January 2004

Creating an Image for Black Higher Education: A Visual Examination of the United Negro College Fund's Publicity, 1944-1960

MaryBeth Gasman
University of Pennsylvania, mgasman@gse.upenn.edu

Edward Epstein

Creating an Image for Black Higher Education: A Visual Examination of the United Negro College Fund's Publicity, 1944-1960

Creating an Image
for Black Higher Education:
A Visual Examination
of the United Negro College Fund's
Publicity, 1944-1960

By Marybeth Gasman
& Edward Epstein

A photograph shows black college students wearing nicely pressed, collegiate clothing [Figure 1]. They are holding their schoolbooks tightly across their chests. They are neat, clean, and studious. Across the page, the title reads "Access to education . . . in the American way."[1] Interspersed with crisply organized, modern looking type, this kind of image was the mainstay of 1940s

Marybeth Gasman is an assistant professor of higher education with the Graduate School of Education at the University of Pennsylvania and Edward Epstein is an independent artist and scholar, both in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Figure 1

and 1950s United Negro College Fund (UNCF) publicity.[2] But what is the visual pedigree of these images, and the layout and design in which they are situated? What did they say about the role of black colleges in American society? Lastly, how did they serve the purposes of the UNCF, and shape the public's, and most importantly, the donors' understanding of Black colleges?

A conglomeration of colleges and universities dedicated to the higher education of blacks in the United States, the UNCF came together in an effort to streamline the fundraising process for these institutions. In addition, the UNCF acted as a united voice for private black colleges. These colleges were founded primarily in the South after the Civil War (with the exception of a few in the North) by white and black missionary philanthropists with the express intent of educating the former slaves. Until the advent of desegregation, these colleges were the only option available for blacks seeking higher education in the South and, in many cases, the North as well.[3]

The image of black college students expressed in the above example of UNCF publicity is conservative and patriotic. The design is quite similar to mainstream forms of publicity that were used at that time. But it was by no means the only type of visual identity available to a black organization. By the mid 1940s, there was a vast field of black-run publications that had developed their own version of the modernist design idiom. Beginning in the 1920s, the thriving Harlem Renaissance had "produced a distinctive literary language, combining the folklore of Africa and southern black America."[4] The Renaissance was also the impetus for the modernist black arts movement in the United States.[5] This artistic influence spilled over into graphic design and could be seen on the covers of *The Crisis*, *Opportunity*, *The Messenger*, and *Fire*. According to Michele Y. Washington, "Multifaceted visual artists mastered the skills of designing, illustrating, and hand-lettering type. With vigor and passion, they turned out dust jackets, illustrations for book interiors, covers of race journals, and posters for film and theater."[6] As well as exhibiting African influence in their design, the photography in these publications tended to take a more assertive and critical stance on issues of race. Given the fact that uniquely African American approaches to graphic design already existed, it is curious that an organization like the UNCF, founded by blacks and for black institutions, would choose such a mainstream representation for itself.

Informed by bell hooks' claim that "all art is situated in history, that the individual choice of subject matter reflects that situatedness," this paper explores the fundraising solicitations made by the UNCF during the 1940s and 1950s.[7] Why did the UNCF, in its efforts to secure funds for black higher education, choose not to adopt the black-inspired designs being used for publicity by other African American organizations—but instead stick to a conventional style with themes that reflected loyalty and patriotism? What messages were embedded in the style as well as the content of the publicity? How did the UNCF publicity address the political, social, and educational situation at the time?

As noted in the above example, photographs play an important role in UNCF

publicity. Theorists of the image such as Roland Barthes have noted that photographs are not as important for the actual events they document, as the way they communicate their meanings to the audience. Details of a photograph, we are told, are interpreted using systems of symbols and meanings applied by the individual viewer.[8] Moreover, the techniques of photography allow for the selection and alteration of the material captured on film, making it easy for the photographer to construct and manipulate a reality that is independent of what he or she experienced.[9] Historian Joan Burstyn says of the choices photographers make about composition, lighting, and lens, "when we make such decisions, we, as photographers, at the most control, and at the least influence viewers' emotional and cognitive response to the world we have created."[10]

A number of scholars have applied the methods of visual communications to the analysis of images in education. In an essay entitled "Questioning the Visual in the History of Education," for example, Kate Rousmaniere analyzes classroom photographs and how they have been used to construct a conventionalized understanding of school practices. She has shown how the exact circumstances under which the photos are taken can be quite different from the messages they conveyed to the viewer, especially in light of their placement and use.[11]

Our study uses visual communications as a way to illuminate race relations and higher education from 1944 to 1960. It analyzes photographs, and also draws on the history of graphic design to discuss the style of the publications in which they are placed. The pieces that we analyze are historical—drawn from the papers of the United Negro College Fund. On the most basic level, our study looks at the appearance of individual publicity pieces (their style, layout, and the correspondence of text and image) and compares them to other materials available at the time, including publications from both the black and white worlds. It gleans several themes, including attitude toward social integration; the curriculum and needs of the black college; and idealization, loyalty, and patriotism. Finally, the study compares these messages to the desired goals of the UNCF—in particular, the need to appeal to black leadership, black alumni, and white donors. It situates the UNCF's overall approach within the history of post-War and Cold War politics. As well as adding to our understanding of the role of publicity in higher education, this paper uncovers an African American perspective on the history of graphic design.

