the rank of private, given two standard-issue uniforms, and received a salary of \$30 per month.³⁹⁰

During the course of their training, cadets were given the opportunity to specialize in a branch of training that would enable them to "become an officer of field artillery, medical or engineer officer, or an expert in some technical or scientific service." Training was divided into two components; military instruction which included 11 hours per week of training in military subjects along with practical instruction, military theory, and physical training. An additional 42 hours per week were devoted to the study of allied subjects, and included lectures, recitations, laboratory instruction, and supervised study. Despite all this training SATC students could not assume they would be admitted to the military's officer training camps once they graduated. Instead, student soldiers were informed at the time of their enlistment that their tenure in the unit was no more than a "try-out" where their performance would be "rated to determine their qualifications as material for officers." Cadets who failed to pass muster in their collegiate training would be re-assigned to a camp or cantonment to

³⁸⁸ The Committee on Education and Training left the entrance requirements up to the discretion of the individual institutions. For those young men who otherwise would not have been able to afford the cost of higher education, the SATC was an unprecedented opportunity to attend college at the expense of the government.

³⁸⁹ "Why Enlist in the Students' Army Training Corps," *Fisk University News*, Vol. IX No.1, 1918, 1.

³⁹⁰ Charles Johnson Jr., *African Americans and ROTC*, 11. The federal government covered these expenses as well as reimbursements for travel expenses.

continue training as a private.³⁹¹ Successful SATC candidates on the other hand, either continued their studies to prepare them for work in a specialized line of service, or were sent to continue their military training at an officers' training camp.³⁹²

Fisk and Howard were among the nearly six hundred institutions authorized to host SATC collegiate units.³⁹³ A joint partnership between the United States military and the partnering educational institutions, the collegiate section and merged academic instruction with military training. A contract between the War Department and the academic institutions clearly outlined the administrative duties of the SATC. Opting into the SATC program required school officials make "fundamental changes...in college and school practices to adapt them to effective service."³⁹⁴ Faculty and administrators would retain authority over all educational matters and were responsible for "quartering, subsistence, and instruction" of the cadets. The contract further stipulated that faculty would be responsible for administering academic instruction to student-soldiers in subjects "approved or prescribed by the War Department." Additionally, colleges and universities agreed to provide "the proper and sanitary housing" of student-soldiers along with meals according to the "quantity and quality equivalent to the standard Army ration," and "provide suitable and adequate grounds for military instruction and drill." For its part, the War Department covered the cost of the students' room and board as well as their tuition expenses and provided rifles and other equipment necessary for training. A commanding officer was stationed on campus to

³⁹¹ "Committee on Education," Advisory Board, 25.

³⁹² "Why Enlist," *Fisk University News*, 2.

³⁹³ The following black educational institutions were authorized to host SATC units: Lincoln University, PA; Meharry Medical College, TN; Talladega College, AL; Virginia Union University VA; Wilberforce University, OH. Atlanta University and Morehouse as well as Wiley University and Bishop Colleges in Georgia and Texas, respectively had joint SATC units. Charles Johnson, Jr., p.12

³⁹⁴ "Committee on Education," Advisory Board, 75

oversee the military training and instruction of the cadets and to enforce military law and discipline.³⁹⁵

With the SATC set to begin October 1, officials at Fisk and Howard spent the month of September making further changes to the campus and amending the curriculum in accordance with the War Department's regulations.³⁹⁶ Past efforts by administrators to minimize the war's impact on academic and campus life were superseded by the needs of the administering SATC. Since the cadets were soldiers on active-duty, the War Department mandated that the "living conditions [had to] conform to military routine."³⁹⁷ In accordance with this request the host colleges were "required to furnish barracks facilities, and mess accommodations" according to military specifications. Faculty also spent the first six weeks of the semester amending their course syllabi.³⁹⁸ Between September 18 and October 15 the War Department issued more than twenty-five circulars "specifying the desirable subject matter" to be covered in the required *allied subjects* including a special *war-issues course* "on the underlying issues of the war." One faculty member from each participating institution was assigned to oversee the course which was meant to "to enhance the morale of the members of the Corps" and ensure they had a complete "understanding of what the war is all about and of the supreme importance to civilization of the cause for which" they were fighting.³⁹⁹

³⁹⁵ Students' Army Training Corps Regulations-1918, Special Regulations No.103, September 24, 1918, 10.

³⁹⁶ "Committee on Education," Advisory Board, 27. A representative from the SATC was sent to each college and university to inspect the facilities to ensure they met military specifications.

³⁹⁷ Committee on Education and Special Training: A Review of Its Work During 1918, p.25.

³⁹⁸ See for example Appendix I-Curricula, September 25, 1918 in Committee on Education and Special Training: A Review of Its Work During 1918, War Department, June 1919, pp.113-121. A list of allied subjects can be found in the "Students' Army Training Corps Regulations," Special Regulations No. 103, 1918, 12.

³⁹⁹ Committee On Education," Advisory Board, "123.

When students returned for the fall semester, they were informed that Fisk had adopted a new military regime. “We are a military institution,” President McKenzie declared during the school’s opening chapel exercises. “We are at war. Fisk University is at war. Every teacher and every student are at war.” As such, the president announced, the university had adopted for the coming school year a curriculum shaped by “the essential principles of efficiency exemplified in the military,” which included among other things “unremitting toil, elimination of all unnecessary activities and motions, [a] regular and insistent schedule of life, promptness, accuracy, reliability, thoroughness, instant and complete obedience.”⁴⁰⁰ McKenzie concluded his speech by imploring both civilian and student-soldiers alike to remember that the patriotism of both civilian and student-soldiers alike, along with “every ounce of energy, every moment of time, every sacrifice of personal preference” would “hasten the end of this war.”⁴⁰¹

It was true; Fisk did look and function more like an army cantonment than a collegiate institution. As per military custom, each day began with the Reveille at 6 a.m. and ended with the evening Taps at 10 p.m. Frequent bugle calls along with the sound of rifle fire, military drills, and the thud of the cadets boots as they marched to and from their classes and study rooms further altered the typical soundscape of campus life.⁴⁰² Fisk not only sounded like an army camp, it looked like one too. Miss Belle Ruth Parmenter, a teacher at Fisk, reported that all students (and faculty) were required to obtain a pass from the Military Headquarters and carry it at all times while on

⁴⁰⁰ “Fisk University is at War,” *Fisk University News*, 17

⁴⁰¹ “Fisk University is at War,” *Fisk University News*, 17.

⁴⁰² According to the SATC regulations, cadets were to receive eight hours of military drill including exercises per week.

campus.⁴⁰³ The armed guards who were stationed prominently at the campus gates as well as the others who patrolled the campus grounds were also a constant reminder that Fisk was “in reality a ‘military camp.’”⁴⁰⁴

The war similarly left its mark on Howard’s campus. Each day began and ended with the call of the bugle, sentinels patrolled the grounds while guards were stationed at the gates, and all on campus “came and went by pass.”⁴⁰⁵ There were soldiers being quartered in every dormitory as well as the academic buildings on campus. Already at capacity, Howard officials hastily built four additional barracks and mess halls to accommodate the new SATC cadets. There were other noticeable changes to the grounds, among which included trenches that the student-soldiers had dug for training purposes.

Even more telling of the war’s influence at Howard was the organization of an all “Girls Battalion” in the fall of 1918.⁴⁰⁶ In October, a nation-wide outbreak of influenza forced the stoppage of all official SATC training and formal academic instruction. The entire student body was quarantined to the campus and placed under military discipline for the duration of the epidemic. While similar precautions were put in effect at Fisk and Spelman, Howard was the only institution to organize all women students boarding on campus into an all “Girls Battalion.” The Battalion, was comprised

⁴⁰³ Miss Belle Ruth Parmenter, a teacher at Fisk, published an article in the September edition of the *Fisk University News*, alerting the students to the vast changes that had taken place over the summer break. “Reorganization of Fisk Campus for War Purposes,” *Fisk University News*, Vol. IX September, 1918 No.1, 4-5.

⁴⁰⁴ “Reorganization of Fisk for War Purposes,” *Fisk University News*, 4-5.

⁴⁰⁵ Dyson, *Howard University*, 70.

⁴⁰⁶ Notably, Nannie Helen Burroughs president of the National Women’s Training School for Women and Girls in Washington, D.C., was running a Training Camp for Colored Women for “Home Defense.” The training camp was set to run for ten weeks of “intensive instruction in war work”—also beginning in October. Women who enlisted could take courses in motor and truck driving and repairing, first aid and home service, operation of elevators, operation of power machines, as well as best methods of preparing and conserving food, practical housekeeping, and home gardening among a number of other courses. For a complete list of courses offered see *The Crisis*, Vol. 16 No.4, September 1918, 45.

of “two companies of girls” who and “drilled daily” and “participated in reviews under the command of cadet officers.”⁴⁰⁷ But by early November the Girls Battalion had been disbanded. The influenza crisis had subsided and the world was on the verge of peace, making any further military training of Howard women redundant.

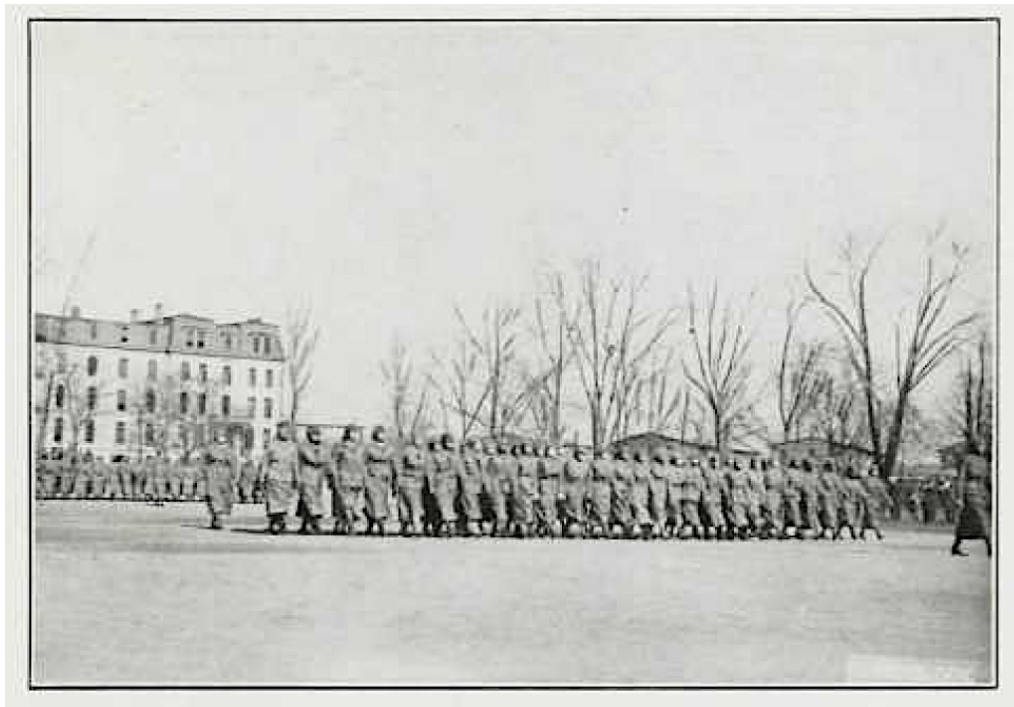


Figure 14. Howard University—Girls Battalion, 1918.

Conclusion

The First World War marked an important period in early twentieth century student activism. Black Americans spent the duration of the war demonstrating their patriotism in the hopes that their loyalty to the country would earn them the rights of full citizenship. In these endeavors, students at Fisk, Spelman, and Howard had played an important role in the black American war effort. Many black collegians believed their war service would be an answer to the seemingly interminable question of the

⁴⁰⁷ Dyson, *Howard University*, 73, Logan, *Howard First Hundred Years*, 123. Once the threat had subsided, Howard officials made the decision to shut down the Girls Battalion, and the women students returned to their regular routines.

“Negro Problem,” and demonstrate to the country and to the world, black American’s fitness for full citizenship rights.

The war engaged black collegians in the fight for their own liberty. As America prepared to enter the European conflict in 1917, black college men led their community’s effort to establish an officers’ training camp. Fighting for the right to serve their country, students at Howard organized a nation-wide student movement that forced the government to recognize black manhood and citizenship. And when the government again called upon black college men to enlist in the new Students Army Training Corps, students at Fisk and Howard again responded in numbers, ready to serve. In the process of serving the country’s war aims, Howard and Fisk became veritable military camps, while the rest of the student body lived under military rule.

Black college women’s war work also had a profound impact on shaping the collegiate culture during the First World War.⁴⁰⁸ The mass mobilization of America women on the home front made black college women conscious of their citizenship rights. These women believed they had just as much to gain as their male peers through their support of the war. College women framed their education as an important part of the national project of continuing to project the country’s strength of organization and efficiency during the trying times of war. Female collegians framed their war work in areas of food conservation, fundraising, and community service as a political program that would give them “some rightful share of the triumph of the principles of righteousness and justice.”⁴⁰⁹ Through their war work female collegians at Fisk, Spelman, and Howard not only fought on behalf of their country, but for their own

⁴⁰⁸ scholars like Nikki Brown have done much to elevate the importance of black club women’s wartime organizing and activism, black college women’s wartime work remains largely unknown.

⁴⁰⁹ “President’s Annual Report,” *Spelman Messenger*, Vol.34, April, 1918, No.7, 2.

liberty from the gendered and racial proscriptions that limited their access to political, economic, and social equality.

On December 7, 1918 the city of Washington, D.C., held its first official Armistice Day celebration. Among the 100,000 celebrants were 600 students from Howard University who had been invited to join the festivities.⁴¹⁰ Less than a month earlier, on November 11, 1918, students at Howard, Fisk, and Spelman, along with the rest of the country awoke to the news that the war was over. The news of the armistice had elicited both optimism and anxiety about the future of black America. As loyal and patriotic citizens of the United States, black collegians had taken up the mantle of war. As black Americans, students had “closed ranks” and put aside their “special grievances.” On the frontlines and on the home front, when the government had called upon them, black collegians demonstrated their willingness to serve. In the months that followed, as the country transitioned to peace, black collegians watched and waited for the war that had made the world safe for democracy, to make democracy safe in America. The students’ invitation to participate in the nations’ first Victory Festival though seemed a promising sign that black Americans were to be included in the country’s peacetime reconstruction.

⁴¹⁰ “Big ‘Sing’ Here Today: First Forman Celebration of Armistice by Washington,” *The Washington Post*, December 7, 1918, 7.

Chapter 4 The New Negro Student Movement

Introduction

In the afternoon on January 2, 1919, four Fisk students received letters from the University stating they had been suspended indefinitely as a result of their “direct defiance to the University.”⁴¹¹ Earlier that day, the four students—Aaron Payne, Myles Paige, Peter Richardson, and Oliver Ross, along with several of their peers, had presented Fisk president, Fayette McKenzie, with a signed petition denouncing the president’s plan to implement compulsory supervised study hours for all men enrolled in college programs. The day before, McKenzie had announced the details of the new curriculum in the President’s Annual Report, stating that Fisk University would be incorporating several of the Student’s Army Training Corps (S.A.T.C.) programs into the collegiate curriculum in an effort to improve educational efficiency.⁴¹²

The S.A.T.C. first implemented the contentious policy as part of the military’s “experiment” in collegiate curricular reform. The policy required all cadets enlisted in the collegiate section to attend forty-two hours of recitation and supervised study each week.⁴¹³ While President McKenzie had a reputation as a strict disciplinarian, his decision to integrate compulsory supervised study hours into the Fisk curriculum was consistent with a larger nation-wide education reform movement that took place within colleges and universities during and immediately after the World War. Education

⁴¹¹ F.A. McKenzie to Myles Paige, 8 January 1919, F.A. McKenzie Collection, Box 13, Folder 19. Fisk University Franklin Library Special Collection-Archives.

⁴¹² The S.A.T.C. provide to be an important catalyst for the reform of higher education in the United States. Fisk University was among the majority of colleges and universities that instituted curricular reforms based on the S.A.T.C. curriculum.

⁴¹³ “The President’s Report,” *The Fisk University News*, Vol. IX No.5 January 1919, 8.

reformers during this period often worried that colleges were more like social resting places for American youth than rigorous institutions for higher learning. The advent of the First World War and its attendant militarization of the college curriculum via the S.A.T.C. convinced many educators to revise their own curricula. According to McKenzie, the military's "closer supervision and exacting discipline" had improved the cadets' academic performance such that he believed that "the way to freedom as well as power," for black collegians, "lies through drill and training."⁴¹⁴

The students, however, opposed the proposed changes, for reasons that they carefully outlined in their letter. The former student-soldiers reminded the president that they had experienced the military's academic program, and, in their opinion, compulsory supervised study was unnecessary, inconvenient, and unlikely to improve students' academic efficiency.⁴¹⁵ The petitioners also cited financial reasons for their opposition to compulsory study hours. When the SATC disbanded, the military also ceased its program of subsidized tuition and board for students. For many students, this loss of income meant that they would either have to leave school or secure part-time employment. The demanding requirements of the new academic program, however, made working part-time nearly impossible.⁴¹⁶ Based on what they believed were reasonable arguments, the students hoped that their petition would convince the president to reconsider his position.

The president had anticipated that there might be some resistance to the new study regulations, and in fact had mentioned as much in his official announcement to the student body. Addressing the students, McKenzie admitted that his new "program

⁴¹⁴ The President's Message," *Fisk University News*, Vol. IX No.4 December 1918, 21.

⁴¹⁵ Myles Paige Letter, 5 January 1919.

⁴¹⁶ Paige Letter, 5 January 1919.

and policy would not commend Fisk to everybody,” though he ultimately hoped that they would “rally to the new demands and lead the van.”⁴¹⁷ So when McKenzie received the students’ petition, he reacted with extreme hostility. According to the president, the petition consisted of language “which was grossly insulting” both to himself, and “to the University as a whole.”⁴¹⁸ The University immediately sent letters of dismissal to the offending students, informing them that they would be asked to withdraw from Fisk unless they publicly renounced their petition: Any student “willing to change his mind,” by contrast, would be reinstated, pending their agreement to sign an official statement renouncing their support of the petition and to publicly acknowledge the “absolute authority of the University.”⁴¹⁹ Until “true repentance and confession” resulted in “proper amends” to McKenzie and the university, the accused student/s would remain ineligible for “consideration at the University.”⁴²⁰ All but Paige, Payne, Richardson and Ross agreed to the president’s terms.

McKenzie’s insistence that the students publicly declare their fealty to the “absolute authority” of the university as a condition of reinstatement at Fisk was significant. The S.A.T.C.’s occupation of Fisk had greatly disrupted the power structure on campus, causing “constant friction” between the University administration and commanding officers regarding student conduct and discipline. While McKenzie credited the S.A.T.C.’s presence on campus with the improved quality of academic standards, he bemoaned the fact that the moral tenor of the campus had suffered under

⁴¹⁷ The President’s Message, *Fisk University News*, Vol. IX No.4, December 1918, 21.

⁴¹⁸ McKenzie to Paige, 8 January 1919, Fisk University Franklin Library Special Collection-Archives, F.A. McKenzie Collection, Box 13, Folder 19.

⁴¹⁹ McKenzie to Paige, 8 January 1919, Fisk University Franklin Library Special Collection-Archives, F.A. McKenzie Collection, Box 13, Folder 19.

⁴²⁰ In a correspondence to President McKenzie, Oliver Ross quotes this line from the letter he received regarding his dismissal from the University. Oliver Ross to President McKenzie, 27 January 1919, Box.13 Folder 22.; McKenzie to Myles Paige, 9 January 1919, Box. 13 Folder 19.

military authority. When it came to disciplining the cadets, McKenzie claimed that there had been a “fundamental misconception on the part of the army as to the relative authority of collegiate and military officers.”⁴²¹ More specifically, McKenzie’s accused the commanding officers for failing to respect and uphold the colleges’ historic moral standards regarding student conduct.⁴²²

In his three years at Fisk, McKenzie had established himself as a strict disciplinarian. The president routinely suspended or expelled students for even the slightest violation of the Student Code of Conduct or perceived challenge to his authority. Under the military regime, however, students were given a level of personal freedom unprecedented at Fisk. According to the president, the military’s “open flaunting of the authority of the college” meant that behaviors that typically would have resulted in the students’ immediate expulsion, went largely unpunished by S.A.T.C personnel. If the S.A.T.C. officers had even “a decent respect for collegiate authority,” McKenzie wrote in his annual report, they would have upheld the “campus prohibition against smoking.” Instead, McKenzie accused the military of tempting the cadets “by prophylactic treatments to enter upon careers of vice,” citing the widespread use of profanity and other immoral behavior among the army officials and collegiate corps.⁴²³

SATC cadets were not the only members of the Fisk student body to challenge the status quo during the military regime. During the S.A.T.C. encampment university officials reported that a “considerable number” of young women had to be “returned to

⁴²¹ Disillusioned with what he saw as a critical failure in the partnership with the Government, McKenzie refused to establish a Reserve Officer’s Training Corps, until Fisk officials were given the authority to appoint military personnel. The president explained this position stating when it came to “the advantages and disadvantages of Government military co-operation, the disadvantages outweighed the advantages in the recent experience. It seemed, therefore, altogether unwise to seek the establishment of a Reserve Officers’ Training Corps.” President’s Report, *Fisk University News* 5.

⁴²² The President’s Report, *Fisk University News*, Volume IX, No.5 January 1919, 3-4.

