



2011

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## Recommended Citation

Hutcheson, P., Gasman, M., & Sanders-McMurtry, K. (2011). Race and Equality in the Academy: Rethinking Higher Education Actors and the Struggle for Equality in the Post-World War II Period. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 82 (2), 121-153.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1353/jhe.2011.0010>

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# Race and Equality in the Academy: Rethinking Higher Education Actors and the Struggle for Equality in the Post-World War II Period

## **Disciplines**

Education | Higher Education

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## Race and Equality in the Academy: Rethinking Higher Education Actors and the Struggle for Equality in the Post-World War II Period

This article focuses on three separate historical case studies in the 1940s and 1950s in order to challenge common assumptions about who has been active, and when, in the struggle for racial equality in U.S. higher education. Although scholars have traditionally argued that the late 1950s represent the beginning of the activities and naming of the Civil Rights Movement, research is increasingly showing that civil rights activities were well underway in many parts of the United States in the 1940s and sustained during the 1950s; this broader research should inform inquiry in the study of racial equality in higher education (Egerton, 1994; Gardner, 2002; Guterl, 2001; Hahn, 2003). For example, the term *civil rights* originated in the 1940s, and although it would be unwise to presume to know its precise origin, the earliest consistent public use is in the name given by the Truman White House to a national committee appointed by the president on problems of discrimination in the United States.<sup>1</sup> In this article, we focus on African Americans because in the 1940s and 1950s, they were arguably the most visible and vocal minority group seeking equality of opportunity; however, we do not wish to diminish the substantial activities of other minorities during this period, such as Latinos and White women. As some historians have argued, the actions of African Americans were highly important in the 1940s and 1950s in the eventual development of

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*The Journal of Higher Education*, Vol. 82, No. 2 (March/April 2011)  
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broad civil rights activities among many groups, and since then our understanding of many minority groups has led to broader efforts to create equality of opportunity (Early, 1997; Fuchs, 1997). In fact, World War II highlighted the importance of civil rights, especially for African Americans as they fought for democracy on battlefields while their democratic rights—such as the right to vote, to purchase a house, to attend desegregated schools—were denied at home. As many African American newspapers suggested in 1942, it was time for the Double V, victory overseas and victory at home (Jones, 1944).<sup>2</sup> Part of the victory at home would be the struggle for access to higher education, which increasingly meant access to a better life and furthering the equality of opportunity for excluded peoples such as African Americans. Such a commitment to establishing equality is evident in the report of the 1947 President's Commission on Higher Education, which offered a fervent plea for colleges and universities to end discrimination in its report, *Higher Education for American Democracy*. The Commission's report was widely read, and is often identified as having a substantial impact on the eventual federal legislation in 1965 to provide federal scholarships to needy students, an obviously important step in providing access to higher education. It also offered a specific and determined recommendation for the integration of higher education. An important historical question remains, however, beyond the conversations about the Double V and the President's Commission report; what were the actions of individuals and organizations in the struggle for access and civil rights?<sup>3</sup>

A challenge in the examination of access is recognizing what one scholar has called the crucial decade, the late 1940s and the 1950s (Goldman, 1971). The 1950s have often been viewed as a conservative decade—both in society at large and higher education. Scholars such as Doug Rossinow and John Egerton have challenged our views of Americans during this time, showing us that the 1960s were built on a solid foundation of quiet activism taking place a decade earlier (Breines, 1992; Egerton, 1994; Eissenman, 2006; Meyerowitz, 1994; Rossinow, 1988). Similarly, historians such as Joanne Meyerowitz and Wini Breines have worked to dismiss notions of complacency with regard to White women during this time as has Linda Eisenmann in her work on women in higher education (Breines, 1992; Eisenmann, 2006; Meyerowitz, 1994). And historians Steven Hahn (2003) and Michael Kren (1999) have helped us to understand the political leadership and actions of African Americans prior to the Civil Rights Movement. Nevertheless, there is virtually no literature in the history of higher education pertaining to civil rights and the 1940s and 1950s. James Anderson's (1988) work ends with the mid-1930s, and while some broad

histories of higher education such as those by John Thelin (2004) and Frederick Rudolph (1965) address discrimination and exclusion, their discussion is brief. Histories of higher education with more specific topics, such as Helen Horowitz's (1987) work on college students, do not offer extensive discussion either. Following the lead of the historians who have examined the general subject of civil rights in the 1940s and 1950s, each case study in our article examines events in those years, when the developing Civil Rights Movement engaged a variety of higher education participants; we seek to expand the discussion of the early years of the Civil Rights Movement to higher education. This engagement is a key illustration of the complexity of the meanings of the struggle to gain access to higher education. Not only lawyers, African American and White, for the Legal Defense Fund worked in the 1940s and 1950s to create access to higher education through court cases challenging segregated professional education, but also, as these three essays show, African Americans and Whites working within higher education sought ways to create equality of opportunity at colleges and universities (Greenburg, 1994; Rowan, 2002; Taylor, 2004).

In the case of national policymaking, the president of the American Council on Education, George F. Zook occupied a significant place in the possibilities for higher education in the late 1940s and beyond, recognizing that policymaking for institutions of higher education in a democratic society ought to represent opportunity for all. Such equality of opportunity included the issue of student access to higher education. His efforts as chair of the 1947 President's Commission represent an important commitment to access, and they were efforts grounded in a long-standing personal commitment.

Racial equality has, of course, multiple meanings in higher education: for example, it can refer to gaining entry at historically White institutions or it could refer to the access one gains to knowledge as a result of the education he or she acquires, regardless of institutional type (Wallenstein, 2008; Williamson, 2008). When examining private Black colleges, the extra curriculum remains a largely unexplored space in terms of access, and presidents of historically Black colleges and universities—despite scholarly assumptions about their weak advocacy for racial equality—used the extra curriculum to educate students about the possibilities for activism in civil rights. Of course, the struggle for racial equality does not rest wholly with the dominant race or institutions of higher education. Our third case study looks at a group of organizations more often than not categorized as places for women to socialize, African American women's organizations, and how they helped many young African Americans open the doors of higher education.

Especially important in these essays is a revision of the meaning of the struggle for racial equality, as we show that understanding the Civil Rights Movement requires recognizing that struggle in diverse forms. Images of young African American men and women in silent protest at White-only lunch counters, massive demonstrations, and speakers railing at the government dominate our common picture of the struggle. As Peter Wallenstein's recent work on desegregation in higher education shows, equality of opportunity in higher education was a complex process spread across many years (Wallenstein, 2008). In our three essays, we examine quiet means of working for civil rights with powerful consequences, to show how the resistance to segregation and the push for access operated at many levels and with determined effort. Much of the broader literature on civil rights and the 1940s and the 1950s—especially before the *Brown* decision—suggests that such quiet means coupled with determination characterized an important part of the effort to secure equal opportunity for African Americans. As James Patterson noted in *Brown v. Board of Education: A Civil Rights Milestone and Its Troubled Legacy*, “the three most powerful forces” in this period were increasing militancy among African Americans, legal activism such as the Legal Defense Fund activities which led to the *Brown* decision, and “increasingly vocal support from white liberals” (Patterson, 2001, p. 2). We focus on increasing African American militancy and action and increasing support from White liberals in these three case studies.

*Quiet Partners in the Struggle: A White Bureaucrat and Access to Higher Education*

Philo Hutcheson

While conventional wisdom (and scholarly knowledge) about White bureaucrats of that time does not paint a friendly picture, George F. Zook's life shows a personal and substantial commitment to the developing Civil Rights Movement of the time. His efforts illustrate subtle yet sustained action to improve access to higher education.

