

**“THE ASSOCIATION IS DYING”:  
BLACK STUDENT ACTIVISM AND THE EVOLUTION OF  
CONSCIOUS SPACE-MAKING AT DUKE UNIVERSITY**

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Historically, black students at Duke University have fought to confront institutional barriers to their belonging at the university. Following their admission in 1963, this struggle was informed by the national culture of black political consciousness. The solidarity that this political context created served to maintain black student consciousness regarding their place at the university and how it fit into the national narrative of civil rights. This paper will give examples of black student activism, as well as trace its expiration. As decades passed, university records indicate that the administration grew more receptive to black student demands as part of its commitment to diversity while student organizations became increasingly depoliticized. As a result, the collective, sustained political consciousness waned in favor of temporary, instrumental displays of discontent.

### *Background*

The second half of the 1960s saw a surge of political activism that differed from that of years past. In the preceding decade, political dissent rarely appeared in the public eye.<sup>1</sup> The first half of the 60s brought protest that had a predominantly parochial lens. Civil rights activists focused on specific local venues or institutions that discriminated against blacks like theaters and lunch counters.<sup>2</sup> In the later half of the decade, the culture transitioned from this locally focused lens to mass movements. The aim became to holistically address the “inflexible will of white society in maintaining its dominance

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<sup>1</sup> Orum, Anthony M., *Black Students in protest: a study of the origins of the Black Student Movement*, (Washington, D.C.: American Sociological Association, 1972), eBook, chap. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Orum, Anthony M., *Black Students in protest: a study of the origins of the Black Student Movement*, (Washington, D.C.: American Sociological Association, 1972), eBook, chap. 7.

over the black minority,” a goal bolstered by the renaissance of shared black heritage and the resulting solidarity.<sup>3</sup>

This newly expanded perspective greatly informed the black student protest movement. Student protests politicized blacks’ place in the university setting. While the concerns of individual student groups reflected specific contentions with university parietal rules,<sup>4</sup> the act of protest reflected a national, highly political context connected to civil rights and black power.<sup>5</sup> Gallagher aptly describes black student activism as “a sensitizing of white conscience” in an effort to “rescue the white campus from its complacency.”<sup>6</sup> This frame of reference consistently reminded protestors and the protested alike that predominantly white institutional spaces exist as caste systems in which the needs and interests of black students are secondary.<sup>7</sup>

The obligation that black students shouldered and continue to take up on occasion demonstrates the responsibility of that group to create and ensure their own space on campus. Chambers and McCready, sociologists specializing in urban education, race, and education policy, created the term “making space” to define the process by which students with stigmatized identities “make sense of and respond to their marginalization” in ways that “affirm their social and cultural identities.”<sup>8</sup> This process includes any type of identity and worth articulation on the institutional stage. Black university student

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<sup>3</sup> Zangrando, Joanna Schneider, and Robert L. Zangrando. “Black protest: A rejection of the american dream.” *Journal of Black Studies* 1 (1970): 146.

<sup>4</sup> Gusfield, Joseph R. “Student protest and university response.” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 395 (1971): 28.

<sup>5</sup> Gusfield, Joseph R. “Student protest and university response.” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 395 (1971): 29.

<sup>6</sup> Gallagher, Buell G. “Higher education and the black student: retrospect and prospect.” *Howard Law Journal* 19 (1975): 37.

<sup>7</sup> Gallagher, Buell G. “Higher education and the black student: retrospect and prospect.” *Howard Law Journal* 19 (1975): 39.

<sup>8</sup> Venzant Chambers, Terah T. and Lance T. McCready. ““Making space” for ourselves: African American student responses to their marginalization.” *Urban Education* 46 (2011): 1354.

protest embodies this process in a deliberately collective manner. It demands space from the university not only in the material sense, but also as acknowledgement of their right to belong and to benefit as students.

### *Modern Examples*

Recent student demonstrations and online campaigns show that the university space is still hostile to black presence. Beginning in November of 2013, University of Michigan students used Twitter to call attention to the declining enrollment of black students at their institution.<sup>9</sup> Ignited by a “Hood Ratchet”-themed fraternity party invitation circulated on Facebook on October 29, 2013,<sup>10</sup> the Black Student Union took to the web to expose the discrimination and microaggressions endured by its members.<sup>11</sup> They created the hashtag #BBUM, or being black at University of Michigan, to track participation and generate dialogue. In February of the following year, the movement culminated in a twelve-hour protest and occupation of the undergraduate library entitled, “1,000 Speak Out,” which over one thousand students and faculty attended in support of voicing black student experiences on campus. Following the campaign, the BSU presented a list of seven demands to university administrators addressing various instances of black students’ marginalization on campus.<sup>12</sup> As of January 2014 the administration approved one request in part; rather than granting the original request for a new multicultural student center in a more central campus location, it allocated \$300,000

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<sup>9</sup> Jennifer Preston. “On Twitter, ‘Being Black at the University of Michigan’.” NYT Blog. February 25, 2014.