⁴²³ President’s Annual Report *Fisk University News*, 4.

parental authority.” According to McKenzie, the reason for the women’s early departure was their inability to demonstrate “wise and prudent” behavior necessary “for their own protection.” Unlike their male peers who experienced unprecedented independence and freedom under military leadership, Fisk co-eds were expected to be “content to live by the strictest rules of reserve and propriety.”⁴²⁴ But just as their male peers who had enlisted in the S.A.T.C. were willing to take advantage of the military’s lax rules, college women were also anxious to push back against the exacting morality that governed their daily lives, knowing that any challenge to the University’s strict moral code would likely result in an “early invitation home.”⁴²⁵

The Fisk students’ opposition to compulsory supervised study marked the first significant episode of the emerging post-war New Negro Student Movement. The petitioners were among a defiant “new generation” of black college men and women. Students in the early 1920s were more economically diverse, politically active and socially engaged than any previous generation. Their political consciousness, racial identity, and desire for justice and equality were forged in the crucible of the social, economic, political, and cultural upheaval of the First World War and its aftermath. Prior to the 1920s, black students’ activism had remained localized to individual campuses, and campus culture varied greatly among black colleges and universities, depending largely on the origins and orientation of the institution (industrial/vocational versus those with a focus on the liberal arts). The experience of the First World War, along with the emerging militant race politics, and changes in youth and consumer cultures, however did much to foster a collective consciousness among black collegians.

⁴²⁴ President’s Annual Report, *Fisk University News*, 9.

⁴²⁵ President’s Report, *Fisk University News* 9-10.

The failure of the First World War to bring about equal rights along with the rise of racial violence that followed the war played important roles in the rise of the militant New Negro and Black Nationalist movements of the late 1910s and early 1920s. Black collegians, especially, were drawn to the militant rhetoric of post-war black politics, which emphasized self-determination and race pride.⁴²⁶ Other factors too, contributed to the militancy of the period, including the movement of black Americans from rural to urban areas in the South and North, as well as international revolutionary movements, the rise of the radical black press, and the increasing influence of militant political organizations.⁴²⁷

The changing social and cultural mores of the 1920s also transformed the New Negro generation of college students. This was the Jazz Age, the era of the New Negro and the New Woman, and mass changes in both youth and consumer cultures. Black collegians were an integral part of these political and cultural changes, both as consumers and producers of the new cultural aesthetics and attitudes about race and gender politics. And the strategies of resistance they devised to remove the restrictive rules and regulations that governed collegiate life reflected the era's core ideals of individualism, autonomy, and self-expression.

⁴²⁶ The origins of the term date back to the post-Reconstruction era and over the course of the early twentieth century the term New Negro took on different meanings. The "New Negro" of the 1920s has generated a large body of scholarship—who was a part of the movement and when, and their beliefs was largely dependent on location, age, and occupation. For the purposes of my dissertation I am mainly interested in the iteration of the New Negro movement on black college campuses.

⁴²⁷ Chad L. Williams, "Vanguards of The New Negro: African American Veterans and Post-World War I Racial Militancy," *Journal of African American History*, 92 3 (Summer 2007): 347-370. Perhaps one of the most important factors in the radicalization of the student population was that a number of students had served in the war and had experienced first-hand the limits of American democracy. As Williams explains, it is important for scholars to move beyond the black veteran as a rhetorical or metaphorical symbol of New Negro militancy, and focus on "how the activism and racial militancy of black veterans fundamentally shaped the historical development and ideological diversity of the New Negro movement." Through their service, Williams explains, veterans had a "heightened racial, political, gender and diasporic consciousness, which translated into a commitment to challenge the strictures of racial inequality during the postwar period."

This chapter focuses on the surge of student activism in the years immediately following the First World War. Between 1919 and 1925, black collegians collectively organized around a core set of ideals that would come to define the New Negro Student Movement. Central to this movement was the rejection of white racism and paternalism in black higher education, academic freedom, the inclusion of pro-black curricular reforms, the modernization of campus policies and regulations, the inclusion of students in campus governance, and greater student involvement in the administration of student affairs.

“Getting the Most out of Education”

By the time the February 1919 issue of the *Fisk News* reached its readers, university officials had made substantial changes to the proposed plan for compulsory supervised study. Though he never publicly discussed his reasoning, the president’s decision to amend the course in supervised study was likely motivated by the students’ protest over the original plan. McKenzie tasked Ambrose Caliver, who was in charge of the course and work of supervised study at Fisk, to explain to the readers of the *News* the methods and aims of the supervised study “movement.” Compared to the president’s report a month earlier, Caliver’s article was noticeably less moralistic and authoritarian in its tone. Caliver explained to the readers that, “the aim of supervised study as it is being conducted at Fisk is to apply the principles of psychology and efficiency to education.” He further emphasized that while the new curriculum demanded more of the student body, supervised study also required “more time and effort on the part of the teacher.” Lastly, Caliver described the new program to readers as “an attempt to get the

maximum result, on the part of the teacher and student, with the least expenditure of time and energy; and to develop the student's power by teaching him the scientific methods of doing intellectual work."⁴²⁸

Supervised study was no longer "compulsory." Instead, the university offered it as a course for credit. Those students who opted to register for the course and completed satisfactory work received credit toward their graduation. Caliver also clarified that the course would consist of "notes on lectures, supplementary readings, essays and an intensive study of the application of principles and methods of study to two subjects [sic]."⁴²⁹ The other significant change was that the course was now open to women who wished to voluntarily enroll. Caliver explained that since the university had made supervised study an elective course, a large "number of the young ladies of the college department" had asked that the course be open to them too.

While McKenzie was willing to make concessions regarding the administration of supervised study, he refused to reverse his decision regarding the disciplinary actions taken against Myles Paige, Aaron Payne, Oliver Ross, and Peter Richardson. After the students rebuked McKenzie's initial offer to recant their statements, the outraged administrator called an emergency meeting of the Prudential Committee—the university's disciplinary body—and proposed a more severe penalty. In the meeting, McKenzie presented his case against the four college men and requested that the

⁴²⁸ Ambrose Caliver, "Getting the Most Out of Education. Supervised Study at Fisk," *Fisk University News*, Vol. IX No.6, February 1919, 7.

⁴²⁹ Caliver offered readers a detailed description of how supervised study hours were conducted explaining: "There is a general study hour kept five evenings a week. Twice a week a lecture is given on general principles and methods of study and their application to certain subjects. Each evening certain teachers from the different groups take their pupils in the class rooms [sic] to give them help in understanding the methods of approaching their lessons and to actually supervise their study of a lesson or group of lessons. Caliver, "Getting the Most Out of Education," *Fisk University News*, 8-9.

Committee expel the students' permanently from the university with the added sentence of a dishonorable discharge.

Fisk University's most severe form of punishment, a dishonorable discharge carried both the penalty of expulsion and entitled University officials to withhold the offending students' transcripts. Without their official records, the students would have difficulty gaining admittance to another collegiate institution. After reviewing the allegations against the collegians, the members of the Prudential Committee voted to uphold the president's recommendations. The four students had just twenty-four hours to collect their belongings and leave the campus.

In the days following their dishonorable discharge, Paige, Payne, Ross and Richardson mounted a vigorous attack on the disciplinary action taken against them. In his departing letter to the president, with whom he had developed a good rapport while at Fisk, Myles Paige expressed his regret at the circumstances surrounding his departure. "I am sorry that your idea of ways (sic) in which I might attain greater efficiency was contrary to mine and my past experience," Paige wrote, but he could not abandon his "sincere conviction" that "the common study hall for college men was not conducive to study and efficiency in the class-room."⁴³⁰ As evidenced in Paige's letter, a critical part of the students' strategy was establishing the legitimacy of their protest. In a written statement to McKenzie, the four presented the case for their innocence by refuting the claim that they had intentionally "refused to obey any rules [currently] in effect." The students also pointed out that because the new policy had not been in effect at the time they submitted their petition, the president had wrongfully charged them

⁴³⁰ Myles Paige to President Fisk University, 4 January 1919, Fisk University Franklin Library Special Collections-Archives, F.A. McKenzie Collection, Box 13, Folder 19. The President also received similarly- worded letters from Payne, Ross, and Richardson.

with failing to comply with a university regulation as the president had suggested.⁴³¹

Furthermore, the students argued, merely signing the petition did not constitute a violation of any of Fisk's established regulations. While they had hoped to reach a resolution with the president that would allow them to remain at Fisk, the students were unwilling to compromise their convictions by admitting to any wrongdoing.

With the start of the spring semester quickly approaching, the four expelled students decided to head north to Washington, D.C., where they planned to enroll at Howard University. Among the nation's prominent black colleges, Howard was considered by students to be the most liberal and progressive when it came to student affairs.⁴³² Even though they could not supply Howard with their official transcripts, Paige, Payne, Richardson, and Ross hoped that Howard's administrators would find their situation compelling and permit them entrance into the university. The students also trusted that by disclosing the circumstances of their dismissal from Fisk, they would gain allies among the Howard faculty and administration, who might also be able to help them acquire their transcripts. As they expected, the Howard officials were sympathetic to the students' unusual situation, and although University policy prohibited them from officially registering at Howard, the four students were allowed to attend classes while they waited for their transcripts.

⁴³¹ Myles Paige to President Fisk University, 4 January 1919, Fisk University Franklin Library Special Collections-Archives, F.A. McKenzie Collection, Box 13, Folder 19.

⁴³² A comparison between the college catalogues reveals that Fisk University's rules for students were much more restrictive than Howard University's rules.

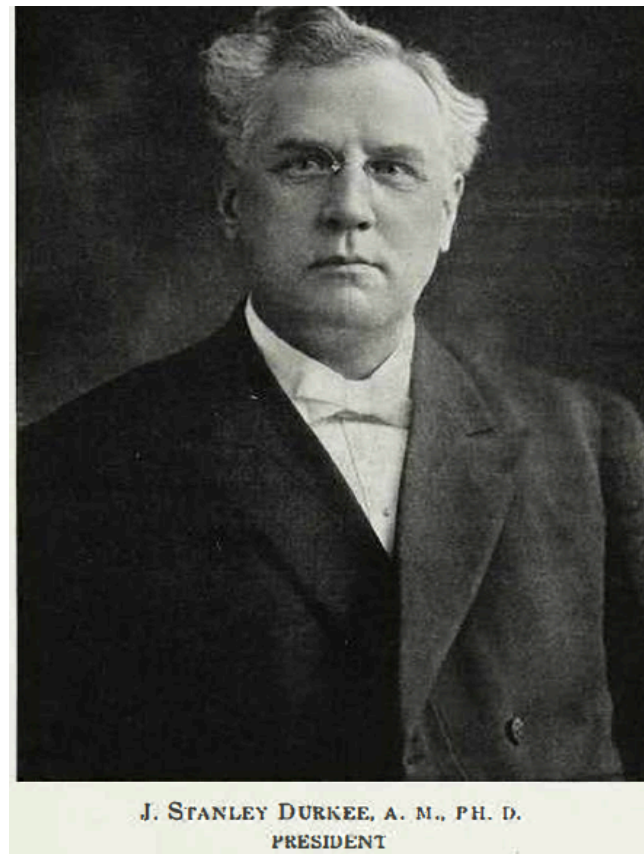


Figure 15. Howard University—President, J. Stanley Durkee, 1919.

After several unsuccessful attempts to obtain the records themselves, the students enlisted the aid of Howard University president, James Stanley Durkee.⁴³³ Confused by his colleague's refusal to release the students' transcripts, Durkee entreated McKenzie to send the four students' records so they could register in time for the start of the spring semester.⁴³⁴ After his initial correspondence failed to produce

⁴³³ Miller, who served as Howard's Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, was similarly unable to procure the students' records. 6 January, Myles Paige Letter.; 5 February, Myles Paige Letter.

⁴³⁴ In his letter, Durkee noted that the students confided that they had been dismissed because "they did not care to accept the regulations of Fisk University." Stanley Durkee to McKenzie, 25 January 1919, James Stanley Durkee Papers, Box 32-1, Folder 22, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University.

results, Durkee again wrote to McKenzie.⁴³⁵ Given the nature of their offense, Durkee noted that it seemed a “pity to sacrifice” the education of the four young men. “Surely, as nothing immoral or nothing of the breaking of the vital laws of the University has been done,” Durkee wrote, “we can make arrangements so these boys can go on with their work here.”⁴³⁶

Despite the longstanding history of cooperation between the two institutions, the administrators were unable to reach an agreement regarding the terms of the four students’ release from their suspension at Fisk. Relations between McKenzie and Durkee deteriorated rapidly, with the former administrator becoming increasingly hostile towards his colleague. McKenzie was especially upset with the Howard president for seriously interfering “with the prompt settlement of a case of discipline at Fisk University” and for allowing the students to “make their headquarters at Howard University and to attend your classes.”⁴³⁷ Durkee further stood accused of the “deliberate violation of the principles of comity between institutions” and for allegedly providing the “moral sympathy of Howard University” in the lawsuit the students were bringing against Fisk University. For these offenses, McKenzie declared that Durkee was a serious “threat against Fisk University.”⁴³⁸

⁴³⁵ Durkee’s letter indicates that in his reply, Fayette McKenzie failed to provide the necessary information to enable the four men to enter Howard. Durkee to McKenzie, 5 February 1919, Durkee Papers, Box 32-1, Folder 22, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University.

⁴³⁶ Stanley Durkee to McKenzie, 5 February 1919, Durkee Papers, Box 32-1, Folder 22, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University.

⁴³⁷ Durkee to McKenzie, 10 April 1919, Durkee Papers, Box 32-1, Folder 22, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University.

⁴³⁸ McKenzie to Durkee, 14 April 1919, Durkee Papers, Box 12, Folder 22, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University.



Figure 16. Fisk University—President, Fayette Avery McKenzie (Left) and Fisk University alumnus, and trustee, Dr. George W. Moore (Right).

Durkee meanwhile was unaware that the four students, led by Oliver Ross, were in the process of initiating a lawsuit against Fisk University and its president. A strategic move, the students hoped the threat of a lawsuit would compel the president to release them from their suspensions. Repeated attempts by the students to make amends with their former president failed to produce positive results, and although the students had attended classes all semester, without their transcripts they were in danger of losing credit for their work.⁴³⁹ More importantly, Howard University had stipulated that the students had to resolve the matter with Fisk by the middle of April 1919, or they would

⁴³⁹ At the suggestion of President Durkee, each student had been told to write McKenzie to “fully explain their spirit to him and make him understand that they were sorry for any wrong committed, ask his complete forgiveness, and restoration as a student.” Durkee to McKenzie, 10 April 1919, Durkee Papers, Box 13, Folder 22, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University.

have to leave the school.⁴⁴⁰ When the students were still unable to register by the middle of April, Myles Paige, Aaron Payne, Peter Richardson and Oliver Ross, with the assistance of Rev. G.M. McClellan, a graduate of Fisk University and personal friend to the Ross and Payne families, proceeded with their plans to challenge their dismissal in the courts.⁴⁴¹

McKenzie knew the students had a compelling case. And even if the lawsuit ultimately failed (which he believed it would), the president feared the publicity from such legal action would “seriously damage the reputation” of Fisk.⁴⁴² In order to mitigate any further damage to Fisk University, McKenzie agreed to meet on April 19 with Oliver Ross, who had journeyed to Nashville to “settle with the University.” Immediately following his meeting with Oliver Ross, McKenzie sent a note to Myles Paige, Aaron Payne, and Peter Richardson who had stayed behind in Washington, D.C. In exchange for a written apology and the immediate withdrawal of their lawsuit against the University, McKenzie informed the students he would recommend full clemency to the Prudential Committee and end their suspension.⁴⁴³

⁴⁴⁰ While the students had attended classes all semester, without their transcripts they could not obtain credit for their work. More importantly, the students had been given a deadline of the middle of April to resolve the matter with Fisk, or they would no longer be allowed to remain at Howard.

⁴⁴¹ McKenzie informed Durkee that on April 3, he had received a letter from G.M. McClellan stating that he “planned to take the matter into the courts.” Moreover, McClellan allegedly stated that he had first hand knowledge from Howard Officials that the president and other faculty were on the side of the four boys and were said to “entertain little respect for the Fisk attitude.” McKenzie to Durkee, 14 April 1919, Durkee Papers, Box 32-1, Folder 22, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University.

⁴⁴² McKenzie to Durkee “Of course you know as well as I that such a suit will utterly fail, but that its publicity will seriously damage the reputation of the institution which seems to line up with the prosecution.” Durkee Papers, Box 32-1, Folder 22, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University.

⁴⁴³ McKenzie sent two letters on April 19, one to Mrs. Jennie A. Ross, the mother of Oliver Ross and to Peter Richardson, Myles Paige, and Aaron Payne. In his letter to Mrs. Ross, McKenzie explained “in spite of the injuries he has done,” her son could secure “my quick recommendation for the ending of his suspension,” if he agreed to sign the following statement. “I did wrong in my defiance to the University when I refused to abide by the rules of the University. I did wrong when I signed the paper which (sic) was disrespectful and insulting to the President. I regret most deeply that I did these things and heartily apologize for them. I realize that the University is perfectly justified in requiring these statements from

On April 29, 1919, ten days after meeting with Oliver Ross, Fayette McKenzie ended the four-month suspension of Myles Paige, Aaron Payne, Peter Richardson, and released their official transcripts to Howard University.⁴⁴⁴ Whether the four young men agreed to apologize to McKenzie is unclear. It is unlikely though, that after four months of having protested their innocence, the students would suddenly disavow the actions for which they had been willing to risk the future of their academic careers. More likely, it was McKenzie who had finally relented under the continued threat of the students' lawsuit.⁴⁴⁵ Aaron Payne, Myles Page, Peter Richardson, and Oliver Ross were able to continue their studies at Howard. Myles Paige graduated in 1920, and while at Howard he was elected as Vice President of the Class of 1920, was a member of the Dramatics Club, played Varsity Football, and joined the university's NAACP branch. Aaron Payne made a name for himself on Howard's football team, and Oliver Ross served as President of the Kentucky Club—for Howard students from the state of Kentucky

Much more than a dispute over academic policy, the students' rejection of supervised study spoke to a larger critique of the missionary educational philosophy and the strict disciplinarian regime that governed black collegiate culture and black higher

me. I further state that I am not and will not be a party to any suit against the University in this matter." 19 April 1919, Durkee Papers, Box 13, Folder 22, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University.

⁴⁴⁴ The official letter to Durkee was sent from Mrs. M.L. Crosthwaith, the registrar at Fisk, who informed the Howard president that she had been "requested to prepare the transcripts of the work of Messieurs Aaron Payne, Peter L. Richardson, and Oliver Ross." Crosthwaith further noted that because he had not completed a full semester of work at Fisk, Aaron Payne was not entitled to receive credits from the University. Instead, Payne's credits could be obtained from his former high school. Also, Myles Paige is missing from this correspondence. However, the Howard University student yearbook of 1919 shows him having been registered. Whether or not his name was accidentally from this correspondence is unknown. Mrs. M.L. Crosthwaith to Dr. J. Stanley Durkee, 29 April 1919, Durkee Papers, Box 13, Folder 22, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University.

⁴⁴⁵ What is certain though, is that despite receiving a full pardon from Fisk University, all four students chose to remain in Washington, D.C. and continue their studies at Howard. The Howard University Catalogue reveals that the four students were registered for the 1919-1920 academic year, and that all four students matriculated from Howard University.

education. Myles Paige, Aaron Payne, Peter Richardson and Oliver Ross had organized a rebellion against Fisk University, its president and policies, and won. Further, the students' protest of supervised study foreshadowed an era of student protest and rebellion that would re-shape black higher education in the 1920s.

New Blood: Campus Politics and Protest at Howard University, 1919-1924

J. Stanley Durkee had been the president at Howard University for less than a year when the recently expelled Paige, Payne, Richardson, and Ross came to him seeking entrance to the university. A Canadian, born in Carleton, Nova Scotia, Durkee received his A.B. and Master's Degree from Bates College and a PhD from Boston University. Before being elected as President at Howard on July 1, 1918, Durkee was a Baptist preacher in Boston from 1901 to 1909 and then as worked as a minister in the South Congregational Church in Brockton, Massachusetts between 1909 and 1918. Durkee's credentials and reputation as a minister were impressive. But he was an odd selection to lead Howard, given he had no previous experience as an educator, let alone the president of one of the nation's leading black institutions of higher education.

Despite his lack of experience, Durkee displayed "dynamic leadership" during his first year, which endeared him to the Howard University community. The new president ushered in a number of reforms and long-standing proposals that his predecessors had previously opposed. For example, Durkee helped to convince the Board of Trustees to grant paid sabbatical leaves for professors. The board also voted to discontinue the high school courses offered by the Howard Academy at the end of the 1919 academic year to focus solely on collegiate level courses. The new president also

authorized the position of Dean of Women, which had first been proposed by the women students of the College of Arts and Sciences six years earlier.⁴⁴⁶ The new president also allowed the students to hold a meeting to support the NAACP's crusade against lynching on April 27, 1919, in lieu of the regular weekly Vesper Services.



Figure 17. Howard University—Myles Paige, 1920 (Top Left), Aaron Payne, 1921 (Top Right), and Oliver Ross, 1924 (Bottom Left).

Among the most critical appointments of Durkee's stewardship of Howard was Carter G. Woodson, founder of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History

⁴⁴⁶ The university also created the Dean of Men position at this time.