First, a caution. It is dangerous ideological territory, in the case of civil rights, to identify the struggle for equality as a territory of Whites. In fact, this essay is not an attempt to define such a struggle, but rather to complicate the definition, to argue that we cannot assume who is doing what when to whom, to use the classic social science interrogatory, but must investigate who is doing what when in order to know how and why. Simply put, the struggle for equality is complex. As John Dittmer notes in *Local People*, agitation for civil rights in Mississippi held very different meanings and actions for local people, who in fact often rejected the

forms of struggle promoted by national civil rights groups that had been effective in other settings. Investigating the work of a White bureaucrat is another means of recognizing how the struggle for civil rights, albeit rare among Whites, furthered the possibilities of advancement for excluded groups.<sup>4</sup>

What makes this examination particularly curious and compelling is that as was often the case in the Civil Rights Movement from the early 1940s to the late 1960s, many people worked below the level of recognition. In this case the focus is on George Zook, a White, middle-class male, head of the American Council on Education (hardly a African American organization) and a figure identified by Hawkins in his outstanding work on education associations as a “consummate bureaucrat” (Hawkins, 1992). Little is known about the work of Whites in higher education in the 1940s in regard to civil rights, obviously in part because often they did little, but also in part because such efforts remain unexplored.<sup>5</sup>

At the outset of this discussion of Zook, there is a necessary caveat. I have read a great deal about Zook, have served on a dissertation committee for a student who wrote about Zook and his presidency of the American Council on Education, and have read much, perhaps almost all, of what Zook wrote. I have no idea how or why he developed a clear passion for promoting civil rights for African Americans. His personal records are minimal, and therefore one must find thoughts about events and individuals embedded within what I think was his careful, systematic, and professional approach to issues. While there are general works as well as biographies of some of those Whites who decided to fight for civil rights in the 1940s, those works are, at this point, dominated by two groups: ministers who, despite their churches’ values and behaviors, decided to engage in efforts to create equal opportunity, and Jews (mostly but not exclusively Northern Jews). All of these works indicate ambiguity within the official religious organization, with individuals resisting that ambiguity and urging their groups to consider all people as equal in the eyes of God and humans. In a very real sense both groups (White ministers and Jews) experienced a calling, often heightened by the ironies of World War II and making the world safe for democracy while minorities in the United States faced discrimination and exclusion (Bauman & Kalin, 1997; Bryan, 2001; Chappell, 1994; Collins, 1998; Friedland, 1998; Galchutt, 2005; Lutze, 2006; Mohl, Graff, Zoloth, & Murray, 2004; Shattuck, 2000; Schulz, 2001; Webb, 2004).<sup>6</sup> Even an investigation of intellectuals in the post-*Brown* era indicates that discussion of race—including by such notable intellectuals as Norman Mailer and Hannah Arendt—“seemed muffled, repressed” (Polsgrove, 2001,

p. xix).<sup>7</sup> A careful examination of the evidence about Zook reveals a clear and sustained effort to ensure far greater access to higher education at all levels for all African Americans, an effort that began with his doctoral dissertation which he completed in 1913.

Zook's dissertation serves as the starting point, since it examined English trading in West Africa in the 1600s. That topic alone might mean little, but it has an arresting context; Carter G. Woodson selected it for publication in one of the earliest volumes of the *Journal of Negro History*. Scholars familiar with Woodson know that he was a very careful editor who would not accept articles that did not fairly represent African Americans. While Zook's dissertation is a dry account of the events of English trading in West Africa, the publication in the *Journal of Negro History* signals an even-handedness in his treatment of Africans that rarely appeared in the early 1900s, when historians and other social scientists were increasingly and rapidly developing theories of race that assumed inferiority on the part of African Americans (Goggin, 1983).<sup>8</sup> So, at the beginning of Zook's academic career, in 1919, he fits within a category exceedingly rare at the time, a White man who was capable of, and interested in, presenting Africans in a positive light.

For a fifteen-year period thereafter, Zook's interest in African Americans becomes unclear—only to resurface in a striking way during the Roosevelt administration. In 1933, the newly elected president appointed Zook (who had spent several years as president of the University of Akron) to the post of United States Commissioner of Education. The Office of Education then sponsored a national conference on African American education in 1934. As correspondence between Zook and a member of the Rosenwald Fund staff shows, the new commissioner was concerned about the “dual system” of education in the South, and the conference was a means to address that concern.<sup>9</sup> Zook was the sole speaker at the conference; the remainder of the conference included only workshops and presentations in break-out sessions. He spoke as U.S. Commissioner of Education, and his remarks were re-printed in the *Journal of Negro Education*. In his remarks he mocked the myth of lifting oneself up by the bootstraps, referring to it as a “sudden magic lifting” of oneself. He also acknowledged the amazing, perhaps globally unequalled, achievement of United States African Americans in education in the previous two decades. He identified education as a key for African Americans in their efforts to create a better life. He also argued that the school was the center of recreation, inspiration, and emancipation (Zook, 1934, p. 582).<sup>10</sup>

Zook also acted within the federal administration in response to discrimination against African Americans. In the spring of 1933 Zook, as



United States Commissioner of Education, informed the Secretary of the Interior, Harold Ickes, that “some Army officers were attempting to block the use of blacks as educational advisors” in African American Civilian Conservation Corps companies (educational advisor was the only leadership position that African Americans held in the Corps) (Gower, 1976, p. 128).<sup>11</sup> Within the context of the federal government in the 1930s, even the executive branch during the New Deal, for Whites to call attention to such racism was unusual.

In 1934 Zook was selected to head the American Council on Education. In that position he did even more to argue for opportunities for African Americans—forming committees with the express purpose of addressing the issue and assigning to them individuals who were interested and capable of working on the problem. His public remarks on the topic of opportunities continued; in 1942 he wrote an article published in the *Journal of Negro Education* in which he argued for higher education of all groups and individuals who are capable. He also argued for federal financial assistance and possible regional professional training, suggesting, “Such arrangements would obviously be in the interest of the Black population in the South” (Zook, 1942, p. 277).<sup>12</sup> Yet his work within the American Council on Education (ACE) is perhaps the most notable effort, as he consistently worked to keep the topic of African Americans and equal opportunity on the agenda of the Council.

The Problems and Plans Committee of ACE was the central committee of the Council for several years, and thus scholars examining the American Council on Education need to pay careful attention to the Committee’s agenda. For the sake of this investigation, it is also important to keep in mind the subtle ways in which the Council president, Zook, could control the agenda and the discussion. In 1943 the Committee held a brief discussion of “the Negro and his educational problems,” and then it passed a motion that the topic be studied preliminarily and reported at the next meeting of the Committee.<sup>13</sup> At the subsequent meeting, the Committee in fact held further discussion about the issue. Will Alexander (of the Rosenwald Fund), present as a guest, suggested that “the Negro problem in education, as in other areas, had now passed out of the sectional stage and had become a national problem.” Robert Redfield (of the University of Chicago), also present as a guest, “emphasized the fact that so far as the Negroes were concerned, the problem broke down into two categories, namely, educating Negroes on the one hand, and second, educating whites relative to Negroes on the other.” He suggested that the ACE was in a position, based on its Youth Commission findings, to issue a statement on the “whole problem of the Negro an undeveloped and therefore wasted human resource.” The Problems

and Plans Committees voted to approve a new committee, the Committee on Education of Minority Racial Groups.<sup>14</sup> In 1944 Zook wrote to Robert Redfield, telling him that the Council's Executive Committee had authorized continuation of the minority racial groups committee through 1944–45. Zook said that he wanted a fall meeting to discuss the proposed project on the waste of human resources resulting from the mis-education and under-education of African Americans, stating, "I believe that this proposal, in which there is a considerable amount of interest, merits our serious consideration."<sup>15</sup>

Beyond the formation of committees to address the African American education problem, there was also the question of membership on ACE committees, and Zook actively recruited African Americans and Whites obviously supportive of equal opportunity to some of those committees. One of his first appointments to the minority racial groups committee was a young African American professor, Allison Davis (University of Chicago), who had written a monograph for the Council's project on American youth on the problems facing African American youth in the South. In 1950, shortly before his retirement, Zook wrote to Ira deA. Reid (at Haverford College), asking him to serve on the Discriminations in College Admission Committee; deA. Reid was a African American man who was formerly employed at the National Urban League and had been a faculty member in the Department of Social Sciences at Atlanta University. Zook told deA. Reid that the Committee had "already performed a rather signal service."<sup>16</sup> Although such appointments might be accurately characterized as tokenism in the 1970s and later, three decades earlier such appointments were far more integrative than suspicious.