<sup>10</sup> Stephanie Shenouda. “Theta Xi’s racialized party plans draw ire.” The Michigan Daily. October 30, 2013.

<sup>11</sup> Jennifer Preston. “On Twitter, ‘Being Black at the University of Michigan’.” NYT Blog. February 25, 2014.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

for renovations to the existing center.<sup>13</sup> In March 2014, Harvard students also created a play and a photo campaign, tracked on Twitter #itooamharvard, referencing Langston Hughes' famous poem.<sup>14</sup> The play's material came from over 40 interviews with black Harvard students that focused on questions of alienation and racial insensitivity. Since March, leaders of minority groups at other predominantly white universities have requested screenings of the play.<sup>15</sup> "Dangerous Black Kids of Georgetown University" is a Facebook page created by Georgetown students to confront racial stereotyping.<sup>16</sup> It features portraits of black students alongside their academic majors and achievements.<sup>17</sup> These campaigns speak to the continued desire of black students to understand and articulate their place in the university. This kind of protest invokes a legacy of black struggle for university representation. In doing so, it acknowledges that the struggle for recognition and acceptance persists, and that black affinity groups shoulder the responsibility for calling attention to these issues.

### *Discrimination at Duke*

Black students at Duke University are no strangers to institutional discrimination. In an April 2014 email to the general body of the Black Student Alliance, president Marcus Benning alerted students to routine carding of black students by the Duke Police Department and the drivers of the Duke Vans service.<sup>18</sup> As of that date, no policy existed that authorized requiring students to present identification before using van services, and

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<sup>13</sup> Robby Soave. "UMich meets demands of black students who threatened 'physical action'." The Daily Caller. January 27, 2014.

<sup>14</sup> Bethonie Butler. "'I, Too, Am Harvard': Black students show they belong." Washington Post Blog. March 5, 2014.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Diana Ozemebhoya Eromosele. "Black college students launch artistic social media campaigns about race." The Root. March 5, 2014.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Marcus Benning, email message to dukebsagb@duke.edu. April 1, 2014.

only black students reported being carded.<sup>19</sup> This phenomenon echoes the lawsuit filed by Duke law student James C. Lee in August of 1987, which claimed that on August 29th of the previous year a Duke police officer stopped Lee on Central Campus and demanded presentation of his identification.<sup>20</sup> Once presented with it, the officer allegedly refused to return the card and arrested Lee when he began to walk toward the campus Public Safety office.<sup>21</sup> The incident incited a maelstrom of student and faculty responses, including a Chronicle series called “Suspect” which detailed black students’ experiences with Duke police and public safety officers, as well as featuring the administration’s response.<sup>22</sup> The student newspaper reported that of all black students polled, 28 percent reported having been stopped, compared to about 7 percent for all other races; 76 percent of all reported ID checks were performed on black students, during which time black students comprised approximately 5 percent of the campus undergraduate population.<sup>23</sup> The ensuing debate divided students, faculty, and administrators into two camps: those who believed that black students suffered the checks disproportionately in comparison to white students and were therefore being unjustly profiled,<sup>24</sup> and those who believed the checks were a necessary part of ensuring student safety regardless of the disproportionate enforcement.<sup>25</sup> Issues like this have forced black students at Duke to constantly fight for their place as equal members of the university. Their race precludes them from the de facto belonging that their white peers enjoy. Each instance of discrimination forces them

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<sup>19</sup> Marcus Benning, email message to author, April 1, 2014.

<sup>20</sup> Lee suit background. Duke Chronicle. September 7, 1987.

<sup>21</sup> Michael Milstein. “Law student files lawsuit against university.” Duke Chronicle. September 7, 1987.

<sup>22</sup> Michael Milstein. “ID checks draw complaints.” Duke Chronicle. February 11, 1987.

<sup>23</sup> Michael Milstein. “Poll links ID checks to race.” Duke Chronicle. February 11, 1987.