(ASNLH), in 1915 who joined the university's faculty as professor of history, the head of the History Department, and the Dean of the College of Liberal Arts in the fall of 1919.⁴⁴⁷ Woodson's appointment occurred alongside the hiring of several new black faculty, including Emmett J. Scott in the newly created position of Secretary-Treasurer and Dr. A.L. Jackson as the head of the new Social Service Department. The new hires and administrative changes implemented at Howard were met with widespread approval from both educators and students alike.⁴⁴⁸

Whatever good will Durkee cultivated during his first year, his inexperience and latent prejudices quickly drew the ire of some of Howard's most prominent faculty. According to Woodson, the amicable relationship he initially had with Durkee began to deteriorate after the Dean refused to enforce a regulation that would require mandatory chapel attendance of the faculty. In the following letter to Dr. Jesse E. Moorland dated March 10, 1920, Woodson notified his colleague, Howard University Trustee, and ASNLH co-founder of the untenable situation that was developing between Durkee and himself. "The situation here is such that I shall have to resign very soon, wrote Woodson:

I seriously doubt that I shall be able to remain at Howard University until the end of the year. Dr. Durkee is a fanatic on religion and wants me to take a part in checking up on teachers' attendance at chapel in spite of the fact that he himself says that the attendance is not compulsory and neither the Faculty nor the Board of Trustees have made such a rule. I have frankly told him in my usual style that I shall take no part in this extra legal work of serving him as a spy. What his

⁴⁴⁷ As the founder of ASNLH and the *Journal of Negro History*, Woodson was dedicated to the study of the global black experience, promoting and recording the accomplishments of black people, and countering racist scholarship. Zachery Williams, *In Search of the Talented Tenth: Howard University Public Intellectuals and the Dilemmas of Race, 1926-1970* (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 2010), 15.

⁴⁴⁸ "A New Day at Howard," *The Washington Post (1877-1922)*, August 17, 1919, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, *The Washington Post*, E14.

next step will be I do not know. I do know, however, that I will write out my resignation first before I take any part in this medieval procedure.⁴⁴⁹

Because of Woodson's revered status as the founder of ASNLH among Black Washingtonians and the heightened racial tensions that lingered from the previous summer's race riot, Howard officials feared the repercussions if the new Dean was suddenly dismissed.⁴⁵⁰ Despite his misgivings, Woodson agreed to refrain from tendering his resignation until Moorland could investigate the matter.

The problems between Woodson and Durkee escalated, though as the semester progressed. Woodson's attempts to make amends were routinely ignored by the president.⁴⁵¹ In addition to their initial dispute regarding the monitoring of faculty attendance at chapel, Woodson provided Moorland with documented evidence that the president's administrative methods were "ruining Howard University." According to Woodson, Durkee ignored the "administrative machinery already established, and administers the affairs of the University through special committees rather than through the Deans as provided by the Board of Trustees."⁴⁵² Further, Woodson noted that Durkee's inexperience in higher education made him a liability to Howard's

⁴⁴⁹ C.G. Woodson to Dr. J.E. Moorland, March 10, 1920, Jesse E. Moorland Papers, Box 34, Folder 695 Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University.

⁴⁵⁰ While Woodson does not specifically mention the Washington race riot by name, the statement that it "would not sit well in the stomach of the Negro people to have me leave Howard in a storm" alludes to the residual tensions and heightened anxieties from the summer's violence. Woodson to Moorland, May 11, 1920, Jesse E. Moorland Papers, Box 34, Folder, 695. Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University. During the week-long riot, members of the Howard ROTC played an important role providing arms and ammunition for black citizens to arm and defend themselves against the white mobs. See Chad L. Williams, David F. Krugler, *1919, The Year of Racial Violence*, (Cambridge University Press, 2014).

⁴⁵¹ C.G. Woodson to Dr. J.E. Moorland, May 11, 1920, Jesse E. Moorland Papers, Box 34, Folder 695. Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University. "I do not see how I can remain for I must maintain my self respect and be a man in whatever situation I may be placed. I have done the manly part of meeting him half way but he has refused to play the part of a Christian. He has acted the part of a dogmatic and domineering czar interested only in his personal machine."

⁴⁵² Woodson to Moorland, May 11, 1920, Jesse E. Moorland Papers, Box 34, Folder 695. Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University.

advancement, stating that the president “has to take advice from almost everybody, and not knowing anything about education, he acts on conflicting advice which keeps him in a muddle and the school in an uproar.”⁴⁵³

Still more concerning to Woodson was the future of black higher education when respected race leaders like Jesse E. Moorland appointed men like J. Stanley Durkee to lead the institutions. Woodson asked Moorland how he could be “so unwise as to impose upon Howard University such a slave driver to masquerade as an educator.” “The fact is,” Woodson, continued, “Durkee has treated several other teachers at Howard University much worse than he has treated me.” If black faculty could not remain at institutions like Howard without losing their self-respect, “what hope is there for the Negro youth,” Woodson posited to Moorland. “Will you permit such inefficient white leadership to bludgeon well educated Negro instructors among them into submission.” Woodson continued to press his colleague, “do you stand for the Negro race or for the whites?” “This is the question” Woodson told Moorland, “which you as well as every other Negro in a position of leadership must now answer.” “Are you with the whites who are exploiting the Negroes, or with those Negroes who still cry for deliverance from the oppressor?”⁴⁵⁴

Woodson was also critical of the leadership structure at Howard University. For black colleges and universities to progress, Woodson argued, they had to abandon the “broken-down theory” that black colleges and universities must employ “the best of the

⁴⁵³ C.G. Woodson to Dr. J.E. Moorland, May 15, 1920, Jesse E. Moorland Papers, Box 34, Folder 695. Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University.

⁴⁵⁴ C.G. Woodson to Dr. J.E. Moorland, May 15, 1920, Jesse E. Moorland Papers, Box 34, Folder 695. Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University.

two races.”⁴⁵⁵ Moreover, Woodson argued that it was detrimental to black institutions to continue to employ white clerics like Durkee, in leadership positions, when “these positions can be admirably filled by scientifically trained Negroes.” To that end, Woodson informed Moorland “the time has come for all Negro schools to be turned over to Negroes.”⁴⁵⁶

Woodson was certainly not the first to question the legitimacy and authority of Howard’s white leadership structure. Since the early years of the twentieth century, black educators had been seeking greater control over black colleges and universities, with minimal success—Morehouse College, which appointed black educator John Hope as president in 1906, was the only college with an African American leader.⁴⁵⁷ The debate over the governance of black institutions, would continue in earnest after the First World War, as more and more race leaders publicly called for an end to compromise, accommodation, and white governance of black institutions.⁴⁵⁸ Moreover, the reform of black higher education was an imperative of both the cultural and political

⁴⁵⁵ Woodson noted that the “broken-down theory” was based on a reverence for the teachers who came south immediately after the Civil War. These educators, then, like the white educators appointed to black colleges now, were not among the most talented. “Immediately after the Civil War teachers of the missionary spirit went South to elevate the Negroes and their work was noble and glorious. These teachers, however, were not the best of the white race but having the task of merely laying a foundation most of them did well. This same group of teachers, fall now far below the standard for the reason that they cannot carry the Negroes forward into the broader realms of reconstructed education, whatever their ambition may be; for they are the teachers of yesterday unknown to the work of scientifically trained instructors in charge of white schools.”

⁴⁵⁶ C.G. Woodson to Dr. J.E. Moorland May 22, 1920, Jesse E. Moorland Papers, Box 34, Folder 695. Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University.

⁴⁵⁷ 1906 forced resignation of John Gordon-black Washington and Howard faculty. With the recent appointment of John Hope at Morehouse College, it seemed reasonable that Howard might also hire a black president to replace Gordon. For a time it seemed possible, but the board was ultimately unable to reach a consensus on a single black candidate and thus Wilbur Thirkield was hired. In 1912 when Thirkield gave notice of his resignation, the Triumvirate—Deans Miller, Cook, and Lewis each campaigned for the position. Again no consensus could be reached, and Stephen Newman was appointed as Howard’s 10th president. As a condition of his presidency however, Newman agreed to defer to the authority of the Triumvirate, who for all intents and purposes ran the university. See Williams’ *In Search of the Talented Tenth* (University of Missouri Press, 2010).

⁴⁵⁸ Raymond Wolters, *The New Negro on Campus: Black College Rebellions of the 1920s* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975), 17.

arms of the New Negro movement, which saw higher education as central to achieving economic, social, cultural, and political equality.

There were other external and mitigating factors prompting the push for greater black participation in the administration of black collegiate institutions. Chief among them was the secularization of the college curriculum at predominantly white colleges and universities. Over the course of the first two decades of the twentieth-century white colleges and universities had come to stress the importance of secular and scientific scholarship over the nineteenth century curricula's emphasis on piety and religion. These curricular reforms were paired with changes to the schools' administrative structure, as white colleges gradually stopped appointing clerical leaders in favor of administrators with strong academic backgrounds.

Concerned that the religious-based education that white missionary educators promoted limited the advancement of the race, black educators argued that it was time too, for black collegiate institutions to appoint secular administrators.⁴⁵⁹ Alain Locke, Kelly Miller, and Carter G. Woodson were among Howard's most vocal advocates for education reform. In addition to being critical of Durkee's stifling leadership, they noted that the current college curriculum was not conducive to training "able black leadership." Locke and Woodson were particularly concerned that Howard's current course offerings and textbooks reinforced the idea of the inherent inferiority of black Americans. Central to New Negro education reforms was to institutionalize courses that cultivated race pride and the achievements of black Americans. Despite widespread support among the Howard faculty, the predominantly white board of trustees and

⁴⁵⁹ Wolters, *The New Negro on Campus*, 82-83.

administration failed to see the legitimacy of such studies.⁴⁶⁰ And repeated attempts by Howard faculty to organize such courses in “Negro history,” the African past, and interracial relations were consistently rejected by the university’s board of trustees creating further tensions between the predominantly black faculty and majority white board of trustees.⁴⁶¹ Woodson’s strong rhetoric and critique of Howard University’s white leadership fit squarely within the emergent New Negro education reform movement, and won him support amongst his colleagues and the student body.⁴⁶² But Woodson’s outspoken opposition to Durkee and other white administrators also resulted in his departure from Howard in June 1920.

As the private feud between Howard’s bureaucracy and Carter G. Woodson reached a boiling point during the spring of 1920, the university’s student body mounted its own public challenges against the school’s leadership structure. Taking the lead in these initiatives was Howard’s Student Council, an elected body comprised of men and women of collegiate rank who served as the official representatives of the Howard student body. Singular among the prominent black colleges and universities,

⁴⁶⁰ Williams, *In Search of Talented Tenth*, 20-22.

⁴⁶¹ Wolters notes that the Howard Board of Trustees consistently rejected the efforts of Kelly Miller, Carter G. Woodson and Alain Locke to make changes to the college curriculum. Kelly Miller first proposed that Howard University subsidize publications of the American Negro Academy in 1901, which the board refused to support. Again in 1915-1916, Alain Locke’s proposal to teach a course on interracial relations was denied as well as the faculty’s submission for a course on “Negro Problems.” Similarly, Woodson’s appeal to offer a course on Negro History was rejected by the Board in 1919. It was not until 1920 that a course in Negro History was finally offered at Howard, and later still in 1922, with the appointment of historian William Leo Hansberry that the university offered courses in the African Past. Wolters, *The New Negro on Campus*, 84-86.

⁴⁶² A copy of Woodson’s original resignation letter dated May 3, 1920 caused a tremendous scene at Howard: “Because your ideas and methods differ widely from those of reputable educators and you do not distinguish between personal service and educational administration, it will be necessary for me to sever my connections with Howard University as Professor of American History and Dean of the School of Liberal Arts. I, therefore, offer you my resignation to take effect July, 1920.” “Alumnus Says,” *Baltimore Afro-American*, June 20, 1925, 2.

Howard's Student Council provides unique insight into the early years of the New Negro Student Movement's efforts at educational and institutional reform.⁴⁶³

In the early 1920s, Howard University's Student Council was the major force in agitating for changes in collegiate life on campus. During these years, the student government organized boycotts and campus-wide strikes, capitalized on the growing power of the black press to bring attention to student grievances, and institutionalized major reforms to the school's rules and regulations and achieved greater student autonomy and participation in the governance of the University.⁴⁶⁴

The first of the Howard student strikes occurred on Monday March 8, 1920. A student representative informed the *Washington Post* informing the newspaper that the city's first student strike was in progress. The *Post* reported that approximately 300 college men had walked out of the dining hall earlier in the day, protesting a proposal to raise the price of board from \$18.50 to \$22.50 per month. When contacted for a statement, President Durkee insisted that there was no trouble at the school, only that there had been a misunderstanding. Several members of the student body, he explained, were reprimanded for not taking their meals on campus—a requirement for all boarding students. The students insisted, however, that the University suspended several of their peers for boycotting the dining halls. Howard students then threatened to organize a general walkout unless the school reinstated those students. With no further news of an

⁴⁶³ Howard's Student Council was unique among its peers. Fisk president, Fayette McKenzie banned student government, while at Spelman, Lucy Hale Tapley argued there was no need for a separate or elected student government, as every student upon entering Spelman automatically became a member of the collegiate community, with the duty to uphold and enforce the principles of the institution.

⁴⁶⁴ Raymond Wolters notes that the Student Council was populated by "embryonic politicians" who campaigned for the much coveted positions in student government. Wolters, *The New Negro on Campus*, 71.

impending general student strike, Howard officials presumably were able to reach a compromise with the boarding students to avoid any further conflict.⁴⁶⁵

The next major confrontation between the Student Council and University administration occurred during the spring of 1921, when the administration imposed a new rule to enforce compulsory chapel attendance. In many ways, the rules and regulations that guided campus life (student housing, dress codes, extra-curricular activities and organizations, mandatory study hours, and compulsory chapel attendance) at Howard were considerably lenient compared to other prominent black colleges and universities. However, President Durkee, an enthusiastic minister, believed that mandatory and compulsory chapel attendance was essential to a collegiate education.

While mandatory chapel attendance had always been listed among the university's rules and regulations, prior to Durkee's arrival the chapel requirement had gone largely unenforced. Because of the difficulties enforcing attendance for Bible study, Sunday morning classes, and Sunday afternoon vespers, faculty members relied on the honor system. Near the end of the 1920 fall quarter, the president convinced the faculty to amend the regulation and enforce students' attendance at all chapel exercises. The new rule as written, stipulated that any student who missed more than eight chapel engagements in a quarter would be penalized by one third of a unit—there were approximately two hundred and forty chapel exercises each quarter. The faculty reluctantly agreed to approve the new regulation, but warned Durkee that there would likely be backlash from the students.

The student body was furious over mandated chapel exercises. The Student Council immediately submitted a petition to the faculty demanding that the new rule be

⁴⁶⁵ *Washington Post*, March 8, 1920.

revoked. While the students waited for faculty to come to a decision, the student government called a mass meeting to update their peers on the status of the petition. According to Kelly Miller, the president of the Student Council received permission to hold an assembly after one of the devotional exercises. Unaware that the mass-meeting had been called, President Durkee refused to allow the students to convene, informing the Council President that, “under the circumstances the meeting could not be held.” Instead of leaving after the chapel exercises had ended though, the Council President made his way to the podium and the students remained in their seats as protest; they continued with the mass meeting as planned. When Durkee again declared that there was to be no meeting, the Council President informed his audience that any who desired “to leave under the President’s demand might do so at once.” Only a few students left the chapel, and the President of the Student Council proceeded with the meeting with no further objections from Durkee.⁴⁶⁶

Shortly after the meeting ended, Durkee charged the president of the Student Council with “insubordination and defiance of authority.” As news of the Council president’s charges spread on campus, the remaining officers of the Student Council issued a formal statement to the president’s office, declaring that the Council President had not acted “in his personal capacity” but was “merely carrying out the will of that organization of whom he was the chosen instrument.” Moreover, the Student Council argued that if there had been any insubordination it had been on “the part of the whole student body and not on the part of the Presiding officer, who was merely an instrument of their will.” Further, the Council argued that since the Presiding officer had secured

⁴⁶⁶ Kelly Miller to Moorland, 2 May 1921, 2. Jesse Edward Moorland Papers, Box 126-32, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University. Miller notes that there anywhere between three and twenty-five students left the chapel.

permission to hold the mass meeting, he would not issue any formal apology as requested by President Durkee.

Six weeks after the initial confrontation between Durkee and the Student Council, both sides failed to come to a satisfactory resolution. To break the stalemate, Durkee convened a meeting of the Academic Council on April 30 and asked that an immediate action be taken against the Council president. During the meeting of the Academic Council, the Dean of Men who had been following the situation closely informed the president that if he moved to dismiss the President of the Student Council over this particular matter it would most certainly lead to a school-wide rebellion and the possible withdrawal of three or four hundred students.⁴⁶⁷ Besides the inevitable disruption to campus life a strike would cause, Kelly Miller feared that a student walkout would not only damage Howard's reputation, but would "set back the higher education of the Negro for at least a generation." According to Miller, the "type of work which Howard University sets up to do" received very little support from the public, and "any outbreak at present would be given nationwide publicity" would only strengthen the conviction that vocational training was a more suitable for black Americans.⁴⁶⁸

With the internal situation at Howard becoming more acute, Kelly Miller reached out to board member Jesse E. Moorland. Miller believed Moorland's diplomacy and respected status among the students would bring an end to the dispute. Moorland agreed with Miller that "under no circumstances" could the faculty allow the "students

⁴⁶⁷ Miller to Moorland, 2 May 1921, 2. Jesse Edward Moorland Papers, Box 126-32, Folder 674. Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University.

⁴⁶⁸ Miller to Moorland, 2 May 1921. Jesse Edward Moorland Papers, Box 126-32, Folder 674. Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University.

[to] make an outbreak at this time.” At the same time Moorland was “very glad” to see that “our young people have life and feeling and purpose,” and he believed it was important that the spirit exhibited by the students “not be crushed.” He believed though that the students’ must be guided in the struggle “for better things,” so as not to “shut the doors in the faces of those who are to come after them.”⁴⁶⁹ By the end of May the Student Council and Academic Council had reached a satisfactory agreement without involving any outside parties. The Academic Council reversed the rule requiring mandatory chapel. It also accepted the Student Council’s proposal to clear the Council President of all charges and instead held the entire student responsible for “flouting the authority of the president.”⁴⁷⁰

The reversal of the chapel attendance rule was a major victory for the Student Council. The threat of a mass student strike had proven effective with the university administration that feared the negative publicity of a student walkout. Upon learning that the administration was determined to prevent a campus strike, the Howard student body saw an opportunity to demand further changes to campus life. The students wasted no time in compiling their grievances and submitted a petition to the President’s office on May 24, 1921, stating: “We, the students of Howard University, after having given careful consideration to the general conditions of student life of the University, feel that great difficulties must result if the students are not made to feel more satisfied.”⁴⁷¹

⁴⁶⁹ Moorland to Miller, 13 May 1921. Jesse Edward Moorland Papers, Box 126-32, Folder 674. Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University.

⁴⁷⁰ Miller to Moorland, 26 May 1921. Jesse Edward Moorland Papers, Box 126-32, Folder 674. Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University.

⁴⁷¹ Student Council to Miller, 24 May 1921. Jesse Edward Moorland Papers, Box 126-32, Folder 674. Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University.

The first issue on the students' list was the issue of self-government. The students' reminded the president that in "former years the students of Howard University have been given an opportunity to develop along practical lines by actual participation in the management of some things that intimately touch student life," the current administration however "has deprived the students of such an opportunity, except in the case of partial self-government." To that end, the students requested that the University "tie student self-government an absolute trial for a reasonable length of time, to be continued if successful, and to return to the present system of partial self-government, if unsuccessful."

Student supervision of athletics was the next item to be addressed. The students requested that a joint committee comprised of both students and faculty oversee athletics, that the Secretary-treasurer be required to provide a public itemized financial report for athletic funds, and that such funds be only spent to support the athletic departments for the purchase of proper equipment. On this point, the students were especially adamant. "Unless such a policy is pursued," the petition read, "the present dissatisfaction on the part of the students is sure to remain."

The students also demanded that the university recognize students' voices on campus. They wanted the university to authorize a student publication that would be controlled by a joint committee made up of members of the student body and student government. Students also insisted that the university recognize the Student Council as the official medium between the administration and the student body in all matters that

affect student life, and that the Student Council be permitted to call a mass meeting “the necessity arises.”⁴⁷²

Within three years, the administration met all of the students’ terms.⁴⁷³ But student activism did not subside. Instead, in early 1924, the Howard Student Council pressed for even more radical changes to student self-government. After the students threatened to strike unless the Student Council received co-authority in matters of student discipline, President Durkee authorized the Council’s request to revise its Charter.⁴⁷⁴ “Freedom! Power!! Responsibility!!!,” was the headline on the front page of the recently established student newspaper, the *Hill Top*, announcing the amended Constitution of the Student Council.⁴⁷⁵ The proposed changes to the Student Council Constitution further expanded the role of student government and limited faculty and administrative control over student affairs. “Article II” of the constitution, clearly outlined the Council’s function, which was “to promote scholarship; to develop in the student body a wise and intelligent self-government; to make and enforce such laws governing students as it deems wise and expedient; to preserve and regulate customs and traditions of the university; to supervise the following extra-curricular activities; the budget system, student journal, clubs and organizations, social functions, and to be represented on all committees dealing with other extra-curricular activities.”⁴⁷⁶

⁴⁷² Moorland To Dean Miller, 24 May 1921. Jesse Edward Moorland Papers, Box 126-32, Folder 674. Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University.

⁴⁷³ Establishing and publishing the student newspaper proved to be the most difficult of the students’ terms. However, the first issue of the *Howard Hilltop* was finally published January 22, 1924.