UNCF Background and Makeup

At the end of the 19th century, black colleges had exhausted funding from missionary sources. Simultaneously, a new form of support emerged, that of white northern industrial philanthropists. Among these leaders of industry were John D. Rockefeller, Andrew Carnegie, Julius Rosenwald, and John Slater. Although as individuals certain of these industrial moguls may have had altruistic motives, the funding system that they created showed a strong tendency to control black

education and produce graduates who were skilled in the trades that served their own enterprises. Above all, the educational institutions they supported were extremely careful not to upset the segregationist power structure that ruled the South by the 1890s.[12] The philanthropists' philosophy was in direct conflict with that of many black intellectuals who favored a liberal arts curriculum. Black colleges such as Tuskegee and Hampton were showcases of industrial education. It was here that students learned how to shoe horses, make dresses, cook, and clean under the leadership of individuals like Samuel Chapman Armstrong (Hampton) and Booker T. Washington (Tuskegee).[13] On the other hand, institutions such as Fisk, Dillard, Howard, Spelman, and Morehouse were more focused on the liberal arts curriculum favored by W. E. B. Du Bois.[14]

Beginning around 1915, there was a shift in the attitude of the industrial philanthropists, who started to turn their attention to those black colleges that emphasized liberal arts.[15] Realizing that industrial education could exist side by side with the more academic curriculum, the philanthropists opted to exercise control over all forms of black education and create a conservative black leadership class ensuring that future black leaders would be educated in an environment that accommodated segregation. Attention from the industrial philanthropists was not necessarily welcomed by institutions like Fisk University, where rebellions ensued against autocratic presidents who were assumed to be puppets of the philanthropists.[16] In spite of these conflicts, industrial philanthropists provided major support for individual black colleges up until the late 1930s. As this support began to wane, black college leaders started to seek their own means of securing funding; and this situation led to the creation of the United Negro College Fund.[17]

Although a major player in the areas of fundraising, philanthropy, and higher education, the UNCF has received very little attention in the literature. For example, Scott M. Cutlip's book, *Fund Raising in the United States*, gives an exhaustive overview of the development of fundraising: important personalities, key organizations, and major donations.[18] However, he provides only three paragraphs on the UNCF. To his credit, he does acknowledge the Fund's role in popularizing the idea of a federated campaign—one in which many institutions band together for the good of the group.[19] Likewise, historians of education have focused their attention on the large sums of money that were contributed by philanthropists to black colleges beginning after the Civil War through 1935, and the motivations behind these contributions.[20] However, there is little interest in the period after 1935— precisely the period in which the UNCF was created.

In 1935, Frederick D. Patterson became president of Tuskegee Institute in Tuskegee, Alabama. Patterson quickly acknowledged that he lacked the fundraising skills and personal ties of past Tuskegee presidents Booker T. Washington and Robert S. Moton. Typically, a new president would look to the trustees of an institution for assistance with fundraising, but Tuskegee's trustees had become accustomed to a more passive role due to the prominence of the institution's past

presidents. Patterson found it difficult to run Tuskegee in an efficient manner while meeting the needs of poor black college students—many of whom lacked the means to pay their tuition. After much frustration, he began to correspond with a cadre of Black college presidents about the challenges of fundraising and possible solutions to these problems. The majority of college presidents wrote back to him detailing their dire financial situations and providing many anecdotal stories about their difficulties in approaching foundations for funds. Patterson realized from his correspondence that Black college presidents were competing against each other by soliciting the same organizations and donors—usually the large industrial philanthropies. Most prominent among the foundation supporters of black colleges was the Rockefeller-sponsored General Education Board (GEB). Founded in 1902 as an outgrowth of John D. Rockefeller, Jr.'s Negro Education Board, the GEB was a consortium of industrial philanthropies which had focused a portion[21] of its giving on black education.[22]

In 1944, Patterson established the United Negro College Fund as a combined appeal on behalf of 32 private Black colleges.[23] As a result of his previous interactions with the GEB, Patterson was easily able to convince John D. Rockefeller, Jr. to publicly endorse the UNCF and serve as its national chairman.[24] This affiliation connected the Fund to the corporate world. In addition to Rockefeller, Jr., men such as Alfred P. Sloan (General Motors Corporation), Harvey S. Firestone (Firestone Tire and Rubber Company), Richard K. Mellon (Mellon Bank), and Robert Woodruff (Coca Cola Company) were on the national UNCF board. Thus, the constituency of the organization was broad. The black college world itself encompassed revolutionaries such as W.E.B. Du Bois, moderates such as Charles S. Johnson, and was heavily supported by members of the Rockefeller, Ford, and Rosenwald families.[25] It was the goal of the UNCF to keep all of these constituencies on board and satisfied at a time when attempts by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) to overturn legalized segregation placed the future of black higher education in flux.[26] This goal was reflected in all of the organizations activities, including its publicity.

Comparing UNCF Publicity to Other Post-War Designs

This section of the article situates UNCF design within the spectrum of styles available during the mid-20th century. In doing so, it presents a brief history of design from the early to mid 20th century—first showing the progression of mainstream design, and then that of other African American organizations. Typical of post-war American design, the UNCF fundraising booklets had a clean, modern appearance. For example, the typography blended hard-edged sans serif fonts with type that had a hand-lettered look such as Brush Script. A representative example is the 1945 publication entitled "Thirty-two Steps Forward to a Better America." [Figure 2][27] On the cover of this piece, the title is splashed across the names of the 32 member
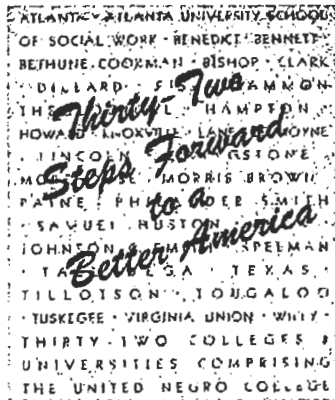
Figure 2

colleges, which appear in a smaller, upper-case lineal typeface. The Brush Script title font provides a tasteful counterpoint to the modern looking letters behind it. The copy on the inside is set with plenty of white space; photos are neatly arrayed, usually in an off-centered position.

The Evolution of Modernism

This piece exhibits many of the features of modernist design as it was popularized in the United States during the 1940s and 1950s.[28] After World War I, many design styles had emerged in Europe that were associated with avant garde art: Bauhaus, Constructivism, de Stijl, and art deco. These early modernist approaches later coalesced into a unified design approach referred to loosely as the international style.[29] This style was characterized by the strict use of a grid, a preference for sans-serif typefaces, off-centered layout, and an overall economy of means.[30] In contrast to these rationalist tendencies, the international style also inherited from modern art a strong dose of surrealism.[31] The collage and photomontage, which placed images of vastly different scales and types on an equal plane, first appeared in cubism and dada,[32] and became a staple of the surrealist art of the 1920s. This type of image making was a regular feature of advertising design in the 1930s in Europe, and later in the 1940s in the United States. An excellent example is the Swiss tourism posters designed by Herbert Matter in the mid-1930s. With their angled type, enormous faces, and tiny figures arrayed in every direction, they sweep the viewer into the space of the image and create a sense of speed and vertigo [Figure 3].[33]

Another prominent part of surrealism was the interest in spontaneously generated lines and shapes—figures that were said to emerge from the depths of the subconscious. These can be seen in the amoeba-like forms of Joan Miro's work, and the child-like drawing in work by Pablo Picasso and Paul Klee.[34] Again, this type of expression found its way into graphic design in the form of broad, flat biomorphic shapes and chicken-scratch illustrations. The tension between the rational, minimal, and geometric on the one hand, and the loose, freeform, and whimsical on the other, is characteristic of modernist design. In the UNCF publication, "32 Steps" these tendencies are evident in the contrast of the Brush Script over clean, geometric letter forms.