In 1949 and 1950 the ACE Committee on Discriminations in College Admissions held conferences in Chicago and Washington, DC, to address the topic of discrimination. Although Zook was unable to attend the Chicago conference, he offered remarks presented at the conference, and he made clear that he wanted the conference and the Council to advance the discussion and to overcome the obstacles of discrimination. He told the participants, "You will be discussing problems in which I personally, as well as the Council, have long and deep interests. It is vital that our institutions of higher education reflect a basic principle of our democracy; namely, an equal opportunity for every individual to continue in such type and through such a period of education as his intellectual ability and interest warrant." He was convinced, based on the success of veterans in higher education, that a major obstacle was economic; the second important factor was the challenge of separate but equal conditions; he stated that "any one with even a cursory familiarity with the field of higher education knows that with only

a limited number of outstanding exceptions, segregated institutions of higher education have not brought equality of opportunity.”<sup>17</sup>

Above all, Zook’s work on the 1947 President’s Commission on Higher Education illustrates his commitment to expanding opportunity. Zook’s guidance of the discussion on desegregation and his refusal to accept conditions on the Commission’s desegregation statement are highly indicative of his commitment to equal opportunity. Without direct statement, he managed to overcome a serious challenge to explicit arguments for desegregation. The overall tone of the Commission’s report reflects a highly unusual commitment to equal opportunity in the late 1940s—and many Commission statements and all recommendations were printed in either italics or bold, offering a visual emphasis to the words of the report. Its authors opened the six-volume report with a volume entitled “Establishing the Goals”—addressing the nation’s new responsibility for strengthening democracy at home and maintaining peace internationally (lessons garnered during World War II). The first volume, in the words of the Commission, set “the pattern for the entire report” (Truman Commission, 1947, p. 3). Commission members called for a new nation—a common call in that period—writing that the meaning of *E Pluribus Unum* included:

A strong and dynamic national community, intertwining in harmony and unity of purpose an infinite variety of individual talents and careers, and in time a strong and dynamic world community, embracing in brotherhood and mutual respect, and a rich and enriching diversity of national cultures. (Truman Commission, 1947, p. 102)<sup>18</sup>

They also specified the meaning of “equal educational opportunity,” declaring it to be for “all persons, to the maximum of their individual abilities and without regard to economic status, race, creed, color, sex, national origin, or ancestry” (Truman Commission, 1947, p. 3).

The Commission was remarkably unrestrained in its critique of colleges and universities in regard to discrimination. It argued that discrimination was “*an undemocratic practice*” and colleges and universities refused to acknowledge their exclusionary behaviors: “Discriminatory practices are denied, ignored, or rationalized” (Truman Commission, 1947, p. 25). These practices were in terms of both the admission of new students and once minority students were on campus. The Commission urged higher education to fight against discrimination:

Each institution should conscientiously plan and prosecute a well organized program to reduce and where possible promptly to eliminate discrimination, not only by correcting its policies and practices, but also by educating its students to seek the abolition of discriminatory practices in all their manifestations. (Truman Commission, 1947, p. 27)

The Commission proposed solutions that went far beyond the general assessment of discrimination in the 1940s.

The specific section on discrimination against African Americans noted both the overwhelming discrepancies in educational attainment and occupations as well as the problems of the South. Yet that section also had a statement of dissent that argued that in the South progress would only be made in accordance “within the established patterns of social relationships.” While the Commission agreed to the inclusion of that dissenting statement at its November 1947 meeting, Zook’s careful responses to President Goodrich White (Emory University), who organized the dissent, sustained the majority report on eliminating discrimination as the statement of the Commission, and the dissenting one was relegated to a footnote (Truman Commission, 1947, p. 29).<sup>19</sup> White objected to the expressed connection between segregation and discrimination in Southern education as well to the suggestion that speedy removal of barriers was an important goal; he and three others on the Commission preferred gradualism, a slow dismantling of segregation and educational barriers. Commission members attempted to find a compromise, and first suggested a “verbal alteration” of the report’s statements on desegregation, which White did not want. In response, Zook maneuvered any possible alteration of the statement on the basis of action taken by the Commission at its previous meeting: “It was pointed out by the Chairman that those statements were in accord with those in the report ‘Establishing the Goals’ which had been accepted.” As a result of Zook’s comments and further discussion, the Commission agreed to a footnote of dissent and an appendix (the latter was never written).<sup>20</sup>

A dominating context for Zook’s support for civil rights for African Americans in the 1940s was the high demand for educated workers during World War II. Nevertheless, Zook had already established an obvious and sustained interest in equal opportunity; it appears, as an admittedly speculative notion, that he used the war as means to argue for the advancement of minorities, including African Americans. As president of the American Council on Education, he needed to be a careful administrator, but even so, his consistent interest in opening educational opportunities for African Americans indicates a commitment running far deeper than perhaps any other white person in national circles of education at the time. I am confident that the evidence indicates that in the face of oppression, in a period of United States history when race riots and lynchings were common occurrences, Zook continuously promoted opportunity for African Americans. As an unhappy contrast, as James D. Anderson has shown in his discussion of African American professors and White colleges and universities in the 1940s, institutions of higher

learning were unwilling to provide places, much less create supportive institutional mechanisms that might have helped integrate their campuses (Anderson, 1993). George F. Zook acted not as a consummate bureaucrat, but in fact as an adroit one with principles. Nevertheless, the struggle for racial equality ran far broader than the efforts of a single association executive in an arena dominated by Whites; the next two essays further illustrate the breadth of the struggle in the 1940s and 1950s.

*“Centers of Influence”: Private African American College Students and Access through the Extra Curriculum*

Marybeth Gasman

Have African Americans had access to a truly well-rounded higher education? This question has been discussed extensively with regard to curricula by historians of education (Anderson, 1988). Although they began with a mixture of industrial and classical education, by the end of the first half of the twentieth century, Black college curricula had turned decisively toward liberal arts. But were Black colleges, specifically private ones, offering an education that prepared students for full citizenship and participation with local, national, and international contexts and activities? By tradition, the extra curriculum—the campus environment, student activities, and above all, the opportunity to participate in public debate—has been seen as a critical part of the college experience (Little, 1980; Terry, 1934). And on the last point, Black colleges of the 1940s and 1950s have come in for some criticism—with some observers saying that the conservative atmosphere on these campuses stifled debate and quashed dissent. Much discussion of the Black college leadership of the 1950s, for example, continues to characterize these individuals as “Uncle Toms.” Looking for evidence of activism on the part of Black college leaders, historians often seek and fail to find open engagement with issues of the day. For instance, Daniel C. Thompson asserted that prior to the 1960s, Black college presidents “refrained from disrupting the local white community” (Thompson, 1973, p. 15). Moving beyond allegations of passivity, acclaimed Civil Rights historian Aldon Morris noted that “Rather than support the movement, . . . many of the teachers and administrators attempted to block it from taking root on the campuses” (Morris, 1984, p. 196). And Black college critics Christopher Jencks and David Riesman proclaimed in 1968 in their classic but controversial text, *The Academic Revolution*, “students’ activism has seldom been encouraged, even tacitly, by Negro college administrators or faculty, and has often been bitterly opposed” (Jencks & Riesman, 1968, p. 434). With these

ideas in mind, this case study looks closely at dissent at private Black colleges as an aspect of access. Were these institutions capable of training African American leaders—graduates whose broad perspective allowed them to take charge of current affairs, to advance the struggle for racial equality?