⁴⁷⁴ In matters regarding the student body, Howard’s administrative body sought to compromise with the students in order to quickly resolve minor issues. Compared to other administrators, Durkee understood that the black youth of the 1920s would not submit to the same restrictive rules and regulations that had been imposed upon earlier generations. Wolters, *The New Negro on Campus*, 76.

⁴⁷⁵ The new Constitution was the result of a five-month study conducted by the council. “Student Council Makes Much Needed Recommendations,” Vol.1 No.6 March 29, 1924.

⁴⁷⁶ “A New Day Wanted”, *Howard Hill Top*, Vol.1 No.5, March 15, 1924,1.

The new constitution also enabled the Council to make recommendations directly to the faculty, Academic Council, and Board of Trustees in all matters concerning the student body including: extra-curricular activities, curriculum changes, the appointment and dismissal of professors, the Student Manual, and registration procedures. The Constitution also established the Student Council as the arbiter of student discipline, and any student unsatisfied with the Council's decision had the right to appeal to the Academic Council. Wherein the issues of discipline arose in which members of the faculty and students were involved, the Council would act jointly with the administration officers and board of trustees as per the details of the case. Finally, the Constitution declared that under no circumstances was a student to be dismissed from the University without a trial either before the Student Council or before a joint committee comprised of faculty members and Student Council members.⁴⁷⁷

After drafting the new Constitution, the Student Council called a mass meeting of the student body for ratification. Council President, L. King and corresponding secretary, Johanna Houston, presented the students with their proposals along with other recommendations, including a list of faculty members who should be asked immediately to submit their resignations, and another list of Howard graduates who should be approached to fill those vacant positions.⁴⁷⁸ According to the Council representatives, the students were not getting their money's worth from certain faculty members who offered the same courses year after year with little or no change. Even more importantly, the students wanted to remove white faculty members who occupied "pivotal positions" within the university and replace them with black ones. Finally, the

⁴⁷⁷ "A New Day Wanted." *Howard Hill Top*, Vol.1 No.5 March 15, 1924,1.

⁴⁷⁸ "Student Council Makes Much Needed Recommendations," *Howard Hill Top*, Vol.1 No.6, March 29, 1924.

student council representatives charged the faculty members with being too “old fogey,” out of date, and for failing to offer “constructive measures for the advancement of student welfare for the past four years.”⁴⁷⁹

Among the other recommendations presented to the student body was the abolition of compulsory R.O.T.C. training for college men. The council reps condemned the R.O.T.C. as a “breeder of war” and “unpedagogical” (sic), and argued that the men’s degrees should “not be attached to making American militaristic and encouraging Howard students to sell their birthright” in exchange for money from the government.⁴⁸⁰ Furthermore, the students argued that it was a “crime to see Howard students always on dress parade,” “perpetuating militarism, when the whole world is crying for peace” and “acting as tools for future wars.”⁴⁸¹

This was not the first time Howard students had banded together in opposition of compulsory military training. In 1921, the Student Council had reached an agreement with the Academic Council to make R.O.T.C. and physical education optional for the spring of 1921. However by the fall quarter, military training was again a requirement for degree. By 1924, though there were other dissenting voices most notably John Dewey and Edward Thorndike of Columbia University, along with the University’s highly regarded president, Dr. N.M. Butler, who also opposed compulsory military training.⁴⁸² The students also cited the recent World Wide Christian Federation’s

⁴⁷⁹ The following faculty were recommended to tender their resignations by the end of the school year: Miss E. Cook, Professor Schuch of Geology, Professor W. Coleman of Physics. “Student Council Makes Much Needed Recommendations,” *Howard Hill Top*, Vol.1 No.6, March 29, 1924.

⁴⁸⁰ Students enlisted in the R.O.T.C. were given a small stipend from the government, which many students relied on in order to afford tuition at Howard. “Compulsory R.O.T.C.,” *Howard Hill Top*, Vol.1 No.6 March 29, 1924, 6.

⁴⁸¹ “Compulsory R.O.T.C.,” *Howard Hill Top*, Vol.1 No.6, March 29, 1924, 6.

⁴⁸² John Dewey was one of the leading opponents of military training in higher education. For more on Dewey’s opposition to compulsory military training see for example: Robert B. Westbrook, *John Dewey*

Student Volunteer Convention held in Indianapolis from December 28, 1923, to January 1, 1924, an event at which students from across the United States and around the world unanimously declared their opposition to compulsory military training.⁴⁸³ Reporting on the Convention for the *Crisis*, Yale divinity student William S. Nelson proclaimed that youth, who “yesterday would have been happy to march behind beating drums” extolling the virtue of their nations and worshipping battle heroes, today “are emancipated from the ignorance of their fathers, the traditions of a false patriotism, and an unworthy nationalism—they are the representatives of the New Humanity which is on the horizon.”⁴⁸⁴ Despite this widespread demand for the abolition of the R.O.T.C., it would be another year before a campus-wide student strike ended compulsory military training at Howard.

“New Blood!” was the rallying cry on Howard’s campus during the spring of 1924, as the student body sought wholesale reforms to collegiate life. Despite the widespread support for the Student Council’s revisions, there were still those students on campus who were “satisfied with the old order of things.” The Student Council

and *American Democracy*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991).

⁴⁸³ According to the *Hill Top*, approximately two hundred and seventy-two students from over one hundred colleges and universities attended the meeting. However, an article published in the March, 1924 edition of the *Crisis* magazine reports a much larger number of students in attendance, stating that “more than six thousand young men and women, representing some thirty countries of the world and forty-eight states and nine hundred colleges of America, gathered at Indianapolis in the Ninth Quadrennial Session of the Student Volunteer Convention. “Compulsory R.O.T.C.,” *Howard Hill Top*, Vol.1 No.6, March 29, 1924.; William S. Nelson, “The New Humanity,” *Crisis*, Vol.27, No. 5 March 1924, 216.

⁴⁸⁴ The “race question” was chief among the other topics addressed at the convention. Nelson reported that the students “decided unanimously that racial discrimination is wrong; no lines should be drawn except co-operatively,” and that “personality should be respected regardless of race;” and finally “that equality of opportunity should be afforded in matters of education, economics and politics.” Beyond merely discussing questions of race, Nelson informed the *Crisis* readership that the students at the convention left with “plans of action,” which included: “opposing organizations striving for the supremacy of a particular race; improve the tone of journalism, encouraging the co-operation of the races in college life—in dormitories, societies, fraternities, churches, attacking the problem of changing individual attitudes; studying the culture of other races, through Cosmopolitan Clubs and similar organizations, and demanding the addition to college curricula of subjects selected to throw light on the race question.” William S. Nelson, “The New Humanity,” *Crisis*, Vol.27, No.5, March 1924, 217.

accused their peers with being more focused on “fine dressing, promenading up and down the campus with the opposite sex,” and too preoccupied with social engagements, than in challenging the administration. If the students expected the administration to accept the revised Constitution, there could be no “backsliding, pussy footing, or side stepping the tasks facing the youth of Howard” and instead “shake off the shackles of fear, indifference, and satisfaction.”⁴⁸⁵ Like their peers the world over who were “rapidly revolting from [the] materialistic, undemocratic, and corrupt conditions left by their foreparents (sic),” the Howard student body was part of a larger world-wide student movement that was fighting for “moral educational reform,” insisting “against encroachment by others on their own ideas and beliefs” and “introducing more democratic forms of student government.”⁴⁸⁶

Howard’s black faculty sympathized with the students’ desire for greater freedom and control. On May 1, 1924, Kelly Miller assembled the entire population of male collegians to address the issue of “Rules and Regulations.” Miller’s talk was heralded by *The Hilltop* as an “epoch making lecture” that signaled the “beginning of true freedom and responsibility for students instead of repression.” In his address, Miller admitted that the faculty was aware that the “old order is changing.” Its members sympathized with the students’ frustration with the pace of change in the educational

⁴⁸⁵ “New Blood,” *Howard Hill Top*, Vol. 1 No.6 March 29, 1924, 4

⁴⁸⁶ As part of the Student Council’s commitment to fostering a more democratic student government, Howard collegians were asked to complete a referendum on questions about student life, current national and international politics, and their future career ambitions. Among the twenty-nine questions posed to the students were the following: “Are you in favor of the Volstead Act as it is?” “Should students smoke on the Howard Campus circle?” “Are you in favor of students having a vital say in determining their curricula?” “How many dances do you think Howard students should have a quarter?” “Are you in favor of the Socialist, Prohibition, Democratic, or Republican Party?” “Are you in favor of limiting the number of offices a student may hold in one year? How Many?” “Do you favor mental tests for professors?” “Have you decided your life’s work? What and why?” For the complete referendum see: “Answer Questions, Give Reasons, Drop in Post Office and See that your Friend Does the Same,” *Howard Hill Top*, Vol.2 No.4 May 14, 1924, 1.

world noting, “there is less change” here than the “ethical, political, economic and social changes” that are “rapidly coming to pass.” Miller cited the conservatism of pedagogical reactionaries as the main reason for the lack of progress in higher education and praised the students of the country for initiating the “changes and progress of a new order” that was “being forced upon them.” With the youth of the world “revolting against despotic authority, repression of ideas, and the old order of things,” Dean Miller declared to his audience that it was time for schools to become “centers of freedom,” comparing the governance of the university community to that of the governance of a free state. “We must set up regulations compared to citizens in a free state, no longer disciples but friends,” asserted Miller to the students, and “you must become a part of the making of the rules of authority.”⁴⁸⁷ For all of Miller’s rhetoric, though, there were still limitations to the degree of student participation in the governance of the University. Indeed, less than a year later the issue of the abolition of the R.O.T.C. would become a major point of contention leading to the University’s largest student strike.⁴⁸⁸

“Away from our Narrow Spheres”: National and International Organizing, 1921-1925

Campus reforms were only part of the post-war New Negro Student Movement.⁴⁸⁹ More than previous generations, black student activists of the 1920s

⁴⁸⁷ “Kelly Miller Makes an Epoch Making Lecture to Male Students,” *Howard Hill Top*, Vol.2 No.4, May 14, 1924, 2-3.

⁴⁸⁸ The issue of eliminating compulsory R.O.T.C. was especially controversial. Howard administrators and trustees feared that abolishing the government-run program could jeopardize the University’s annual congressional appropriations. The university also opposed the students’ request that white faculty be removed from simply by virtue of their color, noting that this went against the school’s history of racial inclusion. Finally, the administration rejected the Council’s proposal to have faculty submit to student evaluations. Wolters, *The New Negro on Campus*, 75-78.

⁴⁸⁹ Ibram Rogers uses the term New Negro Campus Movement to describe black student activism in the years between the First and Second World Wars, denotes the 1920s as the origins of the twentieth

engaged in organizing and activism beyond the campus walls. Prior to the war campus protests tended to be fragmented and localized. In the years following the war, student activists placed a premium on the power and potential of the cooperative organizing. Students of the post-war period were distrustful of and disillusioned by the conservative politics of the older generation who had led them into a deadly war, placed industry and capital over democracy and civil rights, and who had plundered the lands of “less civilized” peoples in Africa and Asia in the name of imperialism, student activists of the post-war era were determined to organize around issues that mattered most to them.

The new student-founded organizations emerged in response to the post-war problems and were run almost exclusively by collegians themselves. In the United States, the National Student Forum, the League for Industrial Democracy, the Student Volunteer Movement, and the American Federation of Negro Students—the first nationally organized black student organization—were among the most prominent. In addition to educational and institutional reforms, these student organizations—religious and secular, national and international—dedicated themselves to a wide range of issues from socialism and communism, to anti-war and anti-militarism efforts, anti-imperialism and solidarity with colonized peoples, as well as labor rights, feminism, and race relations.

In large part, the rise of student organizing and organizations around such wide-ranging issues can be accounted for by the demographic changes amongst collegians themselves. New Negro college students were older, more diverse, and larger in number

century’s Long Black Student Movement. I have chosen to use New Negro Student Movement, a term which captures the full scope of black students’ activism in the 1920s. A radical politics espoused by black student activists, who saw their ideals and politics aligned closely with both the “world-wide” youth movements of the day, and the national and international struggles of people of color.

than their predecessors. The increased enrollments were due to the migration of black Americans from rural to urban areas in both the South and the North and to the improvements in black public school education.⁴⁹⁰ This large influx of students from varying economic and social backgrounds, along with a growing body of international students, resulted in a collegiate culture that was more ideologically and politically diverse than previous generations. Indeed, New Negro student activists integrated the literature and ideas of New Negro leaders at home, as well as international ideas of passive resistance and non-violent direct action, and radical Pan-Africanism, and the thriving youth movements of their peers overseas in Europe, South America, India, Japan, and China.⁴⁹¹

Collective organizing guided the New Negro Student Movement. For example, students at Howard used their power as consumers to organize boycotts of nearby businesses that refused to advertise and support student publications.⁴⁹² The Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity organized a nation-wide “Go to High School, Go to College Movement,” to educate and encourage black high school students to pursue higher education and helped raise scholarship funds for college students in order to increase

⁴⁹⁰ Ibram Rogers notes that “with high schools finally planted widely across the American landscape, the black collegiate population jumped by 50,000 each year during the 1920s, quintupling over the entire decade.” *The Black Campus Movement, Black Students and the Racial Reconstruction of Higher Education, 1965-1972*, 60.

⁴⁹¹ For a general overview of international student movements in the post-war era see especially: A History of the Unruly Subject. It is equally important to note that representatives from international student organizations also came to black college campuses to give talks. For example, on April 91, 1920, Mr. Dass the head of the Indian Nationalist Party in America presented to the Howard Student body the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi and the principle of “non-cooperation.” “Howard Reaches Out to the World,” *Howard Hilltop*, Vol.2 No.1, April 12, 1924, 1.

⁴⁹² The *Howard Hilltop* claimed that Howard students, faculty, and alumni spent more than one million dollars in Washington, D.C. during the school year, while neighborhood businesses contributed only \$187 towards the *Hilltop* and the student yearbook. “Students, Faculty and Alumni, Remember the Blacklist-Lack of Cooperation Cause Students to Lose Money,” *Howard Hilltop*, Vol.2 No.1, April 12, 1924, 1

retention rates.⁴⁹³ The Delta Sigma Theta Sorority also organized an annual education drive, held each May and featured prominent speakers including Mary Church Terrell, Nannie Helen Burrows, and Mary McCloud Bethune.⁴⁹⁴

In the spring of 1921, the Howard student body joined in the NAACP's national crusade against lynching by reorganizing the students' chapter of the NAACP.⁴⁹⁵ Oscar C. Brown, a student leader in the Officers' Training Camp movement also served in France as a first lieutenant with the 351st Machine Gun Battalion of the 92nd took the lead in resurrecting the Howard student NAACP chapter.⁴⁹⁶ Three days after electing the student officers, the Howard NAACP held a mass meeting to begin its month-long, "One Thousand for Howard" membership drive to enlist one thousand students. The campaign received national recognition. The *Chicago Defender* reported that with more

⁴⁹³ Although enrollment numbers reached record highs in the 1920s, the retention rate among black collegians was extremely poor. For example Howard University, which had the largest student enrollment among black colleges and universities reported that only thirty percent of registered students matriculated on average each year. For example, of the class of 1920, which entered with an enrollment of 218, only 60 students graduated. In 1912, 239 students entered, and by the end of the year 86 were still registered in a collegiate program. The class of 1922 had a record number of 325 students registered had dwindled to 100. The activities of Howard's Alpha Phi Alpha Chapter received national attention during the second annual campaign in the spring of 1921. To promote and educate the District's high school students on the value of pursuing high education, members of Howard's Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity visited each of the fifty-two high schools speaking to the 18,000 high school students. The weeklong campaign concluded with fraternity members visiting local churches, urging the public, parents, and ministers to speak to their children to remain in school and to encourage clubs to set up scholarships for worthy students. "Big Brothers Support Go-To-College Movement," *The Chicago Defender*, May 28, 1921, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, *The Chicago Defender* (1910-1975), 2.

⁴⁹⁴ "Delta's May Week," *The Hill Top*, Vol.4 No.7, May 22, 1925.

⁴⁹⁵ With the escalation of white terror and violence against black Americans in the post-war era the NAACP supplied lawyers to defend black men involved in lynching cases, established a task force to investigate and record lynching's and race riots, reporting that after what James Weldon Johnson called the "Red Summer" of 1919, black men were being murdered at the hands of white mobs at a rate of more than one per week.⁴⁹⁵

⁴⁹⁶ The re-organization of Howard's student chapter coincided with the NAACP's larger campaign to increase membership and establish local chapters throughout the country to support their post-war program. As Patricia Sullivan has noted, with James Weldon Johnson assuming the position of executive secretary, and Walter White as his assistant, the two men created a program focused on initiating civil rights legislation, the establishment of a permanent legal defense program, and "leveraging the incipient power of the black vote, and enlisting the arts in the cause of black freedom and racial equality." Sullivan also contends that the postwar era also saw "a growing synergy between a nationally focused movement for civil rights and struggles in communities across the country."

than two-thirds of the black collegiate population enrolled at Howard, the campus-wide support for the NAACP was particularly noteworthy given that “these students are to wield a potent influence in the leadership of the Race for the next generation.”⁴⁹⁷

The positive responses that these and other student campaigns received convinced New Negro student activists of the importance of creating a unified “Negro Youth Movement.” One of the most significant achievements of the New Negro Student Movement was the founding of the American Federation of Negro Students (AFNS) in 1923. Self-identified as a “progressive” rather than “radical” organization, the founders of the AFNS were deliberate in their framing of the youth movement. Specifically, the founders of the AFNS wanted the organization to appeal “to the friends of progress through the United States” in the hopes of attracting potential allies to their cause. The leaders of the AFNS were equally careful not to alienate their more radical peers activists; as an organization that proposed to work “from the bottom up,” a strategy that differed significantly from current race leaders, the AFNS invited and challenged all “those youths who believe in the infinite possibilities of their people to join the ranks of those warring for freedom of the race.”⁴⁹⁸

The idea for a national black student organization was first raised by a group of students from both historically black and predominantly white students in summer of 1922 at the annual Inter-collegiate conference held in Atlantic City, New Jersey. By April of 1923, the American Federation of Negro Students held its inaugural conference

⁴⁹⁷ During the spring quarter there were 1, 821 Class A college students registered at Howard. “Howard Students Form Against Evil Barriers,” *The Chicago Defender*, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, March 5, 1921.

⁴⁹⁸ “On to Nashville,” *Howard Hilltop*, Vol.1 No.5, March 15, 1924, 1.

at Howard University.⁴⁹⁹ Student representatives from Oberlin, Yale, Cornell, Lincoln-University (PA), Tuskegee, and Howard attended the inaugural meeting. During the two-day conference, the students elected an executive committee and heard speeches from leading scholars, including Alain Locke of Howard University and Howard's Dean of Women, Lucy Slowe. The students also drafted a program and constitution for the organization. They agreed that the youth movement would focus its efforts on the promotion of cooperation among black collegians, the stimulation of race pride, the encouragement of education and race culture, and an intelligent consideration of the race problem. The students additionally called for the inclusion of courses in race relations, as well as the teaching of black history in high schools, colleges and universities throughout the United States.⁵⁰⁰

Before the conference ended, the attendees developed a plan to launch three campaigns by the second annual conference, scheduled for April 1924 in Nashville, Tennessee.⁵⁰¹ The first of the campaigns was to focus on increasing "business cooperation," the next would address the issue of the "stimulation of race pride," and the "encouragement of education" would be the emphasis of the third campaign. The purpose of the initial three campaigns was largely informational and to garner support and interest among the black collegiate population. To do so, the AFNS sought the aid of the national black press to help promote the organization's message and also planned

⁴⁹⁹ The idea for a Negro Youth Movement was first proposed at a meeting of black youth in Atlantic City, NJ during the summer of 1922 by students from Cornell, Yale, Howard, Oberlin, Lincoln, Penn State, Harvard, Tuskegee, Downington, Montclair Norma, and the Atlantic City High School, "Youth Convention," *The Pittsburgh Courier*, April 5, 1924, 3.

⁵⁰⁰ "Students Hold National Meet in Washington," *The Chicago Defender*, April 21, 1923, 5.

⁵⁰¹ The students had originally planned to launch the first drive in October 1923, the second in December 1923, and the last one in March 1924. The organizers had set an ambitious schedule, and the first drive was delayed until December.

to have members of the organization hold informational meetings in churches, Sunday Schools, and YMCA organizations.⁵⁰²

Between the end of the conference and the inaugural campaign, members of the AFNS conducted research on the state of black business in America and its relation to black collegiate education.⁵⁰³ The students compiled their findings into a report, which found that black higher education was overwhelmingly “one sided.” On the one extreme, the report noted, was industrial education, which emphasized agriculture and the trades, on the other extreme was the emphasis on training professionals. The students’ investigation also found that in 1923, less than one percent of black colleges offered business training, concluding that the “Negro in the U.S. is being educated in a manner which will not secure the entire freedom of the race.”⁵⁰⁴

According to the students’ report, “virtually no stress has been made upon our youth to enter the business world,” which accounted for the “almost total absence of businessmen and artisans.” Equally troubling, the report indicated that due to the deficit of trained businessmen and women forced many of the “Race’s big businesses” “to go the other race in order to secure certain trained” employees. Based on their findings, the AFNS’ organized the bigger and better business drive to “encourage and stimulate preparation for the business field” among black collegians and to secure support for

⁵⁰² “Students Hold National Meet in Washington,” *The Chicago Defender*, April 21, 1923, 5.

⁵⁰³ In November, 1923 the AFNS sent out questionnaires to black-owned insurance companies, banks, fraternal societies and “productive enterprises” to gather information on hiring trends and employee demographics. “College Men In Organization to Boost Business,” *The Chicago Defender*, December 8, 1923, A1.