Figure 3

Graphic artists such as Paul Rand, Saul Bass, and Lester Beall adapted these modernist design ideas to corporate advertising and publicity in the United States.[35] Rand was well known for his comprehensive visual identity package for the IBM Corporation—elements of which are still in use today. This visual identity extended from logo designs on packages to signage in stores and offices, and pioneered the idea that the entire visual image of an organization should be carefully planned.[36] Modernist design became the standard in corporate identity and continued to be used through the 1970s. Thus, what had begun as a visual revolution came to be a comfortable part of the corporate mainstream in America.

A Black Take on Modernism

Aspects of modern design were adapted to very different ends by black journals and organizations. These uniquely African-influenced designs were prevalent throughout the country in black newspapers, on black organizational publicity, and on black literary publications such as Alain Locke's *The New Negro.*[37] They continued to be used through the early 1960s when they were supplanted by more art nouveau[38] designs, which were still heavily influenced by African and southern black culture. An early example is the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) publication, *The Crisis*, which sociologist W.E.B. Du Bois edited during the 1920s. Throughout the 1920s and into the 1930s, *The Crisis* covers included an interesting blend of art deco and African elements. A March 1928 cover uses deco-like zigzag patterns in its type but also presents an array of African masks and figures [Figure 4].[39] The January 1932 issue of *The Crisis* uses similar deco type on its cover and features an Aaron Douglas fresco in its pages. Douglas was known for his depiction of African and African American subjects in a flat geometric style that was strongly reminiscent of cubism.[40] Later editions of *The Crisis* blended deco and Bauhaus-inspired elements—bold sans serif type and flat stylized illustrations.[41] From the late 1930s on, the type became secondary to the cover photograph on *The Crisis*, which often featured a famous African American who had broken the color boundary.[42] These photographs were bold in their stance and composition.

An interesting collage of photos appears on a July 1940 cover of *The Crisis*—which has a hint of the surrealist dislocation of scale and place. It presents a war-time production theme using a bold array of photos and type—similar to modernist advertising done for The Con-
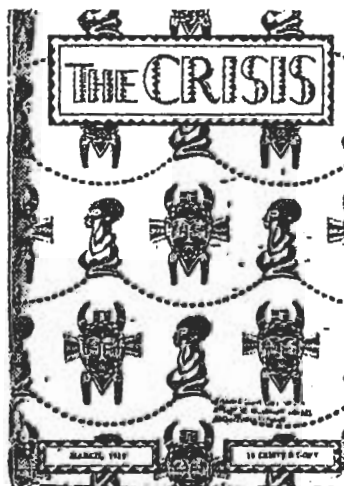

Figure 4

tainer Corporation of America around the same time. However, rather than an uncritically patriotic message, the words "FOR WHITES ONLY" are splashed across photos of military aircraft [Figure 5].[43] While both *The Crisis* and the UNCF designers drew inspiration from modernism, *The Crisis* designs were much bolder and more challenging to the status quo.
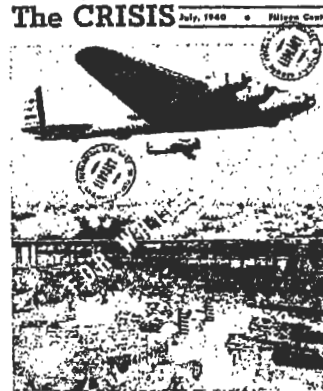
Appealing to a Corporate Audience

Another typical feature of modernist design overall is the use of visual schema to present data. The pictograph or schematic black and white figure first appeared in 1920s Bauhaus-inspired

Figure 5

publications as a way of showing numeric data.[44] By the 1950s, this type of figure was standard corporate fare. Examples of this can be seen in the 1952 UNCF report entitled "What are the Answers?" This piece presents itself as a casual exchange of information between two corporate leaders who happen to be members of the UNCF board: Alfred P. Sloan, Jr. (General Motors) and Devereux C. Josephs (New York Life Insurance). The publication opens with letters from each correspondent, reproduced as if photographed directly from the desk top: off-centered, slanted, with the original letterhead, signature, and typewriter print. The pages that follow give a "scientific" answer to the questions raised by Sloan to Josephs. Each page has a visual presentation of quantitative data, with multiple pictograph figures, maps, and bar and line graphs. The publication culminates in a table, which lays out the financial needs of the UNCF member colleges.[45] Thus, "What are the Answers?" is a typical display of quasi-scientific information about complex social problems.[46] The use of the graphs and pictographs follow a pattern of objectification of individual experience that typified many early to mid-twentieth century graphic presentations.[47] This type of display appeared in many corporate annual reports from the period as well as pamphlets, such as those published by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), which purported to deal with world wide social problems.[48] By adopting a corporate style of design and in particular, that of the annual report, the UNCF's "What are the Answers?" appeals to its audience as if they were shareholders in a company rather than donors to a college.

Visual Cues: Messages in Text and Image

Like the layout and design, the messages conveyed by photography in UNCF fundraising publications were conservative. Among the themes stressed were the interaction of blacks and whites in UNCF events, the curricula and activities of students on the campuses, the physical conditions at black colleges, and the loyalty

48

and patriotism of students. In all of these categories, images and the pairing of images and text reinforced the needs of black colleges but avoided any radical messages.