If the administrators of Black colleges were so inclined to uphold the status quo (and to represent the status quo in the extra curriculum), it is at least curious that so many of these institutions produced national leaders such as John Lewis (Fisk), Ella Baker (Shaw), Julian Bond (Morehouse), Ralph Abernathy (Atlanta), Bayard Rustin (Wilberforce), Martin Luther King, Jr. (Morehouse), and many other activists with whom we are perhaps less familiar. In the words of Samuel DuBois Cook,

It is hardly an accident that Martin Luther King, Jr. was an alumnus of Morehouse College rather than of Harvard College and that the overwhelming majority of the leaders of the civil rights movement—nationally and locally—are graduates of black colleges. Perhaps the black colleges provided a social creativity, ethical imagination and motivation, a sense of outrage at injustice and oppression, a passion for social justice and righteousness, a will to be a better social order. This is why they produced leaders with the socio-ethical vision that Dr. King had. Unlike white colleges, black colleges can hardly foster a love of and a passion for, the status quo. (Cook in Willie & Edmonds, 1978, p. 54)<sup>21</sup>

Why the contradiction? How could Black college leaders who “bitterly opposed” activism have been involved in fostering a “sense of outrage at injustice and oppression?”

In fact, there were some private Black college leaders who encouraged various forms of protest and challenges to the status quo. A review of archival materials at Fisk University, Morehouse College, Tougaloo College, and Tuskegee Institute indicates that the actions of Black college leaders were more varied and complex than is currently reflected in the literature. If these leaders discouraged protest on their own campuses, they certainly did not avoid promoting discussion about protest in other parts of the world—a process which, can be argued, helped engender public dissent among their students. For instance, at Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee, President Charles S. Johnson (1946–1956) introduced students to international topics through film series, speaker forums, and exchange programs with foreign countries (including India, Ethiopia, Haiti, and South Africa)—all of these countries had citizens who believed the United States to be a part of Western imperialism (Gilpin & Gasman, 2003). The Fisk president sponsored lectures with such titles as “British Policy in West Africa” and “The



Abolition of Colonialism,” in an effort to help students to see themselves as “members of a world majority” rather than an oppressed minority in the United States (Sitkoff, 1993, p. 16). In the words of one student, “The Fisk campus was an international microcosm. There were regular and exchange students from all over the U.S. and the world. . . . This taught all of us that the world has all kinds of people in it; we needed to be able to interact in important ways.”<sup>22</sup> The presence of international students and the exposure to international discussions prompted students to question local customs and the status quo of the American South. According to the Fisk student body president Prince Rivers, students began to mock the Jim Crow laws; they would “go downtown and if [they] saw a colored fountain, [they] would say ‘this is a colored fountain and you can buy colored water.’”<sup>23</sup> In effect, exposure to international ideas in the extra curriculum helped Fisk students to show contempt for a Jim Crow system that they had been raised to fear.

Soon the mockery turned to outright protest. Under Stephen Wright’s presidency at Fisk (1957–1966), in the late 1950s, students were moved to participate in lunch counter sit-ins throughout Nashville. At one point, 57 students were arrested by the Nashville police. In a strong statement of support for his students and with a sense of the climate at Fisk during this time, President Wright wrote,

the Fisk University students were all being reared and educated on the great scriptures of American Democracy, and . . . no one should be surprised or astonished that they are seeking to exercise them . . . as long as they conducted themselves peaceably in their demonstration I [have] no present intention of asking them to discontinue their efforts. In the meantime, I [expect] responsible protection of them from the police in the City of Nashville.<sup>24</sup>

Here, President Wright expressed no intention of punishing students for their activist behavior, praised them for their desire for democratic participation, and placed the burden on local authorities to treat them fairly.

Another example of African American presidents sowing the seeds of civil rights agitation is at Morehouse College where under the tutelage of president Benjamin E. Mays, Martin Luther King, Jr. and other students were introduced to the nonviolent strategies advocated by Mohandas Gandhi (Mays, 2002; United Negro College Fund, 2004). In King’s case, this exposure was critical, as it introduced the young civil rights leader to the tools he would later use to fight segregation (Garrow, 1987). Many prominent Indians, including Jawaharlal Nehru, a nationalist and the first prime minister of independent India, and Rammanohar Lohia, the renowned socialist leader, spoke on the Morehouse campus during the early 1950s—influencing the thinking of African Americans

by providing an international perspective on domestic issues (Plummer, 1996). Benjamin Mays used his campus to shape the perspective of his students on global issues. In his words, Black colleges were “the country’s first truly interracial, intercultural, and international centers of education. . . . Unhindered by the traditional customs of the past, they are free to become ongoing experiments in democratic education” (Mays, 1962, p. 32–33). Mays taught his students to be responsible citizens and to respect the law. However, he also taught them how some laws, particularly those in the Jim Crow South, were aimed at segregating and discriminating against African Americans. According to Mays, any law that segregated should be disobeyed. As such, he supported his students in their efforts to challenge segregation in the Atlanta area (Carter, 1998).

Black college students were also shaped by the presence of well-traveled African American teachers, White leftists, and European expatriates on their campuses. For example, Ernst Borinski, a German Jewish immigrant, sponsored forums at Tougaloo College in the 1950s, which featured speakers from Africa and the Caribbean discussing politics, race, and culture (Edgcomb, 1993; Williamson, 2003;). According to Joyce Lander, one of Borinski’s students,

When I was older I asked, “Dr. Borinski, how is it that you got this lab, and why did you bring [African American and White] people together?” He said, “Because I didn’t do civil rights demonstrations. I didn’t go out to protest and I didn’t go to jail. But I also felt that each person in his own way could make a contribution, and mine was to have people share ideas.” What a powerful statement that was.<sup>25</sup>

As mentioned earlier, having access to unconventional ideas often served as a form of encouraging the fight for civil rights on the part of students.

At Tuskegee Institute, Frederick D. Patterson, a member of the Truman Commission on Higher Education, introduced students to the ideas of prominent African American thinkers from throughout the country, including those of Benjamin E. Mays and other Black college presidents with whom he worked closely as the leader of the United Negro College Fund.<sup>26</sup> But his greatest accomplishment in advancing full citizenship rights for African American students was the securing of the Tuskegee Airmen on campus in 1941. Over 900 African Americans completed their first flight training at Tuskegee Army Air Field—a training regimen that required them to undergo more rigorous intelligence testing than White pilots. Half of these young men traveled overseas during World War II as combat pilots, and despite segregation’s barriers, the Airmen



served with distinction—flying over 1,500 missions and shooting down 113 enemy aircraft. Significantly, no Allied bombers were lost while accompanied by Tuskegee fighter planes. These accomplishments contributed greatly to the eventual desegregation of the American armed forces (Gasman, 2002).<sup>27</sup> The presence of the Tuskegee Airmen on the campus also had a substantial impact on the Tuskegee students by thrusting the school into the national spotlight. Under Patterson, Tuskegee became a focal point for the effort to defeat fascism, and at the same time chipped away at the notion of African American inferiority.