⁵⁰⁴ L. Slater Baynes, “The American Federation of Negro Students,” *The Athenaeum*, Vol. XXVI No.8, May 1924, 203.

curricula reforms “so as to provide for the economic development of the present and coming generations.”⁵⁰⁵

The Bigger Business campaign received positive reviews in the black press and especially on with black collegians, including those attending both historically black and predominantly white colleges and universities. Following the success of the bigger and better business campaign, the AFNS distributed informational pamphlets to college campuses, outlining the necessity of the youth movement in general, and the specific functions of the AFNS. As the “new blood of the race,” AFNS president, I.J.K. Wells wrote, black “youth ought to be moving, forging ahead with an adamant purpose,” to “begin where our predecessors have either left off or where they have never begun.” The American Federation of Negro Students, served as a “vehicle whereby all our youth of America may unite,” and the belief in the “infinite possibilities of our own blood and in the boundless and untapped resources of twelve million people,” guided the organization. “We want success without limitation,” Wells proclaimed and “we stand firmly on the proposition that it can not [sic] be had without the habit of cooperation.” As such, the youth movement sought out the “vital, thinking, and ambitious youth to unite with this militant movement in a common program for our education, social, and economic freedom.”⁵⁰⁶

The AFSN’s focus on cooperative organizing, its de-centralized leadership structure whereby local student chapters developed their own programs, its emphasis on grassroots organizing, and member driven programming appealed to black collegians; they joined the AFNS in astounding numbers. By the time the organization convened

⁵⁰⁵ “College Men in Organization to Boost Business,” *The Chicago Defender*, December 8, 1923, A1.

⁵⁰⁶ I.J.K. Wells, “The Negro Youth Movement,” as cited in *The Athenaeum*, Vol. XXVI February, 1924, 120.

for the second annual convention in Nashville, Tennessee, the AFNS had mobilized nearly 6,000 students and established chapters in fourteen schools, an amazing feat given the federation's short history. Black collegians were represented from both historically black and predominantly white colleges throughout the country, including delegates from the University of Chicago and Northwestern University.⁵⁰⁷ The federation's goal of "Union through Youth" was upheld as representatives from nearly all the fraternities and sororities of the country were represented including the Delta Sigma Theta and Alpha Kappa Alpha sororities—with many elected to officer positions.⁵⁰⁸

During the three-day conference, the students discussed the AFNS' plan for the year. Among the issues discussed was the founding of a student economic enterprise, the publication of an Inter Scholastic-Collegiate Monthly, an exchange program for students among American and foreign institutions for study and travel, and a "vigorous drive for racial pride and business preparation."⁵⁰⁹ By the end of the conference, the student delegates decided to focus its major program for the year exclusively on the economic development of the race. The first press release following the Nashville conference called on black youth throughout the country to stop selling their physical labor and "crowding the field as individual labor merchants". While the AFNS acknowledged, "many of us must sell labor," the youth movement also felt that it could

⁵⁰⁷ Prior to the conference, AFNS president I.J.K. Wells had gone on a promotional tour through the northern and southern central states including Kentucky, Tennessee, Arkansas, Missouri, Illinois, Michigan, Ohio, and Western New York. "Annual Youth Movement Ends in Dixie City, *Chicago Defender*, Apr. 19, 1924, 9.

⁵⁰⁸ "Youth Federation Pledges 'Business Program' at Annual Meeting," *The Pittsburgh Courier*, Apr. 19, 1924, 19.

⁵⁰⁹ The conference delegates also agreed to station field agents throughout the United States in zones consisting of four or more states to supervise the work of the movement. "Annual Youth Movement Ends in Dixie City, *Chicago Defender*, Apr. 19, 1924, 9.

not “remain silent when there are other higher paying fields into which the energy of our youth needs to be directed.” Moreover, AFNS president, I.J.K. Wells added, “We feel that our youth will use their services in other fields as soon as they really learn how much better they will be paid therein.” Black Americans, Wells argued, were heavy consumers of both luxury goods and items of necessity, and as such, black youth should consider ways that they could sell goods rather than labor.⁵¹⁰

To encourage black collegians to enter the business field, the AFNS also announced a drive to raise funds for economic scholarships to “foster and stimulate a ‘bigger and better Negro business.’” The AFNS planned to raise \$150,000 to provide one hundred students with scholarships of \$150 each. The *Pittsburgh Courier* described the Federation’s “Logical Scholarships” drive as the “most ambitious effort of the century.” The “aggressive” Negro Youth movement, the paper reported was seeking a solution to “encourage our youth to prepare for the business field” so that “this costly breach in our economic life may be filled.” Assisting the students with this effort was an Advisory-Award Committee comprised of race leaders including Dr. Emmett J. Scott from Howard, Dr. Gilbert Haven Jones, president of Wilberforce University, Robert L. Vann, attorney and editor of the *Courier*, and Mrs. Booker T. Washington, of Tuskegee.⁵¹¹

Despite the enthusiasm and support behind the “Logical Scholarships” fundraising drive, the AFNS fell short of its goal. Undeterred, the AFNS continued to focus the organization’s work on securing the economic freedom of black Americans.

⁵¹⁰ According to Wells, “there are suits, dresses, shirts, hosiery, foods, musical instruments, automobiles, insurance and hundreds of additional things our youths could sell and earn three or four times more than can be earned by the sale of cheap labor.” “Federation Urges Youth to Cease Selling Labor,” *The Chicago Defender* (Nat’l Edition) (1921-1967), June 7, 1924, 4.

⁵¹¹ “Launch \$150,000 Campaign For Business Training,” *The Pittsburgh Courier*, Aug. 23, 1924, 3.

The federation's third annual conference, held in Atlantic City, New Jersey, from August 28-29, centered around a program focused on the how to advertise and educate the idea of "business preparedness" among black Americans. Explaining the idea of "business preparedness," was keynote speaker, George W. Goodman, a former secretary with the AFNS who noted that 'we do not mean that we shall stop with the preparation gained through training in schools and colleges.' Instead Goodman explained, "we mean moral preparedness, financial preparedness, as well as that we as a group must be brought to that state of mind wherein we are psychologically prepared to support our enterprises that our youth may have larger opportunities."⁵¹²

Although the third annual conference was the most widely represented with delegates from St. Paul, Minnesota, to the Gulf Coast, the movement organizers noted that if the AFNS was to continue to grow, their program must become more diverse and to return to the broad program of social, economic, and political activism that had initially made the federation so popular among the black collegiate population. In terms of the work already done, Goodman noted that the AFNS could celebrate that the movement had "caused a more serious thinking on our economic needs and aspirations" and that "there are already members of our group who have chosen business as their life's work because of the efforts of the movement." Still according to Goodman, there was more work to be done, "as we realize that we as yet are still unknown to thousands of our group."⁵¹³ To that end, Goodman announced that for the upcoming year, the AFNS would be turning to the question of "our political conditions and needs," stating that the time had come "when the young men of our Race must

⁵¹² "Ask Business Preparedness at Youth Movement Session," *The Chicago Defender* (National Addition) (1921-1967); October 10, 1925; A3.

⁵¹³ "Ask Business Preparedness at Youth Movement Session," *The Chicago Defender*, A3.

apply himself intelligently to the use of the ballot as a powerful means in helping our group to make progress.”⁵¹⁴ Despite these plans to grow, the AFNS’ activities abruptly declined just as the federation was in the process of planning its new program for the 4th Annual Convention to be held at the end of 1925. The organization was notably absent from the pages of black newspapers and appeared to have ceased all activity by the end of 1926.⁵¹⁵

Conclusion

The precise reasons for the AFNS’ decline are unknown. The initial enthusiasm and wide support for the first national black student organization had provided a platform for black collegians and their issues to be taken seriously by the academic community and the black public alike. The AFNS’ Bigger Business Campaign had been a huge success for the student organization. It brought national attention to a glaring blind spot in the curriculum at black colleges and universities, and forced educators to begin offering new courses in business. Changes in black students politics in the mid-1920s, however point to several possibilities for the AFNS’ demise. For one, New Negro students were increasingly interested in aligning themselves with more progressive, interracial, and internationally focused student groups. Whereas the AFNS filled an immense void for black student activism, by the middle of the decade, leading

⁵¹⁴ “Ask Business Preparedness at Youth Movement Session,” *The Chicago Defender*, A3.

⁵¹⁵ The circumstances regarding the disbandment of the American Federation of Negro Students remains a mystery. Between the organization’s founding in 1922 and through early months of 1925, the black press steadily reported on AFNS conferences and campaigns. But by the end of 1925 the pages of black newspapers were silent on AFNS activities. During these years too, the AFNS had garnered praise both within the black collegiate community and black America as a whole. Even if the AFNS’s economic program had alienated its more radical student members, the federation’s focus on building black political power along with their efforts to engage college women’s participation, would have put it in line with the progressive student organizations of the day.

student organizations such as the National Student Forum, the Fellowship of Youth for Peace, the Students' Peace Conference, and the Labor Conference, were all vying for black students' attention and participation.⁵¹⁶

These national and international student groups also actively encouraged and elected black college women to leadership positions within their organizations—whereas women were noticeably absent within the leadership of the AFNS, and as a result women's issues were conspicuously missing from the larger Negro Youth Movement goals. The post-war decade however was a major turning point for the young black women who went to college in the 1920s with the sense that they were “on the threshold of a new era.”⁵¹⁷ Like their male peers, black college women were politicized by the post-war militant race politics, and like other college-age women had come to define themselves in relation to the modern “New Woman.” Moreover, as college women occupied a greater proportion of the student body, their political clout on campus and within student organizations reflected these changes. No longer willing to abide by rigid university administrations or male-dominated student groups, black college women refused to support those student groups which failed to include them in campus governance and policy decisions, and agitated for reforms on campus around issues that mattered to them as New Negro women.

⁵¹⁶ The following students from Howard were selected to represent the institution at these conferences, John West and Llewellyn Davis, Bernice Chism, Glen Carrington, Ophelia Settles, Marian Thompson, and Edward P. Lovett. “Howardites Respond,” *The Hilltop*, Vol.4, No.7, 6.

⁵¹⁷ “Women In the New Era,” *Spelman Messenger*, January, 1921 Vol.37 No.4, 2.

Chapter 5

New Women, New Negroes, and a “New Spirit,” 1925-1936

Introduction

The late 1920s and early 1930s saw an important shift in student activism. This period involved large-scale campus-wide protests like the Fisk and Howard student strikes of 1925 that have come to define the New Negro Student Movement, as well as smaller individual acts of resistance that challenged university rules and regulations. Both forms of activism combined to create major curricular and campus reforms, which brought about the modernization of black higher education. This same period also saw the advent of the New Negro woman: an identity college women formed that embraced the militant politics of the New Negro movement along with the aesthetics and ideas that defined the New Woman and the rise of the mass youth culture. The rhetoric of greater equality, race pride, and militant leadership that characterized New Negro politics resonated with black college women, who through their leadership in student organizations and as members of the student newspapers, helped shape the intellectual, social, and political life on campus and in the larger black student movement.

The New Woman of the 1920s also influenced black college women's activism and ideals. The New Woman represented a rethinking of traditional femininity and set a new standard regarding beauty, leisure, fashion, sexual mores, and women's place in politics.⁵¹⁸ She was modern, college educated, self-confident, and fashionably

⁵¹⁸ See especially: Margaret Lowe, *Looking Good: College Women and Body Image, 1875-1930* (Johns Hopkins Press, 2005).

contemporary in her dress and appearance; she espoused feminist ideals and championed equal rights for women.⁵¹⁹

Black college women also became increasingly resentful of the paternalistic educational system that privileged female collegians' morals and manners over the cultivation of their minds. Instead black college women demanded the same opportunities as their male peers to cultivate their talents and leadership.⁵²⁰ New Negro women, like Myrtle Hull of Spelman, believed that they could still uphold their duties as an ideal mothers and supportive wives while also pursuing their own professional and personal goals, stating that "not a career, not the desk, nor the political platform" could "alter in one iota woman's mating and mother instinct."⁵²¹ The college campus became a contested site between the black college women who were determined to obtain control over their identities, ambitions, and bodies and the educators who sought to impose their own standards of femininity on them.⁵²² As historian Treva Lindsey has written, "at the core of New Negro womanhood was the movement of black women into a wider array of economic, political, social, and cultural possibilities in the public sphere."⁵²³

⁵¹⁹ Nancy F. Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989), 11-50.

⁵²⁰ Sarah Williams, "Woman in Professions," *Spelman Messenger*, November 1922, Vol. 39 No., 1.

⁵²¹ Myrtle Dona Hull, "The College Woman of To-Day," *Spelman Messenger*, December 1921, Vol. 38 No.3, 8.

⁵²² The ratification of the 19th Amendment in August 1920, further bolstered black women's claims to greater inclusion in political and cultural life. Sarah Williams, a Spelman senior, proclaimed that black women had at last been liberated from the "charge of inferiority" that had impeded women's progress politically, educationally, and professionally. Yet, despite "all the years of restricted opportunity, a longing for untrammelled freedom" still burned within black women. To Williams, there was no question that black women's "accomplishments and great successes" thus far had been "attained by overcoming many obstacles and often by blazing trails," and that the black woman had more than "proved that she is capable of moving side by side with men." Sarah Williams, "Woman in Professions," 1.

⁵²³ Treva Lindsey, "Climbing the Hilltop: In Search of a New Negro Womanhood at Howard University," in Baldwin and Makalani, eds, *Escape from New York: The New Negro Renaissance Beyond Harlem* (University of Minnesota Press, 2013).

This chapter focuses on the politicization of college women, and the way that female students at Fisk, Howard, and Spelman reshaped black collegiate culture in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Beginning first with the ways in which college women organized for campus reforms that directly impacted their collegiate experience and campus life. Next, this chapter explores the role that college women played in the student strikes at Fisk and Howard. College women organized alongside their male peers during these strikes, standing on the picket lines, risking their academic futures, and demanding a greater role in campus governance and the expansion of student rights and freedoms. Lastly, this chapter follows the changes that occurred at Fisk, Spelman, and Howard following the period of student rebellion, as all three institutions went through unprecedented period of reform.

Black Women in the New Era: The New Negro Woman Goes to College, 1920-1925

Rather than pursue a politics of respectability, New Negro college women challenged the structures of inequality, beginning with their campus culture. A letter to Spelman president Lucy Hale Tapley in 1921 from recent graduates contained a series of complaints. Among those listed, the former students addressed the issue of discipline at the school, which they described as a “system of repression and restriction and fails to develop initiative in the girls.”⁵²⁴ Three years later, Vivian Buggs, a sophomore at Spelman, published an article in the jointly published Morehouse-Spelman student newspaper (*The Athenaeum*) with similar complaints regarding the school’s lack of freedom of thought and expression. “Our greatest needs are outlets for self-expression,”

⁵²⁴ Alumnae to Lucy Hale Tapley, Lucy Hale Tapley Collection, n.d. Spelman College Archives.

Buggs argued, to share the “varied and far-reaching...emotions and ideals of over four hundred young women!”

Although the *Spelman Messenger* was the school’s official news organ and published articles written by students, faculty members censored the content. *The Athenaeum* provided Spelman students with more autonomy and freedom of thought and expression. An editorial in the May, 1924 edition of the joint venture between Spelman and Morehouse outlined the newspaper’s purpose to provide an outlet where “students express themselves without supervision, dictation, or censorship.”⁵²⁵ Over the years of working together, however, Spelman students became frustrated with the lack of print space they received for their stories, voices, and opinions. Even when, a Spelman student, like Genevieve Taylor, served as Editor-in-Chief, articles by Morehouse men and about the men’s college dominated the pages of the joint student venture. Finally, students learned that Spelman would be transitioning from a Seminary to a College in the fall of 1924 the students severed their ties with *The Athenaeum*, and instead organized their own student paper, *The Campus Mirror*—independently funded and published by the students themselves.⁵²⁶

Student newspapers held an important place among collegians in the 1920s, and in particular for college women as a way to claim a public presence behind the insular walls of the campus.⁵²⁷ Because student newspapers were widely read across college

⁵²⁵ “The Athenaeum- Our Medium for Freedom of Expression, and Opportunity for Service,” *The Athenaeum*, May 1924, Vol. XXVI No.8, 212.

⁵²⁶ Taylor was not the only woman to serve as editor-in-chief of a student newspaper. Johanna R. Huston of Howard University was also elected to helm *The Hilltop* the same year. The organization of the *Campus Mirror* coincided with Spelman’s transition from Seminary to College in the fall of 1924. President’s Annual Report

⁵²⁷ The writings of Fisk students, and in particular, college women at Fisk are extremely limited during the period from 1916-1925. In 1916, President McKenzie disbanded the *Fisk Herald*, citing financial reasons for this decision.

campuses, they functioned as an important discursive space for college women to assert their opinions on a wide range of issues including electoral politics, “race relations,” and “women’s issues.” For female collegians at Fisk and Spelman—where educators prohibited them from forming political campus groups or from participating in national student politics, the student newspaper—which was widely read amongst the black collegiate community—also became a means for creating and cultivating a collective New Negro women’s consciousness.

Student publications became an important vehicle for college women to air their discontent with paternalism and strict rules. Spelman sophomore Vivian Buggs critiqued the limitations educators placed on the student body. According Buggs, life at Spelman was like living behind “the walls of China” with a “shadow cast over us.” Her comparison of campus life at Spelman to living behind the walls of imperial China was exaggerated, certainly. And yet Buggs’ conclusion that students must “tear the wall down and let in more light” was consistent with New Negro college women’s frustration with paternalistic white educators who imposed strict control over their access to knowledge and information. “Spelman is standing still in vital spots,” Briggs continued “and other institutions are going on, absorbing all the good things from the outside world...” Frustrated, Buggs noted that “great men come to Atlanta, speak to the people and fill them with new ideas,” “inspiring meetings are held, current subjects discussed, and new plans are made for the advancement of mankind.” While, “Spelman remains in her shell and sees nothing, hears nothing, and says nothing,” other Atlanta

youth “as youth of all other places all over the country, marches on in the world of activity.”⁵²⁸



Figure 18. Howard University—Girls’ Debating Forum, 1921-1922.

College women also chafed at the restrictions administrators placed on their extra-curricular activities. Where college men played inter-collegiate sports and participated in national debating competitions, extra-curricular activities for college women at Spelman and especially at Fisk continued to revolve around religious-based intra-collegiate organizations and activities such as the Christian Endeavor Societies, the Y.W.C.A., and weekly Sunday school, and Literary Clubs. Both Presidents’ Tapley at Spelman and President McKenzie of Fisk continued to uphold the prohibition against students joining or belonging to any college sorority or other secret organizations while enrolled at these universities, with McKenzie citing the regulation’s enforcement as “a necessary part of our school democracy.” That administration at both institutions prevented students from organizing campus NAACP chapters, and faculty at Fisk went

⁵²⁸ Vivian O. Buggs, “The Walls of China,” *The Athenaeum*, Nov. and Dec., 1923 Vol. XXVI, No.2-3, 36.

so far as read each copy of the NAACP's *Crisis* magazine, censoring any controversial or radical content before turning the copies over to the students.

Meanwhile, women at Howard created a dynamic and active intra- and inter-collegiate life. Unlike at Fisk, where all student activities were sex-segregated, Howard students had no such restrictions, which enabled students like Bertha B. Lomack and Mable Holloway to serve as leaders of campus organizations. Her peers elected Lomack as president of the Howard Student Progressive Club—an “organization of students banded together for the purpose of informal discussions on economic, political, religious and social problems of local, national and international concern.” The Students’ Progressive club was also Howard’s “link in the chain of youth movements encircling the world” ensuring that Lomack served as an important interlocutor between her campus and leading progressive student organizations.⁵²⁹ For her part, students elected Holloway to the executive committee of the World Court Conference, a federation of American college students founded to determine “the most vital problems which confront the students of American in discovering the ways to meet them.” Holloway’s peers heralded her for having blazed a trail that enabled black collegians the “opportunity to participate in a national movement” that was seeking a “path to greater and better understanding among students.”⁵³⁰

Bertha Lomack’s and Mable Holloway’s elections to high-ranking leadership positions came on the heels of a hard-won fight for equality on Howard’s campus. To be sure, women at Howard had long held officer positions on various co-ed student groups or organizations such as the school’s newspaper and the campus chapter of the

⁵²⁹ “The Students’ Progressive Club,” *The Hilltop*, Vol. III No.5 November 14, 1925, 4.

⁵³⁰ “The Student Council Column,” *The Hill Top*, March 11, 1926, 2.

NAACP, and the student council. And while college women had more than demonstrated their ability and fitness for leadership, students had not yet elected a woman to run a co-ed student group. The lack of equal opportunities for women's involvement in Howard's extra-curricular activities was a point of contention for the university's female population. One article published in *The Hilltop* remarked that a close observation of the participation of students in extra-curricular activities gave one "the impression that these activities were primarily designed for men," "but since out in the world women are clamoring for places on par with men, they might at least...get a little of the practice while they are in college."⁵³¹

Shortly after *The Hilltop* printed the article, Anita Turpeau announced her decision to run for the president of Howard's Student Council in the spring of 1924. As the first woman to ever seek the nomination, her candidacy "created a sensation...by throwing a scare into the male populate on campus." "For the first time in the history of the university," *The Hilltop* reported, "the several conflicting male elements usually at loggerheads with each other, combined to resist this invasion of masculine prerogatives." Although she was ultimately defeated, Turpeau's candidacy and "the idea of a 'new emancipation' made an indelible impression" on her peers.⁵³²

⁵³¹ "Women in Extra-Curricular Activities at Howard," *The Hill Top*, Vol.2 No.1 April 12, 1924, 4.