Mixed Gatherings, Mixed Messages

As mentioned, many images in the publications show the wealthy white benefactors of the UNCF colleges together with students, faculty, and administration. At a time when legalized segregation was still intact, the placement of blacks and whites together in a photograph was a delicate undertaking. Any image that suggested that the races were equal on a social level and that they were free to mix in all situations was likely to spark controversy. In film and on television, black characters[49] were almost always stereotyped. Roles were usually subservient (e.g. maids, butlers, and gardeners); black characters were portrayed as less intelligent, shiftless, and often the object of ridicule.[50] Even the suggestion of familiarity between blacks and whites was enough to cause an outrage. An incident involving UNCF national chairman, John D. Rockefeller, Jr. and a black child demonstrates this difficulty. During a 1944 UNCF radio broadcast, Rockefeller was photographed holding the girl on his lap. After the photo appeared in newspapers across the country, Rockefeller received many angry letters from whites. The tone of the letters implied that somehow Rockefeller's actions would lead blacks to believe that they were equal to whites and would cause the country to dissolve into a lawless state.[51] That blacks, if left unrestrained, would degenerate into lawlessness was an almost religious tenet of the racist mythology of the time.[52]

Where mixed groupings are depicted in UNCF publicity photos, the images are either formally composed, collaged, or the white figure is shown in a dominant position. One such mixed group appears in "America is Free to Choose" over the caption, "The Educated are Tolerant" [Figure 6].[53] The grouping of white UNCF supporters with black college leaders is shown standing in a line—there is no body contact and each member has his hands at his side. Although the message might refer to toleration as a quality of liberal democratic society—a quality desired by both potential black and white donors—it may also be read as a reference to the supposed lawlessness of blacks. To at least part of the audience, the interpretation of the caption might have been "The educated behave themselves," a message that was nicely reinforced by blacks standing in line with their white benefactors. Blacks are also shown behaving themselves under the tutelage of a white professor in a photograph in the "Thirty-two Steps" piece.
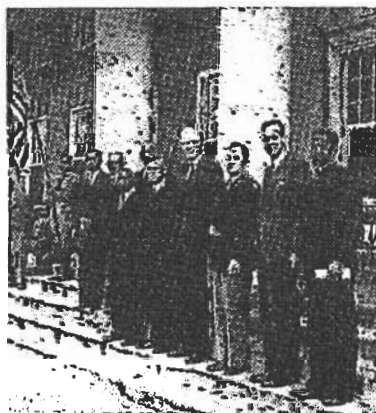

Figure 6

Across from the subheading "Pointing the Way," a standing white figure points to a paper on a table, surrounded by a seated group of black students.

Another photograph that shows the "correct" relationship between blacks and whites is on the cover of the June 1953 publication, *The Moblizer*, a monthly newsletter distributed to UNCF donors and campaign directors.[54] The subordinate role of the black participant is so carefully constructed as to obscure the true meaning of the image. In the photograph, Frederick D. Patterson, the President of the UNCF, shakes the hand of a much taller John D. Rockefeller, III, while Rockefeller holds an award certificate; Dwight D. Eisenhower stands behind the handshake but on the same side as Rockefeller, smiling. The slightly angled and more active stance of Rockefeller as he leans over toward the stiffer figure of Patterson suggests that the philanthropist is giving an award—when according to the headline, he is actually the recipient of a citation from the UNCF [Figure 7]. According to Rockefeller, Jr.'s colleague Walter Hoving, it was not uncommon for the black UNCF presidents to be asked to "step one step lower" in photographs.[55]

Other photographs seem to have been included to reinforce a sense of self importance among the white benefactors. *The Moblizer*, for example, has pages of photographs of corporate executives and their wives dining together; black college leaders, if included at all, are relegated to a secondary role. In one particularly telling photograph, guests seated at a head table include John D. Rockefeller, III, General Motors Chair-

Figure 7

man Alfred P. Sloan, and numerous other executives who are conversing with one another. Seated in the center of the head table is Morehouse College president Benjamin E. Mays, whose gaze is focused on the table; none of the other guests are talking with him, and their backs are turned away.[56] *The Mobilizer* clearly belongs to a genre of donor publicity that supplies extrinsic rewards to the donor – showing them at the center of social networks.[57] That blacks, with few exceptions, were not included in these networks is inadvertently conveyed by the pictures.

In addition to the many group photographs of wealthy donors in social situations the publications contained numerous individual portraits of UNCF leadership, both black and white. The presentation of these photographs again references the corporate report. Typical reports from the late 1940s and early 1950s included rows of portrait photographs of the company's board members as well as photographs of workers, shareholders, and customers in less formal settings.[58] Clearly, the UNCF wished to communicate with an audience comfortable with corporate styles of presentation.

A Focus on Industry

Images of students on black college campuses showed them to be productive and hardworking. In the publication "America is Free to Choose," the words "The Negro prefers to live by the American traditions of independence, thrift and self-help" appear under a photograph of a young black man, presumably a student, driving a tractor [Figure 8].[59] Another page in the same publication is a collage of photos of black students engaged in activities ranging from machine work to agriculture to medicine. The idea of productivity appears so often in the publication as to draw attention to itself. If not by the traditions of "independence, thrift, and self-help," what other tradition would the "Negro" prefer to live by? Accompanied by these photographs, the text seems to assume that part of the audience needs evidence to refute the racist myths of dependence and sloth.

Figure 8

Another curious aspect of the photographs of students at work is the continued prevalence of industrial and agricultural occupations. Again, it is important to note that by the time these publications appeared, the debate over liberal arts versus industrial curricula had all but ended.[60] Although at some black colleges, industrial and liberal arts curricula existed side by side, according to Henry Drewry and Humphrey Doermann, "Industrial education lost much of its attraction well before World War II."[61] As mentioned, by 1915, northern philanthropists began to shift their donations from industrial to liberal arts colleges; and of the 27 colleges in the 1944 membership roster, less than a handful were noted for their industrial curricula.[62] True, UNCF founder F. D. Patterson was also the president of Tuskegee —a noted center of industrial education—but as a veterinary scientist, his idea of "industrial" might have included medical technology and aeronautic (programs he had supported), not tractors and sewing.[63] But of the nine photographs that depict work in the 1944 "America is Free to Choose," four are of occupations generally considered manual: machine work, milking cows, driving tractors, and operating sewing machines.[64] In all of the photographs, there seems to be a deliberate selection of activities that emphasize making or doing as opposed to simply thinking. In short, given the opportunity to present its own picture of the activities at UNCF colleges, why would this black organization choose to showcase the past of these institutions rather than their future?[65]