Unlike his predecessors at Tuskegee (Booker T. Washington and Robert Moton), Patterson was a highly educated scientist—a veterinarian—and he was deeply committed to African American academic and intellectual accomplishment. Like Washington and Moton, he was regarded as a conservative by many and chose to work within the system.<sup>28</sup> He believed that funding African American education was a method by which African Americans could achieve full rights as citizens. According to historian John Egerton, Patterson was the kind of African American leader who avoided the “confrontational exposure” sought by organizations like James Farmer’s Congress of Racial Equality or A. Philip Randolph’s March on Washington (Egerton, 1994, p. 288). However, his actual views were not that different from the likes of Randolph, W. E. B. Du Bois, or Langston Hughes (all considered radicals during the 1940s). For example, when asked to write an essay for a 1944 book edited by Rayford Logan entitled *What the Negro Wants*, Patterson wrote, “Any form of segregation based on race, creed or color is discriminatory and imposes a penalty inconsistent with the guaranties of American democracy.” Moreover, he added,

The more conservative element of Negroes differ from those who hold the most radical views in opposition to segregation only in terms of time and technique of its elimination. In any statement which attempts to speak unequivocally in terms of ultimates, all Negroes must condemn any form of segregation based on race, creed or color anywhere in the nation. (Egerton, 1994, p. 288)<sup>29</sup>

This stance was not atypical for Patterson. According to Charles Stephens, the UNCF National Campaign Director from 1973–1976, Patterson “walked around mad as hell most of the time.” He didn’t usually didn’t agree with White leadership but he knew what had to be done to save African American colleges and as such, he did it. In Stephens’s words, Patterson was viewed by Whites as a conservative, but “he was really a Roosevelt Democrat.”<sup>30</sup>

For students at Black colleges of that era, there were various methods of protest. In many ways, access to a diverse learning environment and exposure to international influences were in and of themselves activist civil rights experiments during the 1940s and 1950s. According to scholars Mary Dudziak, Thomas Borstelmann, and Penny Von Eschen, the United States' Cold War efforts, and particularly its goal of preventing Soviet influence in the developing world, set the stage for the Civil Rights Movement to succeed (Borstelmann, 2001; Dudziak, 2000; Skrentny, 1998; Von Eschen, 1997).

The Cold War was fought on a number of levels. There was a fight on the level of ideas—within the super powers and their allied countries—to convince people that their way was the right way. Another fight took place at a tactical level—winning over different countries in strategic parts of the world such as Vietnam and the former African colonies. The Black colleges noted in this case study and their leaders showed an awareness of both battles. On the level of ideas, the presidents understood that legalized segregation was a contradiction of the democratic idea and the free market system. By supporting integration as an aspect of freedom and democracy, the presidents were being patriotic citizens of the U.S. In the arena of third world politics, the presidents were recruiting international students and providing internationally-focused curricula and programs to draw attention to the struggles of people in the developing world. These programs were a constant reminder to people in the South—both African American and White—that other nations were looking to the United States for direction. The existence of Jim Crow laws in the South became an increasingly awkward situation for Cold War American presidents as they sought to uphold the United States' standing as leader of the free world, and this hastened segregation's demise. Numerous authors have pointed to the confrontations in Birmingham as the quintessential example of how the Civil Rights Movement seized the world stage at a critical point in United States history. As the world reacted in horror to Bull Conner's dogs and fire hoses, the United States was forced to act on behalf of the protesters or risk tipping the balance of world opinion toward the Soviet Union.<sup>31</sup> Thus, through exposure to ideas, Black college leaders prepared students to take advantage of the window of opportunity that the Cold War provided and provided an intellectual foundation for future civil rights agitation, agitation far more visible than the efforts of Black college leaders documented in this essay.

Black college leaders managed to create what United Negro College Fund President Frederick D. Patterson described as “centers of influence” that challenged racial norms and educated the majority of those

active in the Civil Rights Movement. In characterizing the colleges this way, Patterson emphasized their ability to provide “leadership of an economic, civic, social and spiritual nature” and the fact that they were often the only place where people of different races could meet in the segregated South (Patterson, 1958, p. 112).

In making this argument, it is important not to overlook the claims that some Black college leaders, especially those at public institutions, were complacent in their position toward segregation or severely lacking in their support of student activism and challenge to the status quo. Instead, the purpose of this case study is to complicate the picture historians have painted of Black colleges by providing examples of the access that these institutions gave their students to ideas beyond the nation’s boundaries.<sup>32</sup>

Examining the question of whether some Black college leaders instilled an activist frame of mind involves taking a closer look at the nature of resistance and actual protest on their campuses. There were instances of direct protest by college presidents. Henry Drewry and Humphrey Doermann (2001), in *Stand and Prosper*, show how some Black college presidents took personal stands against segregation in their communities. For example, Herman Long, president of Talladega College, shared his open disdain for segregation with students and attempted to vote in several Democratic primary elections.<sup>33</sup> Joy A. Williamson’s innovative work on student activists’ lives shows the varying levels of support for civil rights by African American college leaders in Mississippi during the 1960s (Williamson, 2008). She contrasts President Adam Beittel’s encouragement of civil rights activities at private Tougaloo College with President Jacob Reddix’s efforts to stamp out protest at public Jackson State University, just six miles away. Of most importance, Williamson identifies the various constraints under which these presidents operated, including state governing boards, conservative trustees, frightened parents, liberal faculty, and blatant racism. Overall, Drewry and Doerman and Williamson challenge the one-sided notions of passive African American college leadership put forth by critics of Black colleges. To get a more accurate picture of the role of Black colleges in creating opportunity, scholars must continue to challenge assumptions about the struggle for equality during the era of the developing Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s.

Many Black college presidents and faculty members sought to awaken young people to the global significance of their actions in the 1940s and 1950s, creating an atmosphere on their campuses in which students were free to question local, regional, and national traditions and laws. Moreover, Black college graduates’ awareness of the United

States' role in the Cold War helped them to succeed as civil rights protestors. Many of the seeds of civil disobedience in theory and practice were sown at these Black colleges. This essay challenges the monolithic view of Black college leaders in the mid-twentieth century as simply individuals who accommodated segregation; they indeed were instrumental in the struggle for racial equality.

*Fighting the Good Fight: African American Women's Organizations Supporting Equality*

Kijua Sanders-McMurtry

One mechanism of struggle that is rarely recognized is the group of African American women's organizations that were instrumental in advocating for educational opportunities for young people, resisting oppression, orchestrating civil rights protest, and countering the negative effects of Jim Crow laws during the 1940s and 1950s. The most important efforts of these women were those on behalf of increased educational access for socially disadvantaged members of their race. This case study explores the social activism of three African American women's social service organizations during this period: Alpha Kappa Alpha (AKA) Sorority Incorporated; Delta Sigma Theta Sorority (DST); and The Links, Incorporated (Links, Inc.). On the surface, each of these organizations may appear to be groups for women to gather together, perhaps share tea and crumpets, and then go their separate ways. This article focuses on the activism of two sororities and one social organization, with a particular emphasis on social activism that has led to various forms of access. Concrete examples of the deliberate efforts of these women's organizations to further attempts for racial equality by increasing access to higher education for African Americans in the 1940s and 1950s are discussed.

For much of our country's history, education has been a primary focus of the activist work of African American women. Historians have noted that education was crucial for African Americans not only after emancipation but also during the twentieth century. James D. Anderson, in particular, observes that African American educators during the 1930s believed that "it was their mission to represent the struggles and aspirations of African American people and to articulate the very source of the masses' discomfort and oppression" (Anderson, 1988, p. 278). He argues that they did this "while training Black intellectuals who would help lead Black people toward greater freedom and justice" (Anderson, 1988, p. 278). According to Stephanie Shaw, African American women, who were born free, were indoctrinated with the belief that their educa-

tion was essential to the pursuit of equality and freedom. Shaw notes that the elders in their families and communities, many of whom had been slaves, motivated these women to pursue educational goals. She stresses that “the women’s teachers were equally compelling in making a point of the women’s power. According to the educators, each individual woman, by virtue of her preparation—mental, moral and for a time, manual—had the superhuman ability to uplift the masses and change the whole society. And that was what she had to do” (Shaw, 1995, p. 217) Likewise, historian Linda Perkins claims that the “expectation of the African American community was that those who had achieved academic and professional success would return and assist the community” (Perkins, 1997, p. 718) Many African American women embodied this core ethos of using their cultural and social capital to collectively advocate for their people through clubs and organizations.