⁵³² "The New Emancipation of Women-Anita Turpeau Seeks Admission to Kappa Sigma Debating Society," *The Hilltop*, Vol.3 No.3 October 10, 1924, 1.



Figure 19. Howard University—Anita Bell Turpeau, Senior year, 1925.

Undeterred by her defeat, Anita Turpeau again made history at Howard by pushing the boundaries of traditional masculine spaces and became the first woman in the university's history to apply for admission to the Kappa Sigma Debating Society. Kappa Sigma held a prestigious place among Howard students, not only was it the university's oldest student organization, but membership in the esteemed society was a pre-requisite for membership on the university debating teams. The exclusive society also proudly noted that through the training in argumentation, parliamentary procedure, and oratory, the vast majority of male leaders of the student body were also Kappa Sigma members. Indeed, Kappa Sigma was proud of the legacy it had created noting, "the men with the keenest minds, plenty of initiative, advocates, speakers and presidents of many of the classes as well as Student Councils have generally acquired much of their ability through the medium of this organization."⁵³³

⁵³³ Howard University, "The Bison: 1924" (1924). *Howard University Yearbooks*. Book 104. http://dh.howard.edu/bison_yearbooks/1041924,

Anita Turpeau's decision to apply to Kappa Sigma, then, was a direct challenge to her male peers' long-held dominion over student affairs and governance. While there was nothing explicitly written in the Kappa Sigma constitution that prohibited women from joining, there was a long tradition of the organization's bitter opposition to the acceptance of female students. According to one article printed in *The Hilltop*, "this state of affairs existed, not because any of the" Kappa Sigma's "entertained a belief that the female of the species is affected with less oratorical ability than the male, but rather, it was presumed that the former had not the political training to successfully cope with male opponents."⁵³⁴ Another student explained the rationale behind the exclusion of women from Kappa Sigma, stating that it was simply a matter that "the ole medieval chivalry still actuates us, and our respect for our young women forbids us to engage with them in public debate."⁵³⁵ With such hostility directed towards them, no woman at Howard had attempted to "knock at the door of the debating sanctum," before Turpeau. But when the all-women's team from Vassar College defeated the Princeton squad in a joint debate the year prior to Turpeau's application, "Kappa Sigma saw the handwriting on the wall" and realized the society could no longer justify the exclusion of their female peers.⁵³⁶

Following her application, Turpeau was selected from among the other candidates to participate in the Kappa Sigma try-outs—a series of debates between the

⁵³⁴ "The New Emancipation of Women," *The Hilltop*, 1.

⁵³⁵ Signed anonymously, this letter to the editor was presumably written as satire, and to poke fun at the absurdity of the Kappa Sigma's outdated traditions, which had barred women from participating in the debating society. For example, the student surmised that opponents to women's inclusion were "doubtful as to whether the time has yet come for men to stand in fear of women," and that it be voted that all co-eds "be stored up in a separate building on the other side of the reservoir out of the way that they may keep their ambitions to themselves." The latter comment was in reference to the location of the women's dormitory (razed in 1935), which was quite separate from the main campus. "Student's Forum," *The Hilltop*, Vol.3 No.10 December 12, 1924, 6.

⁵³⁶ "The New Emancipation of Women," *The Hilltop*, 1.

top prospects, which usually preceded formal acceptance to the debating society.⁵³⁷

After Turpeau made the initial cut for entrance into Kappa Sigma, a reporter from *The Hilltop* asked her if she intended on being an active or passive member of Kappa Sigma if she was elected to team, Turpeau bluntly replied: "I am going out to make the university debating team. I would not join to become a wall flower."⁵³⁸ During her try-outs, Turpeau continuously impressed her peers with her skill and poise, which won her the honor of being the first ever woman at Howard to be elected to the Kappa Sigma Debating Society.⁵³⁹ The following year, Turpeau again broke another long-standing tradition at Howard when she became the first woman to serve as *The Hilltop's* editor-in-chief.⁵⁴⁰

Anita Turpeau's refusal to conform to her male peers expectations of restrained femininity was consistent with New Negro college women's conception of themselves as emancipated women. Indeed, college women fiercely championed New Negro women's independence of mind and action, and willingness to balk at "traditions" and disregard "what a masculine prophet" had said about a subject. At the same time that Turpeau sought admission to Kappa Sigma, articles appeared in the Howard *Hilltop*, in

⁵³⁷ "The New Emancipation of Women," *The Hilltop*, 1.

⁵³⁸ "The New Emancipation of Women," *The Hilltop*, 1.

⁵³⁹ It should be noted that at Howard, college women had their own debating society. In 1922, however the society folded, and at the time that Turpeau applied for admission to Kappa Sigma, there were appeals from the Howard co-eds to re-instate the women's debating society. "Shall Women Debate at Howard," *The Hilltop*, No.1 Vol.1 January 22, 1924, 4.

⁵⁴⁰ Turpeau was initially elected as the assistant editor. But when her boyfriend and future husband, T.J. Anderson resigned from his position as editor-in-chief, Turpeau assumed stewardship over the student newspaper. During her time at Howard, Anita Turpeau distinguished herself amongst her peers academically and for her active involvement in the school's extra-curricular life. In addition to serving as the President of the Howard Players, Turpeau was the secretary of her sorority, President of the Pestalozzie Forebel Society, a Cabinet Member of the school's Y.W.C.A., a class journalist, Vice President of Class, Associate Editor of *The Hilltop*, Fun Editor of the *Bison*, a member of the Girl's Glee Club, Assistant Business Manager of the Sorority, Editor-in-Chief of *The Hilltop*, Member of the Tau Sigma Society, the Historical Society, the German Club, French Club, Progressive Club, and the school's Choir. Howard University, "The Bison: 1925" (1925). *Howard University Yearbooks*. Book 106. http://dh.howard.edu/bison_yearbooks/106.

which women students were sharply critical of their male peers; whom they argued were “laggard” when it came to the “movement towards feminine emancipation.” The cause for their peers’ lack of support for women’s equality, the students reasoned, was due to an “inherited southern conservatism” and an outdated “false conception of modesty.”⁵⁴¹ “The parlor ornament girl” was “a relic of the days of chivalry,” one article explained. On the other hand, the rapid evolution and transformations in American society and culture wrought by the modern feminist movement, had given rise to a new “self-assertive, independent and even radical modern woman.”

The same self-determination and desire for freedom of expression that forced Kappa Sigma to change its policies against excluding their female peers, also led to major policy changes at Fisk and Spelman. New Negro college women were no longer content to accept Victorian-era definitions of black middle-class identity, race politics, and gender roles defined for them both by paternalistic white educators and older black reformers. Through their refusal to conform to the draconian dress codes imposed on them or adhere to regulations, which restricted their interactions with male peers, leisure activities and confined them to campus, New Negro college women played an important role in the modernization of black collegiate culture.⁵⁴²

In the 1920s, female students at Fisk, Spelman, and Howard consistently pushed the boundaries of established conventions of black femininity. The decade saw the creation of a distinct youth culture as well as dramatic changes the beauty, fashion and

⁵⁴¹ “Girls in Modern Life,” *The Hilltop*, Vol. 3 No.7 November 7, 1924.

⁵⁴² Martin Summers and Rayford Logan both focus on the ways that male collegians helped to transform black collegiate culture. Summers’ work in particular addresses the ways in which black college men responded to the changing culture mores: this shift from an ethos of producer to one of consumption, from character to personality, from self-denial to self-expression and fulfillment, produced cultural reverberations within the black middle-class.” Martin Summers, *Manliness and Its Discontent: The Black Middle Class and the Transformation of Masculinity, 1900-1930* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 289.

consumer industries as well as the emergence of national advertising campaigns were constantly reproduced for the collegiate generation's visual consumption. The mass beauty culture provided an abundance of skin creams, hair products, rouges and lipsticks, which college women could choose from to create their own individual looks—a drastic change from the simple university uniforms, which repressed individual expression.⁵⁴³

No ideal was more celebrated and contested than the flapper. For college women, the flapper symbolized the epitome of modern femininity. As one Howard co-ed wrote, “the so-called ‘flapper of today...’ is the nearest approach to nature’s ideal of youth; self-reliant, frank, out-spoken and joyous to a semblance of wild carefreeness.” “Despite the fact that tradition has been greatly ruffled by her daring,” the article continued, “she shows that she is practical, capable and no dope of illusions.” “This modern type of femininity...and the woman of yesteryear are one and the same; it is only the outward and visible reaction of the former to situations and the method of expressing her thoughts and beliefs that gives her the appearance of dissimilitude.” Moreover, the author contended it was the “much criticized ‘flapper’” who is “directing women’s energy to wider and greater fields of achievement” and “she who by ingenious methods is fighting the masters with their own weapons.”⁵⁴⁴ Thus for the collegiate

⁵⁴³ Howard University did not have a tradition of requiring a dress code of its students, yet as Martin Summers’ notes, students were expected to dress in a respectable manner consistent with the moral reputation of the University. Additionally, while the dress codes were specifically directed towards the young women of their institutions, Fisk and Howard administrators did expect college men to appear in modest dress as well. Summers, 256-258. Writing about beauty culture in American during this period, Kathy Peiss notes that for black women, the beauty culture was linked to race pride and advancement. Advertisements aimed at black middle-class women by black cosmetic entrepreneurs like Madame C.J. Walker promoted their products in a way that made beauty synonymous with respectability. Kathy Peiss, *Hope in a Jar: The Making of America’s Beauty Culture* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 221.

⁵⁴⁴ “Flapperism,” *The Hilltop*, Vol. III No.1, October 7, 1925, 2.

generation of the 1920s, the changes in women's fashion, beauty culture, and modern femininity were not inconsistent with their own ideals of respectable womanhood. College women self-consciously embodied the spirit of youthful rebellion. Indeed the new Negro college women's bobbed hair, application of make-up, short skirts and dresses, and accessories stood in direct opposition to the ideal of restrained femininity that governed women of the previous generation.⁵⁴⁵

Their choice of clothing challenged long established dress codes at Spelman. For a time, Spelman President Lucy Tapley had been able to amend the dress code regulations to reflect the latest trends in women's fashion. But the guidelines for the upcoming school year were published in the spring, and as new trends emerged each fall students found ways to subvert the president's restrictions against banned items. By the time the 1924-1925 Catalog was released, the president had essentially conceded to the era's fashion trends stating: "as it is impossible to enumerate the many fads which arise from time to time" Tapley advised, "we desire to urge upon all that they observe the spirit as well as the letter of the rules, and thus avoid the embarrassment which must unavoidably arise from any attempt to follow extreme fashion or inappropriate dressing." Tapley tried to curb the students' dress by placing restrictions on expensive and immodest clothing such as crepe, silk, net, lace and velvet. And to deter students from purchasing such contraband items on the rare occasions when they visited Atlanta, the university required each student to bring all the clothing they would need for the school year, along with an itemized list of all the articles contained in their trunks to be turned over to their assigned hall matron when they arrived in the fall for registration.

⁵⁴⁵ According to Lowe, "Flapper attire posed challenges to both black and white women's respectability, but for African American women the challenges were complicated by long-standing racist stereotypes that portrayed black women as naturally imbued with primitive sexual desire." Lowe, *Looking Good*, 125.

Tapley also made concessions for graduating students and for special occasions. During evening receptions, Founders' Day and Class Day celebrations, Tapley permitted female students to wear a "simply made and simply trimmed" white dress and high heel shoes, as long as they were black. For the Graduate Reception, seniors were allowed to bring with them one "special reception dress," which the president had to approve beforehand. At all other times the students had to wear dark wash dresses or skirts, with a white blouse, low cut oxford shoes and stockings made of "strong black cotton."⁵⁴⁶

The 1924-1925 academic year was particularly difficult for Spelman officials who sought to moderate their students' dress. A special insert included in the 1925-1926 college catalog reflected the president's exasperation with the students' refusal to abide by the schools' regulations. To the parents and patrons of Spelman, Tapley wrote: "Is it not possible to provide your daughter's entire wardrobe before she leaves for school? We desire to do away with the incessant requests of girls to buy clothes after they reach Atlanta." "For this reason," Tapley continued, "we wish you would read most carefully what we state about clothing." Without the support of the students' parents, who appeared to be far less concerned about monitoring their daughters' fashion choices than they were about ensuring their daughters received the best collegiate education, officials at Spelman could no longer effectively police students' dress.

The students' same strategy of passive resistance or peaceful rebellion that ended the Spelman dress code was also successful in transforming students' social life on campus. In her annual report to the Spelman Board of Trustees in 1924, Lucy Tapley

⁵⁴⁶ Lowe, *Looking Good*, 33, "Note to Parents," *Spelman College Catalog*, 1925-1926.

indicated, “One of the great concerns of administrators of a large student body is that of a healthy social life.” Each year, the president explained, “the problem of providing adequate social intercourse for college students becomes (sic) more and more acute as the college environment increases.” That year, the president explained, Spelman initiated an experiment in “giving greater opportunity” for allowing “the spontaneous expression of the social instinct.” To that end, a designated “social room” was set aside to allow “those who will be leaders of their generation” to “meet their friends under more normal conditions” that had previously been possible.⁵⁴⁷ Tapley attributed the “increasing prosperity in the home,” which made leisure more possible, and “in the face of pernicious distractions to which young people are subjected” they were in need “of training for the wholesome enjoyment of leisure.” The President insisted that Spelman was doing its utmost to provide increased opportunities for recreation and entertainment on campus, which the students “organized and supported.”⁵⁴⁸

Fisk Student’s Strike

Where students at Spelman found school officials reluctant, but ultimately willing to concede to certain demands as an inevitably fact of the modernization of collegiate life, Fisk students encountered an administrative body, led by Fayette McKenzie, that was openly hostile to change. Conflict between students and the administration had been escalating since the end of the war. Throughout this period, most confrontations between the students and administration remained a private

⁵⁴⁷ Lucy Hale Tapley “Annual Report,” *Spelman Messenger*, April, 1924, Vol. 40 No. 7.

⁵⁴⁸ Lucy Hale Tapley, “Annual Report,” *Spelman Messenger*, April, 1925 Vol. 41 No. 8, 5-6.

institutional matter, with students acting as their own advocates.⁵⁴⁹ Though the students were persistent in the efforts to repeal the rules and regulations, they failed to find a sympathetic ear for their formal complaints against President McKenzie's "rules of good conduct."

In June 1924, Fisk students received an unexpected boost when famous alumnus W.E.B. Du Bois, who was in attendance for the graduation of his daughter Yolande, became aware of the magnitude of student discontent. In response to the information he gathered, Du Bois, who was scheduled to deliver a speech at the alumni dinner, instead used the platform to offer a scathing critique of the McKenzie administration. Condemning McKenzie's mistreatment of the students and his questionable racial politics and policies, the *Crisis* editor went on to enumerate the many and varied regulations that the Fisk president had implemented stating that the majority were simply "humiliating and silly."⁵⁵⁰

⁵⁴⁹ In 1921, a group of students approached one of the board members who had come to hold religious meetings, and confided in him their concerns about McKenzie. The trustee then conducted his own investigation of the president, and reported his findings to the president and trustees noting that the young men and women of the university were subject to repression, tyranny, insult and discrimination. Lester C. Lamon, *Blacks in Tennessee, 1791-1970* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1981), 233.

⁵⁵⁰ The following are examples of the published regulation, which students were opposed to. Many of the rules governing student life were unpublished, an issue the students contended as well. A Dress Committee, comprised of faculty, was assigned to review all students clothing when they arrived to campus. Any articles of clothing or jewelry that did not conform to the stated guidelines were sent home immediately. Similarly, "any breach of the recognized rules of good conduct," was punishable by suspension or dismissal. According to the president, "profanity, betting, gambling and the use of intoxicants, or tobacco" was forbidden, as was "dancing between the sexes...in any University Building." While "Promiscuous dancing and card playing" were "strongly disapproved." Faculty chaperones attended all social, musical, and dramatic functions, which were strictly limited to Friday evenings. And all student organizations were required to submit a schedule of their meetings to the Dean for approval to ensure the attendance of a faculty member at all gatherings. In addition to the "multitudinous and complex" rules imposed by the administration, during his tenure McKenzie had abolished the student government, forbidden the organization of fraternities or sororities, and dismantled the *Herald*—the oldest black collegiate student newspaper. "Conduct," F.A. McKenzie, Box 14, Folder 17. N.D. F.A. McKenzie Collection, Fisk University Franklin Library Special Collection-Archives.

Du Bois denounced the president for failing to support or encourage student initiative and self-expression, citing both the suppression of the Student Council and the *Fisk Herald*—the oldest black collegiate newspaper—as two of the president’s most egregious actions. McKenzie stifled student expression in other ways, most conspicuously through his system of surveillance, requiring all meetings of student organizations to have a faculty member present. “The present racial situation is systematically kept from Fisk students,” Du Bois continued, “as well as the truth concerning the great liberal movements of the world.” Equally disturbing to Du Bois was McKenzie’s prohibition against students forming fraternities or sororities on campus, which he argued was cutting off Fisk graduates “from the best fellowships for life.”⁵⁵¹

Still, Du Bois directed his harshest criticism towards the president’s mistreatment of women students at Fisk. Regarding the infamous women’s uniform requirements, Du Bois had this to say: “I do not for a moment dispute that the parents of the girls at Fisk University tend to waste money on their clothes, but I do say that New England old maids dressed like formless frumps in dun and drab garments have no right utterly to suppress and insult these children...even if they want to wear silk...” Rather than impose “stiff rules and harsh judgments,” Du Bois suggested that inculcating the students with an appreciation for “good taste in dress is a far more subtle matter.”⁵⁵²

⁵⁵¹ “Fisk University has no right autocratically and without consultation with or listening to the advice of students, parents and alumni to ban these powerful and influential organizations and cut their graduates off from the best fellowships for life.” According to Du Bois, much of McKenzie’s restrictions regarding student organizations was linked directly to his fundraising campaign, and his desire to not antagonize white southerners, who were to be the main source of funding for the school.

⁵⁵² W.E.B. Du Bois, “Diuturni Silenti,” *The Fisk Herald*, Vol. 33 No.1, 1924.

The newly resurrected *Fisk Herald* published Du Bois' speech along with similar accounts denouncing the Fisk president. Established by the Association of Fisk Clubs, the *Herald* was "dedicated to the emancipation of the Fisk Spirit from its present slavery."⁵⁵³ Printed between the summer of 1924 and spring of 1925, the *Herald* featured testimony from former (white) faculty and staff, as well as both current and former students to provide further evidence that McKenzie was unfit to serve as president of Fisk. In his testimony, Alphonse D. Phillipse—professor of modern languages—explained the regulations regarding "immoral conduct." The following offenses were also considered "crimes" at Fisk: students of the opposite sex were forbidden to meet without the permission and presence of a chaperone, were prohibited from walking together, and that if a young woman merely cast a smile from her dorm room "window to a youth below," she would be sent home.

According to Phillipse, the regulations disproportionately targeted the women students at Fisk. In the majority of cases, the young women expelled from the university were guilty of nothing "more than defiance of rules which are particular to Fisk, and are not elsewhere looked upon as crimes."⁵⁵⁴ Women who left the campus without permission also found themselves subject to dismissal. In one specific example cited by Phillipse, a co-ed faced expulsion for leaving campus without permission. During the

⁵⁵³ *The Fisk Herald*, Vol.33 No.2, 1925.

⁵⁵⁴ The following offenses were also considered "crimes" at Fisk: students of the opposite sex were forbidden to meet without the permission and presence of a chaperone, were prohibited from walking together, and that if a young woman merely cast a smile from her dorm room "window to a youth below," she would be sent home. Women who left the campus without permission also found themselves were also subject to dismissal. In one specific example cited by Phillipse, one co-ed faced expulsion for crossing the street without permission to visit a professor to inquire about her grade. Phillipse' testimony also revealed that students were "disgruntled" for reasons other than the "numerous regulations and prohibitions," and in particular with the quality of the food, which he stated was "unfit to eat." Moreover, several of the women students had to leave the university due to "improper eating. "The diet," the professor stated, "is determined from economic considerations only." Phillipse spent two years at Fisk. "Testimony of Alphonse D. Phillipse," *The Fisk Herald*, Vol.33 No.2 1925, 16.

discussion of the students' disciplinary case, the faculty learned that the student had merely walked across the street to the building where her professor lived to inquire about her grade. Miss Abigail Jackson, who worked as a hall matron at Fisk from 1916 to 1919, also recalled that when she was first assigned to monitor the third floor of Jubilee Hall, she "found there an utter disregard for the things which make for a fine life in a dormitory." After a few weeks, it became apparent to Jackson that the students were not defiant, but rather "the trouble was rebellion against petty authority in an aggravated form."⁵⁵⁵ Jackson, who was sympathetic to the young women's complaints, attempted to help them organize a student government amongst the women in Jubilee Hall. No sooner had the first "women's meeting" been called—at which Jackson revealed she "learned more in that hour than" she had the entire time she had been on campus, the Dean of Women banned any subsequent meetings. By the spring of 1919, Jackson, like many faculty at Fisk during McKenzie's tenure, left, telling *The Herald* that she felt "helpless and of little use."⁵⁵⁶

While Du Bois' extensive publicity change garnered national attention about the conditions at Fisk, it ultimately failed to bring about meaningful change at the university. The students, however, continued to organize on their own behalf. In November 1925, a group of seven student representatives appeared before the Board of Trustees, whose members had come to campus for the Founder's Day exercises, and presented them with a list of requests. First on the students' list was lifting the ban on fraternities and sororities at Fisk. Next, the students asked: to elect a Student Council to

⁵⁵⁵ "Testimony of Miss Abigail Jackson, *The Fisk Herald*, Vol.33 No.2 1925, 21.