A possible interpretation of the persistence of photographs of industrial occupations is that the UNCF wanted to avoid challenging the accepted social

status of blacks in the South, in order to garner funds from more conservative donors. The photos reinforce the sense of productivity and industry as the result of a UNCF member college education. Another look at this material, however, shows it to be quite similar to photography in U.S. state department pamphlets from the same period. One publication in particular, "The UNESCO Story," provides an excellent comparison. This publication, which tied support for UNESCO to cold war era themes, has numerous photographs of industrious looking workers and students from developing countries, usually in the presence of teachers and benefactors from the industrialized nations, taking advantage of the new tools and technologies provided to them.[66] That the publication is directed to wealthy benefactors as well as ordinary Americans is evident from the many photographs and lists of these individuals. The content and arrangement of these images sends the message that donations of capital and technology from industrialized regions can contribute to the lives of those in underdeveloped areas. The similarity of the UNESCO materials to those of the UNCF suggests another interpretation of the UNCF's emphasis on industrial occupations: a desire to show the positive impact of technology and business capital in an "underdeveloped" region of the United States.

This message is further reinforced by another detail that occurs frequently in the publications: maps of the southern region in which the UNCF member colleges are located. Similar maps appear in publications from the same time from the World Health Organization and UNESCO, to illustrate the distribution of food and supplies to various peoples of the world.[67] Like these UN graphics, maps in UNCF publications show its donors how their contributions are spread out over the "areas of need." [Figure 9][68]

Figure 9

Picturing Needs

Need is conveyed through a variety of means in the UNCF publicity. For example, the publicity piece entitled "A Significant Adventure," shows the experience of living at a black college to be quite an adventure indeed. Under the heading "Poor Housing Discourages Faculty," there appears a photo of a ramshackle two-story, wood frame house— apparently suggesting that black college faculty are living in substandard conditions.[69] In the same publication, a photograph of two faculty members inspecting books stacked up on the floor of a basement appears above the caption, "Limited Space Means Poor Library Service."[70] The identification of the space as a basement is clearly conveyed by the

52

exposed brick wall that surrounds the books [Figure 10]. Again, the focus on these inadequate conditions can be interpreted as an example of black colleges adopting a "beggar status." However, another view is that these conditions are likened to the sub-standard conditions depicted in United Nations' photographs of developing countries. Although in both interpretations the black college is placed in a subordinate role, the second one

Figure 10

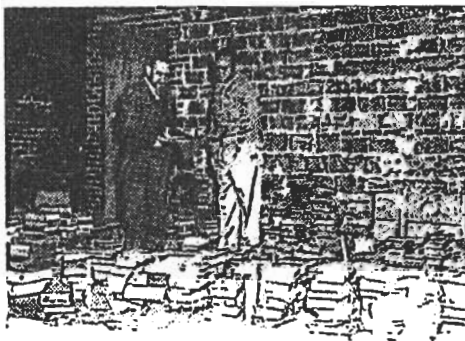carries with it the notion that improvement in education for blacks is congruent with the goals of democracy and capitalism.

Patriotism and Loyalty

Another theme in UNCF publicity images is that of loyalty to the United States. The connection between UNCF colleges and themes of freedom and democracy is most apparent in the inclusion of photographs of black students in uniform. Pictures of blacks serving in various capacities of the military are spread throughout the pages of "Thirty-two Steps Toward a Better America"—a publication that appeared near the end of World War II.[71] Likewise, the 1944 publication "America is Free to Choose" features a row of black airmen pictured in front of a bomber with the caption, "The Negro is making a substantial contribution to the war effort." [Figure 11][72] The text itself begins with the words "It is self-evident . . . ," an obvious reference to the Declaration of Independence. After the end of the war, UNCF photographs continued to suggest that activities at black colleges were contributing to America's
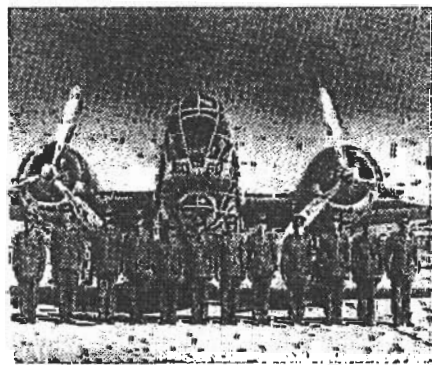

Figure 11

interests—showing that civilian efforts worked hand in hand with those of the military. An image that makes this connection is found in the 1950 publication "A Significant Adventure." This image depicts a black man in uniform on the left with a group of young black nursing students on the right. The caption underneath, enclosed in a stylized coat of arms, reads "Loyal citizens serving their country." [Figure 12][73] This message seems to suggest that service to the United States may be either in the

53

military or in any form of hard work. Once again, the images point to another interpretation of the focus on industry: that black colleges contribute to or strengthen the United States.

Patriotism is also conveyed through the style of the photographs, which paints a youthful picture of life at the black colleges. For example, in "America is Free to Choose," an image of a male and female black student appears over the caption "The private Negro colleges have been the major source of leadership in the past and are the hope for providing leaders for the

Figure 12

future" [Figure 1].[74] The subjects are photographed from a low vantage point so as to emphasize their height. Their features, which are ideal, are softened slightly so as to emphasize geometric form over individual identity. Another nearly identical photograph appears in "A Significant Adventure," also with a male and female couple, also photographed from a low vantage point, and lit in a similar way.[75] The stance of these photographs is strikingly similar to 1920s and 1930s propaganda photos from the Soviet Union, such as those made by Alexander Rodchenko and El Lissitzky [Figure 13].[76] In an essay entitled "Photography and Electoral Appeal," Roland Barthes describes a similar idealization in campaign photographs from the 1950s. According to Barthes,

> A three-quarter face photograph [i.e., viewed from an angle] . . . suggests the tyranny of an ideal: the gaze is lost nobly in the future, it does not confront, it soars, and fertilizes some other domain, which is chastely left undefined. Almost all three-quarter faced photos are ascensional, the face is lifted towards a supernatural light which draws it up and elevates it to the realm of higher humanity . . . .[77]

In the UNCF's case, the idealization of black youth reinforces a patriotic and optimistic view of America.