Gerda Lerner, Darlene Clark Hine, and Anne Firor Scott have argued that many stories of African American women’s clubs and organizations remain undocumented (Hine, 1990; Lerner, 1974; Scott, 1990). Each of these authors has written about the formation of social clubs and organizations by and for African American women during the 1800s (Hine, 1990; Lerner, 1974; Scott, 1990). But, there is limited research on the range and scope of educational activism among African American women’s social service organizations such as the three examined in this case study, especially during the mid-twentieth century. The exception being Anne M. Knupfer and Christine Woysner’s new edited book on women and organizations, which includes a few chapters related to African American women in the 1950s and 1960s (Knupfer & Woysner, 2007). Historian Marybeth Gasman alludes to the notion that the secretive nature of these organizations may provide an explanation for why these stories remain untold (Gasman, 2005).<sup>34</sup>

According to Joe Ferry, the formation of African American women’s organizations began with a need for the African American upper class to deal with the alienation and isolation that they experienced in a racist society. Ferry notes that “Black fraternal groups began as small, elite social groups that eventually made social activism part of their agenda” (Ferry, 2003, p. 75)<sup>35</sup> Deborah Cannon Partridge wrote in 1945 about the ways in which African American organizations began to veer from their original purpose as fraternal organizations. Originally about “sociability” and “sympathetic companionship,” these organizations began to help African American women aspire to “better living facilities, and stimulation of intellectual association” (Partridge, 1945, p. 374). Phi Beta Kappa, established in 1776, was the first fraternal organization and one that provided a model for other fraternal organizations both African

American and White. However, according to Partridge, the African American Greek letter organizations evolved into something different over the years:

Negro Greek letter organizations, following the pattern of white societies, retained this interest in the personal development of their members, and during the early years of their existence stressed this as their major purpose. However, with the growth of the organizations and the extension of the members into the world of work, a new emphasis developed. This idea acknowledged “letting down your bucket where you are” and assumed responsibility for assisting in the solution of the various problems which confront the Negro in America. (Partridge, 1945, p. 374)

Partridge noted that the fraternal organization for African Americans became less about the “selfish” and more about the “idea of ‘Fraternity for Service’ with a definite and direct responsibility to society” (Partridge, 1945, p. 374). The stories of these three women’s organizations illustrate their commitment to racial uplift and access to higher education, key components of the struggle for racial equality, belying any assumption that the groups were only interested in social interaction.

#### *Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Incorporated*

Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority (AKA) was founded in 1908. The founders of the organization, nine female students at Howard University, emphasized the importance of academic excellence and racial uplift among their members, both representing important aspects of agency. One obvious means of access is in the use of monies to further opportunity. AKA members became interested in developing funding programs for their own members during the 1920s when they established a “revolving loan for members who needed financial aid to further their education” (Parker, 1990, p. 164). The organization continued to offer these scholarships and revolving loan programs throughout the 1940s and 1950s. Health care was another area of emphasis that AKA chose for its educational efforts. Historian Cynthia Shelton discusses the formation of the National Health Office (NHO), a branch of AKA in New York City, which in 1945, “promoted the recruitment of student nurses and health programs at Black colleges” (Shelton, 2003, p. 97). AKA awarded grants at some African American colleges specifically to support efforts to increase medical personnel and aid to children. It also donated grant-in-aid money during the mid 1940s, which was distributed to the Howard University College of Medicine to support students pursuing research in child development (McNealey, 1993). Shelton notes that the minutes from a 1952 AKA conference held in Kentucky revealed that



the organization donated monies to the UNCF and distributed “\$3081.50 dollars in scholarships” to students in their immediate area (Shelton, 2003, p. 217). The AKAs placed an emphasis on opening doors in the medical professions for African American women as a route toward service to the African American community and toward a stable, middle class lifestyle.

### *Delta Sigma Theta*

Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, founded by 22 collegiate women in 1913, has been actively engaged in promoting higher education since the early 1920s. The first national president of Delta Sigma Theta, Sadie Tanner Mossell Alexander, designated a week in May for the national organization and all of its chapters to focus on education. The effort, which according to Deborah Partridge was designed for “encouraging higher education among Negro women,” also focused on influencing African American youth in local urban communities where the organization had chapters. Delta historian Edna Johnson-Morris indicates that during the 1940s, the Deltas placed an emphasis on vocational education as well. According to Johnson-Morris, this was directly related to the effects of World War II on much of American life during that period. Underscoring that the world was in a “state of chaos,” Johnson-Morris described Delta’s priorities thus:

DELTA SIGMA THETA has faced its task courageously in the past—it must continue to face its task—a task in a time of tragic war. We must help to teach and train the masses. The DELTA MAY WEEK of this era must interest all classes—those impressed by the HIGHER EDUCATION campaigns—those to whom the program of VOCATIONAL EDUCATION has its appeal and those constituting the masses who are vitally concerned over the opening up and continuation of INDUSTRIAL JOB OPPORTUNITIES.<sup>36</sup>

V.P. Franklin and Betty Collier-Thomas note that for “many black women leaders, such as Ida Wells-Barnett, Mary Church Terrell, Mary McLeod Bethune, civil rights activism became a part of their personal identity” (Collier-Thomas & Franklin, 2001, p. 38). As Delta president and a member of the Truman Committee on Civil Rights, Sadie T. M. Alexander was admired and respected among many of her colleagues. Moreover she was a social activist who embodied the spirit of service and activism described by Franklin and Collier-Thomas. Sadie Alexander’s comments to the membership of Delta Sigma Theta in a speech entitled “The place of a fraternity in the life of a student, in the life of a university, in the life of the Negro race” described a three-pronged approach to ending racism in the United States. She noted that the fra-

ternities and sororities, housed on university campuses, could be instrumental in addressing the ills of racism.<sup>37</sup> She argued that the fraternities and sororities represented the “largest group of Negro intellectual power” and she challenged the members to use this intellect to increase access and equity with the following statement:

Democratic institutions can be preserved only if the people are willing to pay the price. Those of us who would suffer the most by the loss must be willing to pay the greatest price for their continuance. Not only our future economic position but our existence in America depends on our willingness to support those organizations, men and women, who through years of accumulated experience are equipped to meet and overcome the onslaught of racism in America. Democracy must be defended today at any cost ... you are therefore prepared to adjust your after college program to the welfare of your race.”<sup>38</sup>

Deltas were concerned about financially supporting higher education efforts both through donations to organizations that advocated equity and access in education and to specific women who were pursuing higher education or working with youth. According to Johnson-Morris, “philanthropic interests of the Sorority have been demonstrated time and again, but of note among the financial gifts during this administration were those sent to our own Honorary Soror Mary McLeod Bethune’s school which she founded in Daytona Beach, Florida; to Kumari Paul, an Indian student” who was highly recommended and “to the N.A.A.C.P. for partial payment in our Life Membership taken out therein.”<sup>39</sup> It is clear that the Deltas understood well their role as women who would and could make a difference in the world. The sororities were early advocates of resistance to oppression; African American women’s social organizations also became advocates of such resistance.

#### *The Links, Incorporated*

The Links, Incorporated is a African American women’s service organization. It was founded in 1946 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Educators Margaret Roselle Hawkins and Sarah Strickland Scott conceptualized it as a club that would “link friends in service” (Parker, 1982, p. 3) The members of the Philadelphia club were women who were actively involved in their communities in various capacities. Their commitment to community service was indicative of the attitudes shared by professional women during that time.

The Philadelphia Links developed a plan of action for their club. The cofounders envisioned the organization as one that would focus on three central areas—the civic, the charitable, and the intercultural (Parker, 1983, p. 3). While it is important to note that the women who founded



this organization were actively involved in other organizations, one must also recognize that they envisioned that this club would meet the needs of African Americans in ways that previous organizations had not. The women believed that the club should implement programs that would “foster cultural appreciation through the arts; develop richer inter group relations; and help women who participated to understand and accept their social and civic responsibilities” (Parker, 1982, p. 3). These women were dedicated to providing the means for racial and social uplift in their own communities.