⁵⁵⁶ That McKenzie had created a spirit of distrust and frustration among the faculty was widely known and reported by students, alumni, and faculty alike. "Testimony of Miss Abigail Jackson," *The Fisk Herald*, 22.

work with the faculty to revise the rules of conduct, to permit senior students to leave campus after school hours without having to first ask permission, and allow senior women to chaperone underclassmen. The proposed student council would also cooperate with the faculty to amend the dress regulations, as students complained that having to purchase a separate wardrobe for school purposes was an unnecessary and burdensome expense. The students also requested “the petty rules governing social relations be removed” on the grounds that prevented the formation of normal relations between students of the opposite sex, that the “great number of rules exaggerates the conditions so as to cause undue sex-consciousness, and that the prohibition of students attending social functions together created a spirit of distrust and spirit of oppression on campus.”⁵⁵⁷ After meeting with the students, the Board agreed to consider an amendment to the women’s dress code and authorize the organization of a Student Council and Athletic Association. McKenzie, however, vetoed the Board’s recommendations. Within a few days of McKenzie’s veto, the students’ organized two consecutive after-hours protests.

Tension between the students and administration remained palpable throughout December and January. On February 4, 1925, the conflict that festered for so long under the surface of the campus’ social and political life erupted in the form of open and organized rebellion against the administration. The President had assembled the students in the chapel to announce the Board’s official ruling against any amendments

⁵⁵⁷ The students also submitted a brief list of fifteen “major grievances and requests,” to the Board of Trustees, which included the following: (1) an opportunity to go before the faculty and be heard; (2) a student council; (3) Fraternities and sororities; (4) A recognized Athletic Association; (5) Modification of the Dress Rules; (6) Privileges for upper class men; (7) Student employment in respectable positions; (8) Student publications; (9) Sympathetic chaperonage; (10) Fewer compulsory exercises; (11) Examinations so arranged as to permit the student time to go away for the holidays; (12) Spirit of Distrust; (13) Spirit of oppression; (14) Different quality of teachers; (15) Race element. F.A. McKenzie collection, Box 14, Folder 18. Fisk University Franklin Library Special Collection-Archives.

to the university's established rules and regulations. After the meeting, the students left the chapel and returned to their rooms for the evening. At 11 p.m. the campus came alive as group of students staged a "noisy but non-violent protest."⁵⁵⁸ Just after midnight, on February 5, 1925, fifty white police officers stormed onto Fisk's campus after receiving a call from the President that there was a riot at the school. According to McKenzie, more than one hundred men from Livingston Hall had disregarded the ten o'clock curfew, and instead had taken to the campus banging trashcans, breaking windows, and shouting, "before I'll be a slave, I'll be buried in my grave."⁵⁵⁹

The officers arrived to campus shortly after McKenzie placed the riot call. According to an account published in *The Athenaeum*, the policemen went through the "rooms of boys and girls alike, bullying, insulting, and in many cases maltreating our finest and most cultured sons and daughters." That the police entered Jubilee Hall—the oldest and most prominent building on campus, and as the women's dormitory was a act of blatant aggression and intimidation. Moving on from Jubilee Hall, with pistols drawn and clubs out, the police entered Livingston Hall and forced the men in out of their beds and into McKenzie's office. McKenzie identified seven "ring-leaders," the same seven who had appeared before the Board of Trustees in November, and immediately had them arrested on felony charges of destruction of property and inciting to riot.⁵⁶⁰ The police issued warrants were issued for the two remaining leaders. The other

⁵⁵⁸ The editors of *The Athenaeum* published the accounts of the Fisk Strike as an act of solidarity with their peers. *The Athenaeum*, Vol.1 February, 1925, 160.

⁵⁵⁹ According to the account given in the *Athenaeum*, McKenzie waited until after the demonstrators had returned to their rooms to call in the police. *The Athenaeum*, Vol.1 February, 1925, 161.

⁵⁶⁰ It was later proved that many of the students were not present on campus at the time of the initial disturbance.

demonstrators had to either sign a statement denouncing the protest or immediately withdraw from the university.

News of the disturbance at Fisk spread quickly through Nashville's black community. The public outrage over McKenzie's decision to call the police to one of black America's most respected institutions proved to be a catalytic moment.⁵⁶¹ The next day, the Fisk student body held a mass meeting in the school's chapel and voted to strike until the Board of Trustees agreed to review their requests and McKenzie tendered his resignation.⁵⁶² For two months, over three-quarters of the Fisk student population went on strike—they boycotted classes and refused to attend mandatory chapel. The students staged peaceful protests and picketed in front of the campus gates while white police guards stood by to keep away any outsiders. The contrast between the striking men and the white police guards, who the president had ordered to stand guard, was a powerful statement of black resistance against white oppression as the students would not be intimidated by McKenzie's tactics to break up the protests. An equally conspicuous symbol of the students' resistance was the strike uniform that Fisk co-eds wore—a visual representation of the students' revolt against the ultra-conservative traditions and paternalism. In their flapper dresses, silk stockings, and high heels the college women transformed Fisk's campus, which had for so long been an oppressive space of white paternalism, into the site of their liberation from Fayette McKenzie's "reign of terror."⁵⁶³

⁵⁶¹ News of the police on Fisk's campus was particularly upsetting to Nashville's black community because of recent incidents involving the murder of two black men, one by a policeman and the other a shopkeeper.

⁵⁶² *Chicago Defender*, "'Oust Dr. M'Kenzie', Fisk U. Students Insist," February 14, 1925, p.1, col.1.

⁵⁶³ *Chicago Defender*, "Students Say Fisk Prexy Held Grudge," Mar 21, 1925, p.A1, col.8, Richardson, *A History of Fisk University*, 84-89.

The Howard Student Strike

When Howard students organized a campus-wide strike on May 7, 1925, to eliminate the mandatory “twenty cut rule” in R.O.T.C. and Physical Education, college women joined their male colleagues on the picket lines and in demonstrations on campus.⁵⁶⁴ By participating in these demonstrations, Howard co-eds clearly articulated their vision of New Negro womanhood by claiming a public and militant role in campus life. And when Howard officials tried to break the student strike by threatening suspension, the women of Miner Hall, “met by classes and voted solidly to accept suspension when it comes and go home.”⁵⁶⁵ The residents of Miner Hall issued a powerful statement to school officials that directly challenged the idea of the dormitories as private, feminine and domestic spaces. Instead, the students reclaimed the dormitory as a site of empowerment and resistance.

Throughout the post-war period, the campuses of Fisk, Spelman, and Howard were important sites of college women’s empowerment and resistance. As young, black women coming of age during a period of cultural and political reform, and amongst the upheaval of conventional social mores, college women expressed their dissatisfaction with their subordination within sex-segregated leadership structures within prominent campus organizations and asserted themselves within the leadership structure and governance of the New Negro Student Movement. Indeed, for college women in the early 1920s, the college campus became the platform through which they asserted their ideas and opinions as they headed student organizations and through their writings in

⁵⁶⁴ When a student accumulated a total of 20 unexcused absences in physical education and R.O.T.C. combined, he was suspended from the college for the remainder of the quarter.

⁵⁶⁵ “Howard Faculty Serves Ultimatum on Student Body,” *The Daily American*, May 13, 1925. James Stanley Durkee Papers, Box 32-1, Folder 47. Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University.

student publications. And as politically and culturally emancipated women, students at Fisk, Spelman, and Howard pushed back against the idealized feminine domesticity that had defined women of the earlier generation through their conspicuous choice of dress. The flapper “uniform” served as the ultimate a visual marker of college women’s ideals and aspirations as modern—assertive and independent—women.

“A New Spirit”: 1925-1936

By 1925, black collegiate culture had undergone a dramatic transformation. Through their individual and collective acts of resistance and protest, black collegians ushered in a period of education reform unprecedented in black higher education. For many college men and women, the failure of the First World War to bring about meaningful gains for black Americans combined with the period of white repression and violence that followed it to provide impetus for student resistance to oppression on campus. Black collegiate culture also changed as a result of confrontations between students and educators over the outdated authoritarian and moralistic Victorian-era policies that forced students’ compliance through harsh discipline and punishments.

The students confronted the entrenched system of missionary paternalism in diverse and creative ways. Students like Myles Paige, Aaron Payne, Peter Richardson, and Oliver Ross challenged academic policy and Fisk University’s overarching pedagogy through their protest of the compulsory supervised study hours. Set in the months directly after the end of the First World War, these former Student Army Training Corps (SATC) cadets reflected the post-war militant activism that rejected accommodation. Howard University’s formidable Student Council demonstrated the

importance of student self-government. During the early 1920s, the Student Council effectively mobilized the student body and organized strikes and boycotts to force the administration to accede to their demands for campus and curricular reforms. Likewise, the New Negro generation of college women played an important role in the modernization of black campus culture through their collective writings on womanhood, their modern fashion choices, and demands to be included as leaders in student organizations.

The post-war generation of black collegians also focused on organizing and activism beyond their own campuses as part of a larger national and international youth movements. These students founded the first national black student organization, the American Federation of Negro Students (AFNS). Organized as a broad movement, the AFNS harnessed the collective power of black collegiate youth to aid in the social, political, and economic freedom of the race. During the AFNS' three years of operation, its members campaigned and canvassed black communities throughout the country, raising awareness about the need for black colleges and universities include more black history and culture into their curriculum and to support the economic development of the black community.

The student uprisings at Fisk and Howard in the spring of 1925 marked a watershed moment in the turbulent post-war period by effectively bring to an end the long era of missionary paternalism in black higher education. In April 1925, Fayette Avery McKenzie, president of Fisk University tendered his resignation. Exposed for his tyrannical leadership of Fisk University during the student strike in the spring of 1925,

Fayette McKenzie left the school under a shroud of controversy and embarrassment.⁵⁶⁶ That same summer, Lucy Hale Tapley also submitted her resignation as Spelman's president to the school's Board of Trustees.⁵⁶⁷ The circumstances surrounding Tapley's resignation after almost two decades of service at Spelman was never made public, nor was the information regarding her impending departure from the college announced until two years later, in the summer of 1927 when she officially stepped down. Perhaps Tapley, was tired of battling with the students, or maybe given the state of student unrest at Fisk and Howard, Tapley feared that she too might succumb to a similar fate as her college at Fisk, and wished to depart on her own accord.

Not soon after, in February 1926, James Stanley Durkee ended his scandalous career as the president of Howard University. The campaign for his removal began following the student strike in May 1925 and continued through the summer and fall of 1925 and winter of 1926. Through a series of articles published in the *Baltimore Afro-American* written by a Howard graduate who went by the name "Alumnus," the sorted details of Durkee's mismanagement of the "Capstone of Negro Education" were revealed. In addition to his abuses of the students and faculty, "Alumnus" and also revealed that the president had accepted a concurrent appointment as the president of the Curry School of Expression, a private academy with a "whites-only admissions policy"—a decision, which ultimately spelled the end of his career at Howard.⁵⁶⁸

Throughout the early 1920s, students at Fisk, Spelman, and Howard had privately and publicly protested their administrators' oppressive rules and regulations,

⁵⁶⁶ Richardson, *History of Fisk*, 99-100.

⁵⁶⁷ Florence Read mentions that at the time she retired, Tapley was nearly 70 years old. A likely factor, among many that contributed to her decision to leave Spelman. Read, *Story of Spelman*, 208-209.

⁵⁶⁸ Logan, *Howard First Hundred Years*, 202-208, Williams, *In Search of the Talented Tenth*, 23-36.

which were meant to ensure students' conformity to an idealized image of black manhood and womanhood that would be more palatable to southern whites. Knowing they would likely face expulsion—a penalty that could, and did, irreparably harm their future academic careers—college men and women throughout the early 1920s refused to accommodate their institutions' draconian rules. These smaller acts of rebellion resulted in significant changes at the individual institutional level. But when Fisk and Howard students organized to strike in the winter and spring of 1925, their actions put a spotlight on the harsh discipline and daily insult students endured at black America's most prestigious institutions, leading to wholesale changes within black higher education.

Between 1925 and 1930, black collegiate culture underwent an unprecedented period of reform. College men and women had protested, agitated, and won basic rights and freedoms. The right to select one's own clothing, spend leisure time with members of the opposite sex on and off campus, hold dances on campus and attend socials off campus, were many of the rights black students could expect of a modern collegiate institution. So, too was it possible to form student clubs, organizations, and fraternal societies independent of faculty control and surveillance. Students also fought for and defended their right to freedom of speech in the form of independent student-run newspapers that reflected the ideas and ideals of the student body free from administrative reprisal. By the late 1920s, the idea of student government, once vigorously debated, had become commonplace at black colleges and universities. For black female collegians of the 1930s, the college campus education offered a realm of opportunities for leadership unknown to earlier generations of college women. Within

campus clubs and societies, in local community organizations and larger national and international student organizations, black college women occupied prominent leadership roles, shaping and changing the nature of black collegiate culture and student activism.

The success of the New Negro Student Movement of the early 1920s, forced college administrators to concede to many of the student demands to liberalize college rules and regulations and allow students a larger role in campus governance. Progressive and reform-minded administrators replaced the deposed benevolent tyrants—Fayette McKenzie and James Durkee. While, Lucy Hale Tapley's departure from Spelman similarly opened the door for a new administrative regime that would be more responsive to student needs. Incoming students in the late 1920s continued to build on the legacy of their predecessors. Indeed, the late 1920s cohort of black collegians entered college already politicized and radicalized with the belief that the basic academic and student freedoms, which the New Negro Movement had secured were their indelible rights. And these students continued to dismantle the racialized system of missionary paternalism and oppression that had held black higher education students hostage for more than a century.

No institution felt the force of student rebellion more strongly than Fisk. The student strike there publicized the deficiencies in the school's leadership, and raised public awareness of the ways in which black higher education had been hindered by systemic racial prejudice upheld by paternalistic white educators like Fayette McKenzie. Because the student strike had made such an impact, during the spring of 1925, Fisk was under pressure from alumni, students, and the black public to address

the students' concerns. Even more important was the way the university handled the student grievances would set an important precedent not only at Fisk, but also for black higher education in general.

Within the first year of the mass student strike the university implemented many of the students' reforms. An interim committee comprised of Fisk faculty and members from the board of trustees was formed for the 1925-1926 academic year. In the spirit of reconciliation, the committee agreed to reinstate all students who had been expelled for their participation in the student strike, approved the reorganization of student-run *Fisk Herald*, agreed to the students' request to organize a student government, and amended the women's dress code. The committee also began to compile a list of "experience[d] and "competent" black faculty and administrators.⁵⁶⁹ All other major changes the committee agreed were to be left to the new president, Thomas Elsa Jones.

In February 1926, the Fisk Board of Trustees announced that Thomas Elsa Jones, a Quaker and former missionary to Japan, who held a PhD in sociology from Columbia University, had been appointed as the university's new president.⁵⁷⁰ Like his predecessor, McKenzie, Jones was white and had no prior experience working in black higher education. But the board hoped that his youth and progressive politics would appeal to the students and alumni, who intimated that they preferred that the next president be black.⁵⁷¹ If there was any initial concern among the Fisk community about the hiring of Jones, an endorsement from Dr. H.H. Proctor, a prominent alumnus of Fisk

⁵⁶⁹ Lamon, *Blacks in Tennessee*, 243.

⁵⁷⁰ More on Jones' biography, see Joe M. Richardson's *A History of Fisk, 1865-1946* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2002).

⁵⁷¹ Lamon notes that "talk of a black president for Fisk had floated about in Nashville for fifteen years" but members of Nashville's black community had "avoided any demands for such a racial concession during the year-long crisis which led to McKenzie's resignation." Lamon, *Blacks in Tennessee*, 243.

and president of the Greater Fisk Committee of New York—which had been indispensable to the students’ efforts to remove McKenzie from Fisk—helped to dispel this apprehension. Of Jones, Proctor noted: “He believes in the largest possible liberty for students...and he may be expected to expand the present student activities. He is democratic in his tendencies, and is in accord with the plan to have the alumni represented on the Board of Trustees.” More importantly, Proctor noted that the new president intended to “have Fisk really representative of its constituency, a school of the people, by the people, and for the people in whose interest Fisk was built.”⁵⁷² Despite Proctor’s reassurance that Jones possessed a progressive attitude regarding racial politics, the students put the new president on notice. Written on behalf of the student body, an article in the *Fisk Herald*, informed their new president that as long as he exemplified “in his personality and administration the principles of student government, and student expression consistent with modern democracy ideals and ideals,” he would find “no more fruitful field in which to labor.”⁵⁷³

With the specter of the student strike hanging over him, Thomas Jones was eager to work with the students. During the first year of his administration, the president along with members of the student council, faculty, alumni, and board of trustees repealed the ban on campus dances. Jones also agreed to review the students’ proposal to establish Greek letter fraternities and sororities at Fisk. Jones agreed to establish a joint-committee of faculty and students to make recommendations and establish

⁵⁷² “Thomas Elsa Jones,” *The Greater Fisk Herald*, Vol. 1 No.7, June, 1926, 7.

⁵⁷³ “A New President,” *The Greater Fisk Herald*, Vol.1 No.4, March, 1926, 7.

guidelines for campus chapters. The Board of Trustees adopted these guidelines, which became effective on campus in the fall of 1927.⁵⁷⁴

During the next three years, President Jones worked with student leaders to enact further changes to democratize Fisk. Revising the outdated and draconian Fisk student code of conduct—which had been a major source of student discontent—was also among Jones’ top priorities. Collaborating with the Student Council, Jones and members of the faculty reduced “the rules of the University to a minimum,” and codified the new regulations in a student handbook. Under Jones, students at Fisk pioneered an elaborate system of student government on campus. In addition to the Student Council—which was the main governing body of the students, President Jones also agreed to a request from the students who lived on campus to organize separate men’s and women’s senates. The elected members of the men’s and women’s senate were responsible for matters pertaining to the welfare of the men and women, over circumstances in which either men or women only were involved, either on or off the campus, and represented the interests of boarding students on the Student Council.⁵⁷⁵

Student life also changed for the better in other ways under Jones’ leadership. Where president McKenzie had been opposed to students’ involvement in any inter-

⁵⁷⁴ The copy of the fraternities rules as presented to The Board of Trustees included fifteen points outlining the guidelines regarding the establishment of an interfraternal council that would consist of a member from each fraternity, sorority, and the Dean of Men and Women, which would have oversight of all interfraternal functions. To eligible for membership in a Greek letter society, a student had to complete 45 quarter hours, been in residence at Fisk for at least two quarters, and had passing grades in all his or her courses during the two proceeding quarters before they could be pledged. The interfraternal council was also to have a representative on the Student Council. Thomas Elsa Jones Collection—Board of Trustees—Minutes and Reports, 1927, Box 19 Folder 1, Minutes of a Meeting of the Board of Trustees of Fisk University, June 7, 1927, 3.

⁵⁷⁵ According to the Student Council Constitution, the council had original jurisdiction “over matters of conduct in which both men and women students are involved, either on or off the campus, and appellate jurisdiction over matters of conduct in which either men or women students are involved falling within control of the Men’s and Women’s Senate, recognizing that appellate jurisdiction in matters determined by the Council finally resides in the faculty.” Thomas Elsa Jones Collection, Box 69 Folder 1, Fisk University President, Collection—Students—Printed Materials, 1931-1932 Student Handbook, 28.

collegiate student conferences or organizations, which were not explicitly religious in nature or those he deemed to be too radical, Thomas Jones supported students' involvement in off-campus initiatives. For example, in 1928 students from Fisk attended the second annual conference of the National Student Federation of America (NSFA)—an organization representing the collective interests of students and student governments in the United States.⁵⁷⁶ From that conference, the students made important connections with other student activists from across the country and by the early 1930s Fisk University had established itself as a leader in both the national and international student movements.

Students also engaged in community service and activism. As part of president Jones' efforts to repair the university's damaged reputation within Nashville's black community, Fisk initiated a comprehensive community service program that included a training school for the city's religious workers, a student-run community Sunday school and a boy's club for Nashville youth. Fisk students, training for careers in social work and sociology also participated in the administration of the Bethlehem Center and Community House.⁵⁷⁷

While administrative-student relations improved significantly under Jones' new leadership, so too did the school's academic standing. Student protestors had been especially vocal about the deficiency of qualified faculty at Fisk—not to mention the

⁵⁷⁶ The NSFA was the outgrowth of the meeting of the Intercollegiate World Court Conference, held at Princeton in December, 1925. Mabel Holloway of Howard University was among the founding members, and was elected to the NSFA's governing body. Along with delegates from Howard, Fisk was the only black collegiate institution to send representatives to the NSFA conference that year.