In light of the emphasis on patriotism, the connection between supporting the UNCF and the cold war themes of freedom and democracy becomes even clearer. Numerous titles, head-

Figure 13

54

ings, and captions in UNCF pamphlets advertise the link between the organization's goals and those of "the free world": "The Tools of Freedom"; "America is Free to Choose"; "Education Means Progress"; and "Living Democracy." Similarly, the U.S. state department's "UNESCO Story" links worldwide economic development and national security. It specifically mentions U.S.-Soviet competition as a reason to support United Nations efforts. It is also significant that many of the UNCF publications appeared at the same time that accusations of disloyalty were being made against many figures in higher education, government, and the media.[78] In certain cases, the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), whose members included southern conservatives such as Senator Martin Dies, Jr. of Texas who brought charges against educators because they had shown support for the black cause.[79] Thus it was necessary for the UNCF leadership to advertise to all the idea that its member colleges were on the right side of the struggle against Communism.

A Strategic Use of Images and Text

In the words of the UNCF founders, the most important goal set forth by the organization was to "help provide funds required for current operating budgets . . . 10 percent of [the] budgets" of the affiliate colleges.[80] However, an even more important goal was educating the American public as to the contributions that black colleges and their graduates had made throughout the nation.[81] This effort was significant not only for its benefit to the fiscal well being of the black colleges, but for the effort to improve the status of black higher education in the United States. Looking at the UNCF publicity materials, it would be easy to conclude that some of their contents undermined this effort. Certain aspects of the design and appearance of UNCF brochures were quite conservative. Comparing UNCF publications to other designs of the time and reviewing the history of graphic design in the early to mid twentieth century, we see that their layout and typography were a bland distillation of modernist styles, rather than the more bold use that had been developed in other black publications such as *The Crisis*. The pages were filled with cliché graphs and charts in the corporate style. Moreover, the text sometimes failed to repudiate racial stereotyping—leaving in references that might have affirmed the racist assumptions of some readers.

According to Roland Barthes, "a photograph is a mirror, what we are asked to read is the familiar, the known."[82] Certainly, the photography in UNCF publicity used a language that was well known to its audience. The black subjects that appeared in the photographs were presented in roles that were deemed acceptable according to the racial politics of the day. They were portrayed as successful and optimistic but rarely assertive. The black college pictured was one that fit in nicely with segregation era notions of black education: a place where one learned an industrial skill, and above all the values of industry and self-sufficiency. Furthermore, the decrepit appearance of the campus reaffirmed conventional notions of

charity: conveying the importance of the donation, but also reinforcing the donor's sense of superiority. Finally, frequent juxtapositions of black college students with the American flag and symbols of American military might suggested a kind of unquestioning loyalty. Thus, one interpretation of the UNCF publicity would be that it made a Faustian bargain: trading financial success for the long term improvement of the image of black colleges.

However, certain aspects of the publicity lend themselves to another interpretation. When looked at in the larger context of a nation emerging from war and entering an indefinite ideological struggle against Communism, the UNCF materials can be seen as having a larger purpose. The organization seized an opportunity to position itself within the cold war struggle and in fact, used this struggle as leverage against its adversaries. Leverage in this case included rallying powerful interests (corporations, government officials, and influential individuals) to the cause of black higher education. It was well-known that those who controlled wealth in the United States—notably John D. Rockefeller, Jr.—were engaged in their own public relations campaign to deflect the notion that capitalism cared little about the well being of ordinary people.[83] It was for this reason that Rockefeller, Jr. had devoted the better part of his life to philanthropic endeavors.[84]

And, the United States government itself had a role to play in this public relations game. As the superpower committed to defending capitalism as the superior economic and political system, it needed to show the world that life under this system was prosperous and just, even for those who lived in less favored regions of the country.[85] A review of UNCF materials shows numerous maps of the South, pictures of good, corporate-looking people along with evidence—both photographic and schematic—of the benefits they were providing. This aspect of the publicity materials suggests a more savvy kind of bargaining on the part of the UNCF leadership. The financial gain of black colleges was tied to their positioning as key players in a democratic and capitalist society. In fact, this positioning proved useful in the ongoing struggle for black rights. Those who would advocate the continuation of Jim Crow claimed that black colleges were havens of Communism and outside agitation.[86] In order to oppose segregation during the tense post war period, it was necessary to situate black leadership and black college students among the loyal citizenship and disconnect them from ideas of dissent and treachery. The UNCF publicity accomplished these goals effectively and black higher education benefited.[87]

Acknowledgements

Thompkins, Kate Sedgwick, and Kate Rousmaniere for their thoughtful comments on earlier drafts of this paper.

Notes

[1] "America is Free to Choose," 1944, General Education Board Papers, Record Group 5235-5240, series 1, sub-series 3, box 491, folder 5338, Rockefeller Archive Center, Sleepy Hollow, New York (RAC).

[2] In this paper, we use both present and past tense. Present tense is used when talking about specific documents that we are looking at now. Past is used when we talk about historical situations and context.

[3] Although segregation was not mandated by law in the northern United States, White colleges and universities rarely accepted Black students.

[4] Michele Y. Washington, "Souls on Fire," in Steven Heller and Georgette Balance, Eds., *Graphic Design History* (New York: Allworth Press, 2001), 269.

[5] David C. Driskell, David Levering Lewis, Deborah Willis-Thomas, and Mary Schmidt Campbell, *Art of Black America* (New York: Abradale Press, 1994); Richard Powell, David Bailey, and Paul Gilroy, *Rhapsodies in Black: Art of the Harlem Renaissance* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997).

[6] Washington, "Souls on Fire," 269.

[7] bell hooks, *Art on My Mind. Visual Politics* (New York: The New Press, 1999).

[8] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (New York: Noonday Press, Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, 1981); Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1971); Kate Rousmaniere, "Questioning the Visual in the History of Education," *History of Education* 30, 2 (2001): 109-116; Ian Grosvenor and Martin Lawn, "Ways of Seeing in Education and Schooling: Emerging Historiographies," *History of Education* 30, 2 (2001): 105-108; Ian Grosvenor, Martin Lawn, and Kate Rousmaniere (Eds.). *Silences & Images: The Social History of the Classroom* (New York: Peter Lang, 1999); Joan Burstyn, "History as Image: Changing the Lens," *History of Education Quarterly* 27, 2 (Summer 1987): 167-180.