Their goals were reflected early in the implementation of programs that would focus on the needs of African Americans in their quest for racial equality. In a historical account of the Washington, DC Chapter of the Links, Eula Trigg and Thelma Perry noted that Links’ chapters were “composed of black women, all of whom are dedicated to the ideals of progress, uplift, and humanistic concerns.”<sup>40</sup> Based upon the principles of friendship and service, The Links began implementing their mission almost immediately by providing access to education for youth through scholarships and financial support. Their archival papers document the numerous efforts that local chapters within their organization focused on in terms of providing financial assistance to colleges and their students.

A 1952 report to the national body of The Links authored by noted activist and civil rights leader Daisy Lampkin cites numerous examples of scholarships and other monetary support given to African American students by the Baltimore Links chapter. Many of these donations allowed students to overcome racial barriers in education. For example, the Links gave “\$250 to the NAACP toward the education of Hiram Whittle, the first Negro student to attend the College of Engineering of the University of Maryland.” Other donations include \$300 to “Paul Brent, a student studying at Peabody Institute.” A 1955 report shows that other chapters followed Baltimore’s lead. The Atlanta chapter reported that it made donations to the United Negro College Fund. The Wilmington, North Carolina chapter indicated that it gave two \$50 scholarships for high school students to pursue their higher education goals. The Tallahassee, Florida chapter of The Links created a bookmobile and presented it to the students and faculty of Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University (FAMU). In today’s economy, these figures seem like small contributions; however, when combined with funds from the UNCF or when used at public institutions with low tuition, the funds made a substantial difference in the lives of individual African Americans. And, through these early efforts, The Links were able to determine how great the need was for its members to develop national programs that focused on access to higher education.<sup>41</sup>

Although chapter programs are the most prevalent means of community and social mobilization among The Links, there are numerous other examples of the work done by the organization. Significant national programs have included the 1958 “Educating for Democracy.” Links’ historian Marjorie Parker noted that “the idea for this program grew out of an awareness that talent among minority youth was being wasted, even though the successful functioning of a democracy required that every citizen reach his or her highest level” (Parker, 1982, p. 75). Educating for Democracy led some chapters to provide scholarships to young people, and other chapters to offered tutoring and cultural enrichment programs.

Another important project that The Links implemented in cities throughout the United States was the Project Discovery program. This program was designed to provide support for middle-aged, middle-income minority women, especially those seeking further education. The purpose was to give information and guidance to “sources of support for minority women who were going through changes in their lives due to loss of jobs, dead end employment, re-entry into the work force, and divorce or death of a spouse” (Parker, 1982, p. 110). According to Eula Trigg and Thelma Perry,

As for us, the Washington, D.C. Links, we were upwardly mobile, middle class women who well understood the huge gap between ourselves and this vast under-class of Blacks, who received the worst of everything, including schools and jobs. . . . We also understood that whatever our successes and accomplishments, the structure and tenacity of racism in America were so strong that the bonds between the two classes would never be broken. In a very real sense we were our brothers’ and sisters’ “keepers”; and once we had become cognizant of the intensity of our relationships we would not have turned back even had it been possible.<sup>42</sup>

Although often concerned with the trappings of their middle class status, the women of The Links knew that they had an obligation to assist low-income African Americans, especially those striving for an education. These women may not have made a habit of marching in protest with their more militant sisters, but they carved out their own niche for creating access for African Americans and advancing civil rights.

African American women’s service organizations were often comprised of women who held membership in more than one club or group dedicated to the racial and social uplift of African American people. These women worked together in their efforts to resist oppression and believed that education was an essential element of fighting racial prejudice.

### *Concluding Thoughts*

Following victory in World War II, as the United States reflected on its new role as promoter of democracy overseas, many citizens wondered whether there was an adequate commitment to democracy at home. They recognized that opportunity was the core of democracy, and opportunities were limited across race, class, and gender. Educational access for African Americans was an especially poignant issue in an era when African American veterans, having fought for democracy overseas, were subjected to brutal racist attacks upon their return home. President Harry Truman himself became an advocate of desegregation after learning of those brutalities. And the members of the 1947 President's Commission specifically noted obstacles for African Americans in their report stating that the "Negro is the most frequent victim of racial discrimination because prejudice on the basis of color is dominant in the American community" (Truman Commission, 1947, p. 29). Creating access was seen as a key step in ending racial discrimination.

Access has many meanings, and in our essays we have focused on some specific and important meanings. In one broad sense, access means having actual institutional opportunity to matriculate at a college or university. As evidenced in Zook's work, creating and promoting such access was an important national policy issue, one that could not be ignored for the sake of assumed special circumstances such as the need for "gradual" change in southern higher education. Furthermore, following matriculation, both White and African American students needed to understand the importance of democratic practices, and their role in furthering access for those who followed them.

Nevertheless, mere admission to college does not adequately address the needs of those facing oppression. The careful—though admittedly intermittent—work of Black college presidents in the 1950s shows that many educational leaders often caricatured for their lack of support for racial equality were, in fact, supportive. There is more to resistance than the sit-ins and marches that were so common in the 1960s, and the use of the extra curriculum shows a subtle yet powerful mechanism for educating students in means to achieve, or to fight for, equality. Robust dissent and debate ought to be a hallmark of the academy, and Black college leaders at some colleges in the 1950s were able to provide access to dissent and debate in regard to ending discrimination internationally, providing a model of agency for many students.

The work of African American women's associations demonstrates how the ongoing battle for access occurred among educated middle-class women through organizations seen as attempting other goals.

These organizations made a sustained effort to provide scholarships and help young African Americans through the admissions process, and as the Truman Commission reported, economic barriers were especially formidable; the first two of the report's six volumes specifically addressed such barriers (Truman Commission, 1947). The 1947 President's Commission on Higher Education at once reflected a context of ongoing division within American society while also offering glimpses into a possible future of democracy for all. As these essays document, in general terms as well as in the instance of individuals—such as George F. Zook, Frederick D. Patterson, and Sadie Alexander—not only members of the Commission but also educators at campuses and within organizations recognized various means for creating access and implemented those means in an ongoing fight for racial equality in the democracy.<sup>43</sup>

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>On Truman's conversion from at best a neutral stance on racism to a determination to end discrimination and on the meeting with Truman to discuss brutality against African Americans, including veterans returning home, see White (1948). On the choice of "civil rights" by the Truman staff, see Gardner (2002). As Gardner also reports, Truman was the first United States president to speak to the NAACP and the first to speak in Harlem. For a fuller discussion of Truman and civil rights, see Hutcheson (2001).

<sup>2</sup>For an in-depth discussion of the developing militancy among African Americans during World War II, see Rosenberg (2006).

<sup>3</sup>For discussion of the 1947 President's Commission and its commitment to ending discrimination, see Hutcheson, P. A. (2001). For discussion of the report's impact and rhetoric, see Hutcheson, P. A. (2003).

<sup>4</sup>Two counter examples serve to sustain this argument. First, we cannot assume that now or in the past that all African Americans support such goals as civil rights. It must be obvious by now, given our current political surroundings, that there are indeed deeply conservative African Americans. Not every African American is a Black Panther, much less a member of the NAACP. Second, even when African Americans are ready to assist other African Americans in the unfulfilled quest for civil rights, the former group may well meet with rejection even though both groups have the same goal. See Dittmer (1994) for an extraordinary examination of the local efforts of African Americans to overcome oppression, often without interest in assistance from national groups of African Americans.

<sup>5</sup>As a curious example of this lacuna, see Anderson (1993). Anderson documents the work of Fred G. Wale of the Rosenwald Fund in his efforts to place African American professors at predominantly white college and universities and his frustrations at the consistent lack of interest among White college presidents, but Anderson does not identify Wale as White.