⁵⁷⁷ Thomas Elsa Jones Collection, Box 19 Folder 4, Fisk Board of Trustees—Minutes and Reports, The President's Annual Report 1927-1928, 8. Fisk University Franklin Library Special Collection-Archives,

lack of qualified black faculty.⁵⁷⁸ Jones addressed their concerns by making it his mandate to restructure the university's leadership and administrative personnel to enable Fisk to attract and retain top black faculty. Leading scholars like Alain Locke, E. Franklin Frazier, Lorenzo D. Turner, and St. Elmo Brady, were among some of Jones' notable hires. Curricular reform followed, as the new faculty took the lead in instituting major changes. By the late 1920s, Fisk University had a prominent research-oriented faculty and also began granting graduate degrees. In 1930 the university became the first black institution of higher education to receive accreditation from the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, prompting Jones to state, "I think we are now definitely out of the era of soul-saving, thrill-chasing, educational well-wishing and are very much like any one of the first-class colleges."⁵⁷⁹

Like Fisk, Spelman College also experienced extensive reforms in the later half of the 1920s. While administrators at Spelman avoided the type of large-scale rebellion that occurred at Fisk and Howard, the early 1920s marked a period of discord between students and the aging president, Lucy Hale Tapley as students consistently pushed back against the restrictive rules that governed all aspects of student life. Spelman students embodied a new ideal of modern womanhood—politicized, independent, career-oriented, and fashionable—that was significantly different than the idealized model of Victorian feminine domesticity, piety, and virtue that characterized the early twentieth-century. As New Negro women, Spelman students expected their collegiate experience that reflected the realities of modern life and a rigorous education that would prepare them to enter the career of their choice.

⁵⁷⁸ During the student strike, it came to light that many of McKenzie's hires were white college students, who were barely qualified to teach high school, let alone university courses.

⁵⁷⁹ Jones as cited in Joe M. Richardson, *History of Fisk*, 114.

To lead Spelman into a new era, the college's board of trustees elected Florence M. Read to succeed Lucy Hale Tapley as president in the summer of 1927. A graduate of Mount Holyoke, Read had worked as the secretary of her alma mater's alumnae association, as a secretary at co-educational Reed College, and as the Executive Secretary of the International Health Board of the Rockefeller Foundation before being named as Spelman's next president. Though she was an unconventional candidate, the board believed that Read would develop Spelman into a "strong liberal arts college." Before accepting the position at Spelman, Florence Read demanded that the college's future be secured with an endowment, rather than the annual grants the college received from the General Education Board. Read and the General Education Board reached an informal agreement, and by 1935, for the first time, Spelman was completely independent of funding from missionary societies and organizations.⁵⁸⁰

With more control over the institution's finances, Florence Read was free to institute a series of progressive reforms without the interference of conservative-minded missionary organizations. The completion of the "University Plan"—an agreement between Spelman, Morehouse, and Atlanta University (AU) in 1929 was an equally important factor in bringing about policy reforms at Spelman. According to the plan, Spelman and Morehouse would continue to provide undergraduate training, while AU would offer graduate degrees and professional training only. Under the plan, students from AU would transfer to Spelman or Morehouse to complete their undergraduate degrees. Thus to bring Spelman in line with its goal of becoming a prominent liberal

⁵⁸⁰ Read, *The Story of Spelman*, 213. The agreement reached was that the GEB would provide one and a half million, on the condition that Spelman raise an equal amount. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. donated one million from Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial, 100,000 Julius Rosenwald (personally) and 100,000 from Julius Rosenwald Fund.

arts school for women, and to facilitate the transition for college women coming from AU, who were accustomed to the liberal policies at that institution, many of the college's stringent rules were either abolished or modified.⁵⁸¹

Extending greater social privileges to the students was first among the changes initiated by Florence Read. Through their active defiance, Spelman students had already forced changes in the school's dress code. But they still chafed under the strict regulations concerning guests and calling hours, off-campus restrictions, and administrators' resistance to student government. Read implemented a series of reforms that addressed many of these issues. She extended calling hours from once per week to every day from 4:30 to 5:30 p.m. for Juniors and Seniors, and three times a week from 4:30 to 5:30 p.m. for Freshman and Sophomores. She also made adjustments to the students' rigid daily schedule, allowing students more free time and autonomy to spend their leisure hours as they chose. Under Tapley, students at Spelman followed a strict schedule and moved around campus according to carefully choreographed boundaries that limited their movements on and off campus. And prior to Read's administration, access to the city of Atlanta beyond the schools' gates was virtually forbidden, and no student was permitted to leave campus without a faculty chaperone. Florence Read however introduced new "off-campus permissions," which allowed students to come and go from campus more freely. Juniors and Seniors were allowed to leave campus in most instances without having to report to their "Housemother," while Freshmen and Sophomores required the housemother's permission first. The new "permissions" listed

⁵⁸¹ AU transfer Rubye Weaver explains that when the announcement for the University Play was made, she as well as other students were "alarmed" to learn that they would have to complete their degrees at Spelman. Upon arriving at Spelman though, Weaver concluded that she and her peers had "found everything just as we had hoped and dreamed that it would be." Rubye Weaver, "Impressions of Spelman College," *Campus Mirror*, Vol. VII No.1, October, 1930, 5.

a series of approved areas, which educators deemed acceptable for students to visit, including “designated shopping districts” as well as the “west end”—the neighborhood adjacent to Spelman’s campus. Students also had permission to go to “town” once per week as well as the Ashby Theater, which was also on the approved list of leisure activities.⁵⁸²

Other significant developments during Read’s first years as Spelman’s president included the introduction of student government and intercollegiate organizing and activism. The introduction of the Community Council—later the Student-Faculty Council in 1930 was among one of the most important reforms initiated by Florence Read. Since the founding of Spelman, administrators had resisted the idea of instituting any form of elected student government.⁵⁸³ The council however diverged from this tradition by inaugurating for the first time in the institution’s history elected student representation in the administration of the college. Four faculty delegates along with ten student representatives served on the council, whose purpose was to serve in an advisory capacity to “promote the welfare of the college community” and foster greater communication and cooperation between the student body and faculty.⁵⁸⁴ The Community Council proved to be a success and the following year Read approved the organization of Spelman’s first Student Council.⁵⁸⁵

⁵⁸² Florence M. Read Collection, Box 12, Folder 29, College Rules. Spelman College Archive,

⁵⁸³ Instead educators emphasized that every student, as a member of the Spelman College community had a duty to “be loyal to Spelman standards of honesty and integrity through active cooperation on her own part in upholding all college regulations.” Spelman College Bulletin, 53.

⁵⁸⁴ Each class nominated representatives, who were then elected by the student body. In total, there were four members from the senior class, three from the junior class, two members of the sophomore class, and one freshman.

⁵⁸⁵ Alpha Talley, “Spelman College—To Grow or Not to Grow,” *Campus Mirror*, Vol. VII No.7, April 15, 1931, 5.

In December 1930, Spelman sent delegates to the 6th annual National Student Federation of America conference, held in Atlanta. The NSFA was the first major secular intercollegiate conference attended by Spelman students, who up to that point had almost had organized almost exclusively along religious lines, with their participation in the Atlanta Interracial Student Forum being the only exception. There was great enthusiasm for the work of the NSFA among the students who were especially drawn to the organization's anti-war stance. When the delegates returned to campus, the students voted to organize a campus committee of the NSFA. The students' involvement with the NSFA would prove to be catalytic, once connected with like-minded politicized, militant student activists, so that when a nation-wide peace strike was organized for April, 22, 1936, students from the "conservative and reactionary" Spelman College were counted among the college women and men who walked out of their classes in opposition to war.⁵⁸⁶

As Fisk and Spelman experienced radical transformations in the later half of the 1920s, the changes at Howard were comparatively subtle. During the Howard Renaissance of the late 1910s, students in the District had fought and won many of the freedoms still denied to their peers at Fisk and Spelman in the late 1920s. Students at Howard already enjoyed a relaxed atmosphere in terms of dress and social privileges, Greek letter sororities and fraternities were well established, the Student Council was a vital force in the area of governance and policy decisions, the *Hill Top* provided an outlet for student voice and opinion, and students were engaged in a variety of inter-collegiate organizations. Still, the selection of Mordecai Johnson as the first black president at Howard University was perhaps the most important, if unintended outcome,

⁵⁸⁶ Lyonel Florant, "Youth Exhibits a New Spirit," *The Crisis*, August 1936, 254.

of the students' strike against compulsory R.O.T.C. in the spring of 1925 and James Stanley Durkee's resignation a year later.⁵⁸⁷ The details regarding James Staley Durkee's failures as president of Howard were unearthed in the months of controversy following the mass student protest, and opened up a long-standing debate at Howard around the question of black leadership for black institutions.

In June 1926, a selection committee at Howard named Dr. Mordecai Wyatt Johnson as the new president of Howard University. Johnson was a graduate of Morehouse College, with additional degrees from the University of Chicago, Rochester Theological Seminary, and Harvard University. Within his first few years as president, Mordecai Johnson established himself as an effective administrator, determined to recruit and retain the best black scholars to teach and research at Howard.⁵⁸⁸ Moreover, Johnson was a staunch proponent of academic freedom and democracy, who allowed faculty to introduce and teach the courses of their choice. By the early 1930s, Howard University was home to a majority of the nation's more leading black intellectuals and scholars, including Sterling Brown in the English Department, William Hastie and Charles Houston who taught in the law school, Charles H. Thompson, founding editor of the *Journal of Negro Education*, historian, Charles H. Wesley, and Alain Locke in the philosophy department. Johnson also recruited economist and activist Abram Harris Jr., in 1927 along with political scientist, Ralph Bunche in 1928, and sociologist E. Franklin Frazier who came to Howard from Fisk in 1934.

⁵⁸⁷ While Johnson was the first black president to serve at Howard, Bishop John A. Gregg was the first black president-elect. After Gregg declined the university's offer, a search committee put forth the names of other candidates. After a vote, it was determined that the position would be offered to Mordecai Johnson. For more on the election of Mordecai Johnson as president see, Rayford Logan, *Howard University, The First Hundred Years, 1867-1967* (New York: New York University Press, 1968), 242-244.

⁵⁸⁸ Jonathan Holloway, *Confronting the Veil: Abram Harris, Jr., E. Franklin Frazier, and Ralph Bunche, 1919-1941*, (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 47.

Sophomore Lyonel Florant followed Frazier to Howard. A former student at Fisk and leader in the emerging militant youth movement of the 1930s, Florant was representative of a growing number of student activists who had become politicized by the acute economic situation following the stock market crash in 1929, continued racial violence, disenfranchisement, and the indignities of Jim Crow against black Americans. During his year at Fisk, Florant had been active in the radical Denmark Vesey Forum, a student organization that received national recognition in the fall of 1933 and spring of 1934 for organizing a mass non-violent student demonstration in protest of the lynching of Nashville youth, Cordie Cheek and boycotting a scheduled performance of the Jubilee Singers in a Jim Crow theater in Nashville.⁵⁸⁹ The incident created a major scandal for Fisk after Florant published an article about in the Baltimore *Afro-American*, detailing the harsh treatment he had received from the faculty for his participation in the protest. Though he faced expulsion for his actions, Florant defiantly wrote, that he was dedicating his life to the fight against Jim Crow and “I am willing to die fighting for it.”⁵⁹⁰

At Howard, Florant found a more progressive faculty and student body who were “more receptive to social action.”⁵⁹¹ During his first semester he joined the Liberal

⁵⁸⁹ In his life history, Florant explained that members of the Denmark Vesey Forum had proposed to invite the students from Vanderbilt, Peabody College, and the other white colleges in the city to march in protest with the students at Fisk. It was agreed at a mass meeting, that if the marchers were attacked, they would “offer no resistance.” Despite opposition from President Jones, and being prohibited from obtaining a parade permit to march through Nashville, the protest went ahead on Fisk’s campus. In addition to the student protest, the Denmark Vesey Forum “cooperated with every progressive movement in the city of Nashville and for the first time a relationship was established between the students and the residents of Nashville According to Florant, after the Cordie Cheek protest, members of the Denmark Vesey Forum were under extreme scrutiny from administrators, and “from then on, our work for the most part had to go on underground if we were to remain at the University.” E. Franklin Frazier Papers, Negro Youth Study Life History—Lyonel Florant, July 26, 1938, 43-46. Box 131-108 Folder 11, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University

⁵⁹⁰ Lyonel Florant, “Life History,” *The Crisis*, 48; Baltimore *Afro-American*, March 3, 1934, 2.

⁵⁹¹ Florant, “Life History,” *The Crisis*, 51.

Club, an underground student organization comprised of socialist and communist-leaning students. Florant had spent the summer before entering Howard traveling through the Delta and attending the Summer School of the Student League for Industrial Democracy, where it was impressed upon him “the need for vast changes in our economic system.”⁵⁹² Under the auspices of the Liberal Club, Florant and other student activists participated in several demonstrations including a mass anti-lynching picket organized by the N.A.A.C.P. where protestors gathered outside the office of the Attorney General with ropes around their necks. Florant also lead a student strike against war and fascism, and attended a the Student Congress Against War and Fascism in Brussels where he “gained a new outlook on the international aspects of the economic problems.”⁵⁹³

In 1936, *The Crisis* published an article by Lyonel Florant, who had recently been elected as the national secretary of the newly formed Youth Section of the National Negro Congress. According to Florant, a “new spirit” had manifested itself among the “Negro youth.” At the recent meeting of the National Negro Congress, held in Chicago, a youth section made up of student leaders from various groups had come together to discuss the most pressing needs of black youth, namely the struggle for “better economic opportunity for Negro youth, better educational facilities, adequate recreational facilities, and a peaceful society free from lynchings, fascist terror, and the imminence of war.” The youth section, Florant continued, “concretizes a development which has recently manifested itself in Negro student circles—a tendency to substitute for a narrow racial outlook an orientation based on a class composition” and a

⁵⁹² Florant, “Life History,” *The Crisis*, 51.

⁵⁹³ Florant, “Life History,” *The Crisis*, 52.

realization among “Negro students” that their “identity of interest” lay increasingly with that of “the working class.”⁵⁹⁴

Florant’s article reflected the shift in black student activism that occurred in the decade following the mass New Negro Student Movement protests. Less focused on institutional reform and campus-based organizing, black student activists in the 1930s formed strategic partnerships with local and community organizations and civil rights initiatives. They also organized direct-action campaigns, including consumer boycotts and voter registration drives. For example, at Howard students joined the New Negro Alliance (NNA), a local Washington, D.C., organization founded for the purposes of ending discriminatory hiring practices in general, and specifically in predominantly black neighborhoods.

By the mid-1930s, the national student movement was a large-scale national movement comprised of both black and white collegians. In addition to black student organizations such as the youth section of the National Negro Congress (later the Southern Negro Youth Congress), black collegians held high-ranking positions in interracial groups such as the communist-leaning National Student League, socialist Student League for Industrial Democracy, the American Youth Congress, National Student Federation, and American Student Union. The student activists of the 1930s were a diverse group of communists, socialists, liberals, and pacifists engaged in efforts to end racial discrimination in New Deal programs, to support anti-lynching legislation, and the American Youth Act—a bill that would provide aid “through work projects for unemployed youth, college projects for needy undergraduate and graduate students, and though financial guarantees of free public education in high schools and vocational

⁵⁹⁴ Lyonel Florant, “Youth Exhibits a New Spirit”, *The Crisis*, August 1936, 237.

schools.”⁵⁹⁵ Black students also attended international youth conferences organizing around economic and anti-war initiatives.

The social, cultural, and political landscape had changed drastically by the 1930s. The Depression had created an economic crisis among black youth. The war in Europe again threatened to embroil black youth in a war on two fronts—the international conflict against tyranny and fascism, and the domestic battle for basic civil rights and freedoms. As students organized to meet these new challenges in new and innovative ways, they also drew upon an established tradition of protest culture embedded within black collegiate culture and higher education that began in the early 1900s and would continue through the modern civil rights and black power movements from the 1940s through the 1970s.

⁵⁹⁵“The American Youth Act,” *Columbia Daily Spectator*, Volume LIX, Number 67, 16 January 1936, 2.

Conclusion

The names Charles Cooper, Charles Gavin, Madree Penn, Samuel Allen, George Brice, Hallie Queen, Aaron Payne, Myles Paige, Peter Richardson, Oliver Ross, Oscar C. Brown, Vivian Buggs, Genevieve Tylor, Bertha B. Lomack, Mable Holloway, Anita Turpeau, and Lionel Florant may mean little to the modern reader. And yet, these students were the architects of the early twentieth century black student movement that brought about major institutional changes within black higher education and established black collegians as leaders in the era's larger struggle for civil rights and freedoms.

The education of a leadership corps of professional black men and women was a central component of late-nineteenth and early twentieth century civil rights agenda. As the representatives of the race, the young black men and women educated at liberal arts institutions like Fisk, Spelman, and Howard would embody respectable citizenship and lead in the fight to achieve equal rights for all black Americans. The advent of radical civil rights organizations like the Niagara Movement (1905) and its predecessor, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored Peoples (1909), made the role of black collegians in the larger civil rights movement clear: students were to spend their time in school focusing on their education, cultivating their leadership skills, and remain well versed in the current race debates.⁵⁹⁶

Black collegians responded to the call to organize, and during the first two decades of the twentieth-century, there was a proliferation of student publications, organizations, literary clubs, debating societies, and the founding of several fraternal

⁵⁹⁶ See for example W.E.B. Du Bois's Open Call to College Men on behalf of the Niagara Movement: Niagara Movement (Organization). An Open letter to college men: the meaning of the Niagara Movement and the Junior Niagara Movement, ca. 1906. W.E.B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.

and sororal organizations, as students prepared to develop as future leaders of the race. In this process, students became better organized and adept at leading their own organizations. At Howard, in particular, where faculty had less oversight over student organizations, black collegians began organizing around broader civil rights issues including woman suffrage and electoral activism. The *Howard University Journal*, the student newspaper, provides a prime example: students wrote about a wide range of topics, including radical political ideologies such as Socialism and Communism, and their potential to use in the larger struggle for civil, economic, political, and social rights. The founding of an NAACP student chapter at Howard in 1913 also proved to be an important factor in both the politicization of black collegians, and advancing the notion that college youth had an important role to play in the wider movement for civil rights. Among the student chapter's central goals was to organize similar chapters on black college campuses throughout the country.

The Woman Suffrage movement of the 1910s and students organizing during the First World War proved to be a catalytic moment in the history of early twentieth black student activism. Through their participation in the suffrage movement and through their war service and organizing, black collegians came to see themselves as not simply preparing for future leadership roles, but as an established group within the larger black freedom struggle. For the female student populations at Fisk, Spelman the movement for women's suffrage provided a platform for black college women to demand the democratization of the leadership structures of student organizations, and to legitimize them as both "respectable" women and as skilled political leaders and activists. And when the President of the United States, Woodrow Wilson called on

black college men and women to declare their patriotism and dedicate themselves to the country's war effort, the students responded enthusiastically. College men at Howard and Fisk initiated a national movement to establish a training camp for black Officers. And those men who did not make it to the front lines, readily volunteered to join the Students' Army Training Corps. Black college women were equally committed to sustaining the country's "second line of defense." Students at Fisk, Spelman, and Howard organized auxiliary's of the Red Cross, war relief societies, purchased War Bonds, and participated in the nation's food conservation efforts.

If the war had helped to create a sense among black collegians that they were capable of organizing and leading initiatives on a large-scale, the post-war radicalization of black students along with the emergent youth culture of the 1920s solidified what had been slowly forming through the early 1900s, as a distinct black collegiate identity. Indeed, student politics reflected both the radicalization of black Americans, a reaction to the failure of their wartime service to produce tangible gains for black Americans, as well as the social and cultural changes brought about by the emerging youth culture of the 1920s, which challenged established gender, social, and cultural norms.

The net effect of this more coherent or national black collegiate identity manifested itself in two ways. First, black student activists organized the first national black student organization, the American Federation of Negro Students (AFNS) in 1923. The AFNS had a clear mission: to create a progressive "Negro Youth Movement" that would work specifically for the cause of black students. The organization's agenda was framed around several specific goals, namely the promotion of greater cooperation

among black college students, the cultivation of race pride, promotion of race culture in education, and to help facilitate among students an intelligent consideration of the race problem. The black press and race leaders applauded the students' efforts, and black collegians themselves demonstrated their approval of the AFNS, joining the organization in large numbers. By the second annual conference in 1924, nearly 6,000 students had become members, and there were chapters in fourteen schools.

Despite its initial success, the AFNS was disbanded in 1926. And though the reasons for the organization's demise are unclear, the AFNS has an important place within the early history of black student activism. The organization's emphasis on cooperative organizing, its de-centralized leadership structure, which enabled local student chapters to develop their own programs in accordance with the needs of each individual school, its emphasis on grassroots organizing, and member driven program strategy served as a model for black student organizations that would continue through the modern Civil Rights Movement. Student-run national civil rights organizations like the Southern Negro Youth Congress (1937) and the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (1960), adopted an organization model that very closely resembled the AFNS' leadership structure. Equally important, the AFNS established black collegians as extremely able and successful leaders in the movement for race progress and in the wider struggle for equality. While the battle for education reform would continue through the modern Civil Rights Movement, the AFNS put a spot light on the deficiencies in black higher education that forced the black public and college administrators to take notice.

The new distinct collegiate identity manifested itself in the wave of student protest in the 1920s and the reforms that followed. The ideals of individuality and freedom at the heart of youth culture greatly informed students' individual and collective protest and resistance to the oppressive black collegiate culture. While students throughout the early twentieth century had at various times organized in response to administrative policies that curbed their rights and freedoms, the mass student protests of the 1920s established at all three institutions a culture of dissent and resistance that persisted at Fisk, Spelman, and Howard. Indeed, the ideas, organizations, and desires of early twentieth century black student activists left a legacy that modeled effective organizing and established that was inherited by the generation of post-WWII student activists and civil rights leaders like John Lewis, Diane Nash, Ruby Doris-Smith Robinson, Pauli Murray, and Stokely Carmichael. These student activists who led the civil rights and black power movements would continue the tradition established by the earlier generation and continued to use their collective power to effect institutional and educational reforms and the continued struggle for black rights and freedoms.

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