[9] Burstyn, "History as Image: Changing the Lens."

[10] Burstyn, "History as Image: Changing the Lens," 168.

[11] Rousmaniere, "Questioning the Visual in the History of Education."

[12] Anderson, *The Education of Blacks.*

[13] Anderson, *The Education of Blacks.*

[14] Anderson, *The Education of Blacks*; Stephen J. Peeps, "Northern Philanthropy and the Emergence of Black Higher Education—Do-gooders, Compromisers, or Co-conspirators?" *Journal of Negro Education* 50, 3, (1981): 251-269; Eric Anderson and Alfred A. Moss, *Dangerous Donations: Northern Philanthropy and Southern Black Education, 1902-1930* (Columbia, MO: The University of Missouri Press, 1999).

[15] Anderson, *The Education of Blacks.*

[16] Anderson, *The Education of Blacks.*

[17] Anderson, *The Education of Blacks*; Peeps, "Northern Philanthropy and the Emergence of Black Higher Education."

[18] Scott Cutlip, *Fundraising in the United States* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University, 1965).

[19] Although our focus for this paper is historical, there have been current writings on the

topic of fundraising design. For more information, please see: Harold D. Lasswell, Ralph D. Casey, and Bruce Lannes Smith (Eds). *Propaganda and Promotional Activities; An Annotated Bibliography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969); George A. Flanagan, *Modern Institutional Advertising* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1967); and A. Westley Rowland, *Handbook of Institutional Advancement* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1986).

[20] Anderson, *The Education of Blacks*; Peeps, "Northern Philanthropy and the Emergence of Black Higher Education;" Anderson and Moss, *Dangerous Donations*.

[21] Although the GEB was funded as an outgrowth of the Negro Education Board, it gave only 19% of its donations to Black Education. For more information, see Anderson and Moss, *Dangerous Donations*.

[22] According to historian James D. Anderson, the GEB wanted to orchestrate the "systematic development of a few select institutions of black higher education."(p. 238). These institutions would: ". . . produce college-bred leaders to acculturate black Americans into the values and mores of southern society. Second, it was very important that black leaders be trained in the South by institutions 'in touch with the conditions to be faced by the young people in later life rather than in the North by institutions . . . out of touch with southern life.' Third, and most important, the development of a few strong institutions was viewed as a strategic means to reduce the number of existing black colleges" (p. 255). See Anderson, *The Education of Blacks*.

[23] See Marybeth Gasman, "Frederick Douglass Patterson (1901-1988), College President and Founder of the United Negro College Fund," *The Encyclopedia of Philanthropy* (New York: Oryx Press, 2001)

[24] Frederick D. Patterson to Jackson Davis, General Education Board, May 28, 1943, General Education Board Papers, Record Group 5235-5240, series 1, sub-series 3, box 490, folder 5231, RAC.

[25] Gilpin, Patrick J. & Marybeth Gasman, *Charles S. Johnson: Leadership beyond the Veil in the Age of Jim Crow* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2003).

[26] Richard Kluger, *Simple Justice: The History of Brown v. Board of Education and Black America's Struggle for Equality* (New York: Knopf, 1976).

[27] "Thirty-two Steps Forward to a Better America," 1945, General Education Board Papers, Record Group 5235-5240, Series 1, Subseries 3, box 491, folder 5238, RAC.

[28] Philip Meggs, *A History of Graphic Design* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1998).

[29] Meggs, *A History of Graphic Design*.

[30] Meggs, *A History of Graphic Design*.

[31] Jerry Jankowski, *Shelf Space. Modern Package Design, 1945-1965* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1998).

[32] Cubism and dada are two key movements in modern art. Pioneered by Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque, cubism dissected forms and represented them as flat, geometric shapes. Dada emerged as a revolution in literature and visual arts in aftermath of WWI. A protest against the war and the established order, dada championed the anti-art gesture (e.g., Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain*, which consisted of an upside-down urinal placed in an art gallery) and the chaotic assemblage of what were then considered non-art materials.

[33] Meggs, *A History of Graphic Design*, 298-299.

[34] Werner Haftmann, *The Mind and Work of Paul Klee* (New York: Praeger, 1954); Glenbow Museum, *Four Modern Masters: De Chirico, Ernst, Magritte, and Miro* (Calgary, Alberta, Canada: Glenbow Museum, 1981); Los Angeles County Museum of Art, *Picasso: Sixty Years of Graphic Works* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1966).

[35] Jankowski, *Shelf Space.*

[36] Jean-Marie Floch, *Semiotics, Marketing, and Communication: Beneath the Signs, the Strategies* (New York: Palgrave, 2001).

[37] Alain Locke, *The New Negro* (New York: Atheneum Press, 1925).

[38] Art nouveau refers to a style of art developed in the last decade of the 19th century. It is characterized by the free use of ornament based on organic forms and by its flowing lines and curves.

[39] *The Crisis*, March 1928, NAACP, Robert W. Woodruff Library Archives, Atlanta University Center, Atlanta, GA.

[40] *The Crisis*, January 1932, NAACP, Robert W. Woodruff Library Archives, Atlanta University Center, Atlanta, GA.

[41] Meggs, *A History of Graphic Design*, 284.

[42] *The Crisis*, September 1939, November 1947, NAACP, Robert W. Woodruff Library Archives, Atlanta University Center, Atlanta, GA.

[43] *The Crisis*, July 1940, NAACP, Robert W. Woodruff Library Archives, Atlanta University Center, Atlanta, GA.

[44] Meggs, *A History of Graphic Design*, 292.

[45] "National Mobilization of Resources," General Education Board Papers, III 2G, Box 492, folder 5241, April 1952, RAC.

[46] We use the term "quasi-scientific" to differentiate this presentation of data from that of scholarly social scientific research. Tables and graphs resulting from academic research might be accompanied by detailed descriptions of the methods, use a precise scale, and indicate the source of the data.

[47] Meggs, *A History of Graphic Design*.

[48] Lillian Doris, *Modern Corporate Reports* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1948): 146-150; The U.S. National Commission for UNESCO, *The UNESCO Story* (Washington, DC: Department of State, 1950).

[49] In most cases, black characters were portrayed by whites in black face.

[50] Kenneth W. Goings, *Mammy and Uncles Mose. Black Collectibles and American Stereotyping* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994).