<sup>6</sup>Even those works that examine groups—such as Southern Whites—tend to focus on individuals, clearly indicating that singular rather than collective efforts characterized the early decades of the struggle for equal opportunity. See Bryan (2001), Chappell (1994), and Murray (2004).

<sup>7</sup>See also, Polsgrove (2001, pp. 48–50) on Mailer and (pp. 50–59) on Arendt. Another work examines the work of white activists in the Civil Rights Movement, but it begins with a survey administered in the early 1960s; see Pinkney (1968).

<sup>8</sup>Goggin argues that Woodson was especially careful about manuscripts for the Journal, wanting to be sure to counter standard racist scholarship, as did Woodson himself. See Woodson (1940). See also Zook (1919).

<sup>9</sup>On planning for the conference, see George F. Zook, United States Office of Education Commissioner, to S. L. Smith [Director for Southern Office, Rosenwald Fund] September 14, 1933. Entry 9, Box 1, Folder 2, "Letters of Appreciation," American Council on Education Archives, Hoover Institution on War, Revolution, and Peace, Stanford University. The Rosenwald Fund was, of course, a key and often supportive funding agency in the development of education for African Americans in the South.

<sup>10</sup>See Zook (1934), p. 582 on bootstraps, p. 585 on role of school.

<sup>11</sup>Gower (1976), see p. 128 on Zook's remarks, p. 135 on leadership positions.

<sup>12</sup>See Zook (1942), p. 277 on higher education for the capable, p. 278 on regional professional training.

<sup>13</sup>"Minutes of the Problems and Plans Committee Meeting Held at Rye, New York, July 16-17, 1943." Entry 10, Box 31, Folder 17, "Problems and Policies Committee," 1944, 3, American Council on Education Archives, Hoover Institution on War, Revolution, and Peace, Stanford University.

<sup>14</sup>"Minutes of the Meeting of the Problems and Plans Committee," November 1-2, 1943. Entry 10, Box 31, Folder 17, "Problems and Policies Committee," 1945, 1 on two guests, 2 on Redfield's comments about ACE's position, American Council on Education Archives, Hoover Institution on War, Revolution, and Peace, Stanford University.

<sup>15</sup>George F. Zook to Robert Redfield, June 30, 1944, Entry 9, Box 25, Folder 3, "Committee on Education of Minority Racial Groups," 1943-44, American Council on Education Archives, Hoover Institution on War, Revolution, and Peace, Stanford University.

<sup>16</sup>Allison Davis to George F. Zook, July 7, 1944, Entry 9, Box 25, Folder 3, "Committee on Education of Minority Racial Groups," 1943-44, American Council on Education Archives, Hoover Institution on War, Revolution, and Peace, Stanford University; George F. Zook to Ira deA. Reid, March 7, 1950, Entry 10, Box 60, Folder 7, "Discriminations in College Admissions Committee 1949-50," American Council on Education Archives, Hoover Institution on War, Revolution, and Peace, Stanford University. On deA. Reid, see also Young & Deskins (2001).

<sup>17</sup>"Statement from Dr. George F. Zook, President of American Council on Education to the Conference on Discriminations in College Admissions," "Minutes of Meeting of Committee on Discriminations in College Admissions," May 4, 1950, Entry 10, Box 60, Folder 7, "Discriminations in College Admissions Committee 1949-50," American Council on Education Archives, Hoover Institution on War, Revolution, and Peace, Stanford University.

<sup>18</sup>Throughout the report the Commission members used italics and bold to highlight principles and recommendations, and these font styles are reproduced accordingly.

<sup>19</sup>On the Commission's broad interest in discrimination, see p. 29 for a list of groups experiencing discrimination, a list including "Negroes, Jews, Catholics, Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, Latin Americans, Italians, and Orientals." On White's role, see Goodrich White to George Zook, October 27, 1947, Box 17, Goodrich White Papers, Special Collections, Emory University.

<sup>20</sup>"Report of the Commission Meeting, November 3-4, 1947," 7, Goodrich C. White Papers, Special Collections and Archives, Robert W. Woodruff Library, Emory University, Box 17, Folder 10.

<sup>21</sup>Du Bois, it should be remembered, held not only a PhD from Harvard University, but also graduated from Fisk University.

<sup>22</sup>Vivian Norton, interview with author, 11, May 1999. Vivian Norton entered Fisk in 1952 and graduated with a BA at age 18.

<sup>23</sup>Prince Rivers, interview with author, 25 March 1999. Prince Rivers entered the Fisk University Basic College Early Entry program in 1953. He graduated with a BS in 1957 and an MA in 1959.

<sup>24</sup>Stephen J. Wright, interview with Marcia Goodson, United Negro College Fund Oral History Collection, Columbia University, New York, New York, 47.

<sup>25</sup>Joyce Lander, interview on PBS special "From Swastika to Jim Crow," New York: Public Broadcasting Corporation, 1995. See also Edgcomb (1993).

<sup>26</sup>For more information on Patterson's political leanings, see Gasman (2007).

<sup>27</sup>See also, Patterson & Goodson (1991) and Scott & Womack (1998).

<sup>28</sup>Charles Stephens, interview with author, May 5, 2006.

<sup>29</sup>See also, Logan (1944).

<sup>30</sup>Charles Stephens, interview with author, May 5, 2006.

<sup>31</sup>See also, Leffler (1999); Rosenberg & Karabell (2003); Gerstle (2001); and Plummer (1996).

<sup>32</sup>Historians interested in African American colleges have looked at issues of leadership (in most cases White leadership) through 1935. See Anderson (1988) and Anderson & Moss (1999).

<sup>33</sup>"Attempted" refers to the fact that Herman Long was prevented from voting by local White townspeople.

<sup>34</sup>Of note, Gasman's essay discusses the involvement of African American sororities in the funding of scholarships.

<sup>35</sup>In this case study, I do not attempt to address the charges of elitism and exclusivity that have often been lodged against African American fraternal organizations. I recognize that these criticisms do exist and acknowledge them because they may further explain how and why many African American women's organizations remain unrecognized for their social service activities. However, the criticism does not negate the important contributions of these particular women's organizations. See Shelton (2003).

<sup>36</sup>University of Pennsylvania Archives, Sadie. T. M. Alexander Papers (UPT 50 A374S), Box (67), File Folder (33), See Johnson-Morris, E. B. (1944). *The history and development of the Delta Sigma Theta Sorority*. Gary, IN: The Gary American Publishing Co., 75.

<sup>37</sup>University of Pennsylvania Archives, Sadie. T. M. Alexander Papers (UPT 50 A374S), Box (67), File Folder (33).

<sup>38</sup>The place of a college fraternity in the life of a student, in the life of a university, in the life of the Negro race, Speech to Delta Sigma Theta, 1939, Box 71, Folder 61, Sadie T.M. Alexander Papers, University of Pennsylvania University Archives, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 1.

<sup>39</sup>Speech to Delta Sigma Theta, 1939, Box 71, Folder 61, Sadie T.M. Alexander Papers, University of Pennsylvania University Archives, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 13.

<sup>40</sup>Eula Trigg and Thelma Perry, "The Washington, D.C. Chapter: The Links, Inc." unpublished historical account located in the archives of The Martin Luther King Library of the Washington, DC Public Library, July 1986, 5.

<sup>41</sup>Daisy Lampkin, "Report of Program Committee, 1955-1956", folder 2, box 1, Atlanta Links Papers, Auburn Avenue Research Library, 1-1.

<sup>42</sup>Eula Trigg and Thelma Perry, "The Washington, DC Chapter: The Links, Inc.," 7.

<sup>43</sup>For example, the Truman Commission explicitly cited the Committee on Civil Rights in regard to discrimination by "private educational institutions," *Higher Education for American Democracy*, V. 2, 28.

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