[51] Buford G. Lincoln, Life Insurance Counselor, Los Angeles, California to John D. Rockefeller, Jr., June 3, 1944, Messrs Rockefeller—Education, III 2G, box 96, folder 6620, RAC.

[52] Leon Litwack, *Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow* (New York: Knopf, 1998).

[53] America Is Free to Choose," 1944, General Education Board Papers, Record Group 5235-5240, series 1, sub-series 3, box 491, folder 5338, RAC.

[54] "The Moblizer," June 1953, Rockefeller—Education, III 2G, Box 96, folder 664, RAC.

[55] Walter Hoving was interviewed regarding his involvement in the UNCF in 1981 by historian Marcia Goodson. The interview is located at the Columbia University Oral History Collection, New York, New York (p. 31).

[56] The Moblizer, June 1952, Rockefeller—Education, III 2G, Box 96, folder 664, RAC.

[57] Cutlip, *The History of Fundraising*.

[58] Del Monte Shield Annual Report, May 1952; Humble Oil & Refining Company Annual Report, 1948, Schoenberg Center for Electronic Text & Image, University of Pennsylvania Library, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (www.library.upenn.edu/etext/collections/lippincott). The Schoenberg Center has hundreds of annual reports in PDF format located on its website.

[59] "America is Free to Choose," 1944, General Education Board Papers, Record Group 5235-5240, series 1, sub-series 3, box 491, folder 5338, RAC.

[60] Charles V. Willie and Ronald R. Edmonds, *Black Colleges in America. Challenge, Development, and Survival* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1978), 91; Anderson, *The Education of Blacks*, 274; Daniel C. Thompson, *Private Black Colleges at the Crossroads* (Westport, CT, 1973).

[61] Henry Drewry and Humphrey Doermann, Stand and Prosper. *Private Black Colleges and their Students* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 92.

[62] "Appraisal of a Venture. The United Negro College Fund's First Fifteen Years, 1944-1959," John D. Rockefeller, Jr. Papers, RAC.

[63] Frederick D. Patterson, *Chronicles of Faith. The Autobiography of Frederick D. Patterson* (Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 1991). While at Tuskegee, Patterson initiated many new programs related to science and technology including, commercial dietetics (1935), commercial aviation (1935), veterinary medicine (1935) and engineering (1948).

[64] Anderson, *The Education of Blacks.* See the chapter entitled, "The Apostles of Liberal Education."

[65] In the past foundation such as Phelps-Stokes, the Rosenwald Fund, and the General Education Board used images of industrial education to portray black colleges. However, these were white led organizations operating early in the century.

[66] The U.S. National Commission for UNESCO, *The UNESCO Story* (Washington, DC: Department of State, 1950): 57-61.

[67] The UNESCO Story (Washington, DC: U.S. National Commission for UNESCO, 1950), 54.

[68] "What are the Answers?" 1952, General Education Board Papers, Record Group III 2G, box 492, folder 5241, RAC. See also, "Appraisal of an Adventure," Vertical Files, UNCF Papers, AU Center.

[69] "A Significant Adventure," ~1950, General Education Board Papers, Record Group 5235-5240, Series 1, sub-series 3, box 491, folder 5240, RAC.

[70] "A Significant Adventure," ~1950, General Education Board Papers, Record Group 5235-5240, Series 1, sub-series 3, box 491, folder 5240, RAC.

[71] Thirty-two Steps Forward to a Better America," 1945, General Education Board Papers, Record Group 5235-5240, Series 1, subseries 3, Box 491, folder 5238, RAC.

[72] "America is Free to Choose," 1944, General Education Board Papers, Record Group 5235-5240, series 1, sub-series 3, box 491, folder 5338, RAC.

[73] "A Significant Adventure," ~1950, General Education Board Papers, Record Group 5235-5240, Series 1, sub-series 3, box 491, folder 5240, RAC.

[74] America is Free to Choose," 1944, General Education Board Papers, Record Group 5235-5240, series 1, sub-series 3, box 491, folder 5338, RAC.

[75] "A Significant Adventure," ~1950, General Education Board Papers, Record Group 5235-5240, Series 1, sub-series 3, box 491, folder 5240, RAC.

[76] Rodchenko was a Russian painter, sculptor, designer, and photographer; Lissitzky was a Russian painter, typographer, and designer. Alexander Lavrentjev, *Rodchenko Photography* (Munich: Schirmer/Mosel, 1982), 113; Philip Meggs, *A History of Graphic Design* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1998), 268.

[77] Barthes, *Mythologies*.

[78] Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights. Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000).

[79] Litwack, *Trouble in Mind*. John Egerton, *Speak Now Against the Day. The Generation Before the Civil Rights Movement in the South* (New York: Knopf, 1994); Marybeth Gasman, "Scylla and Charybdis: Navigating the Waters of Academic Freedom at Fisk University during Charles S. Johnson's Administration (1946-1956)," *American Educational Research Journal* 36, 4 (Winter, 1999).

[80] Frederick D. Patterson, "Development Programs at Negro Institutions," Speech given before the Council of Presidents of the National Association of State and Universities and Land-Grant Colleges, Chicago, Illinois, November 11, 1969. Located in vertical file, UNCF Papers.

[81] Jackson Davis, General Education Board notes, June 17, 1943, General Education Board Papers, Record Group 5221-5234, series 1, sub-series 3, box 490, folder 5231, RAC.

[82] Barthes, *Mythologies*.

[83] Anderson, *The Education of Blacks*; Ron Chernow, *Titan. The Life of John D. Rockefeller, Sr.* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998); Edward Berman, *The Influence of the Carnegie, Ford, and Rockefeller Foundations on American Foreign Policy: The Ideology of Philanthropy* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1983).

[84] Peter Collier & David Horowitz, *The Rockefellers* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston, 1976); Marybeth Gasman, "A Word for Every Occasion: John D. Rockefeller, Jr. and the United Negro College Fund, 1944-1960," *History of Higher Education Annual* (Spring 2003).

[85] Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights*.

[86] Egerton, *Speak Now Against the Day*; Ellen Schrecker, *No Ivory Tower. McCarthyism and Universities* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

[87] For more information, see John Egerton, *Speak Now Against the Day*, 172-174.