<sup>24</sup> “Letter to the Editor – Blacks and men in blue.” Duke Chronicle. February 16, 1987.

<sup>25</sup> Michael Milstein. “Public Safety braves charges.” Duke Chronicle. February 12, 1987.

to unite and demand that the administration rectify it, thereby affirming black students' place in the university.

### *Activism*

Duke's Afro-American Society was a student organization formed in 1967, four years after the university first enrolled black students. It purposed to create and maintain an activist culture among black students on campus and served as a unified forum in which their needs on campus could be discussed, debated, and acted upon. The AAS Allen Building takeover on February 13, 1969 demonstrated for the first time the organization's skill in mobilizing its members behind their cause. The group asserted that negotiations with the Duke administration for over two years regarding several issues affecting black students on campus had not produced the desired results.<sup>26</sup> It believed itself to have "exhausted the so-called 'proper' channels," necessitating a more direct approach.<sup>27</sup> So, on that February morning, seventy black students entered the Allen Building and refused to leave.

They brought with them a formal list of all the unsatisfied requests, titled "The Black Demands."<sup>28</sup> On the academic side, they demanded an Afro-American studies department, an exclusive black advisor, protection and increase of scholarship funding, and the reinstatement of black students dismissed for course failure. With regard to social life, they requested a black dorm, allocation of black students' annual fees to the black student union, and "the immediate end to police harassment of black students and demand protection of all black students at Duke." In addition, on the administrative level,

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<sup>26</sup> The Black Demands from the Malcolm X Liberation School, inside Allen Building. February 13, 1969 Box 1, Folder 3. Allen Building Takeover Collection. University Archives, Duke University.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

they called for “the immediate end to tokenism of black representation in university power structures.”<sup>29</sup> The breadth of demands demonstrates the extent of AAS’ consciousness regarding black issues on campus. Each point was a specific example of how the university failed to adequately support black presence on campus. Combined, they comprise a powerful narrative of hostility. The university would not provide funding for the black student union comparable to other groups. Grant money for black students was not a priority. Academic deans dismissed students that struggled in the classroom rather than seeking solutions. The need for such a demonstration reflected black students’ lack of representation among administrators and faculty. The university tolerated black students’ presence but would not grant them the same resources for participation and belonging as their white counterparts.

Police, administrators and peers criminalized black students. The list of demands highlighted police harassment suffered by black students. Administrators’ response to the Allen Building takeover treated the students as offenders. In the minutes of the administrations’ meeting during the occupation, transcribing secretary Williams quotes a professor Bradley as saying, “If these Afro-American students are to be given due process, then we should not prejudice that process by hearing from one of them in advance.”<sup>30</sup> The language of due process immediately categorizes the students as a group standing against the established order rather than stakeholders within that order. The meeting discusses them as if they are a union that must reach a compromise and be sent back to work. It concluded with the objective to remove students from the building before

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<sup>29</sup> The Black Demands from the Malcolm X Liberation School, inside Allen Building. February 13, 1969 Box 1, Folder 3. Allen Building Takeover Collection. University Archives, Duke University.

<sup>30</sup> Administrative meeting minutes from George W. Williams, Secretary pro tem. February 13, 1969 Box 1, Folder 3. Allen Building Takeover Collection. University Archives, Duke University.



beginning negotiations, as if they presented a threat to those inside.<sup>31</sup> Eventually, Provost Marcus Hobbs suspended the students involved, again “pending due process,” stating that those who refused to vacate would “be deemed to be trespassers and will be subject to criminal charges for trespassing and other violations of the law which may occur.”<sup>32</sup>

Considering the administration’s relationship to black students, this language merits close attention. From a legal standpoint it seems a natural progression, but it also perpetuates a specific mode of classification. First, administrators will “deem” students as trespassers, classifying them as criminals despite the fact that they attend the university in which the building they occupy is located. Then students will suffer punishment as a result of that classification. Even more, Hobbs assumes that other legal violations will occur, which essentially means that the administration expects the students to become violent. This example adds another dimension to the administration-black student relationship. The President, the Provost, and other involved faculty wish to placate black students not only because they were hostile to black presence but also because they fear the consequences of not doing so. The dissatisfied black population was, and is, a threat.

Conservative students on campus also perceived this threat, less to their individual lives and more to campus culture as a whole. While the three day demonstration following the takeover featured at least 1,000 sympathizing white students,<sup>33</sup> the night of the occupation saw a meeting of Duke’s chapter of Young Americans for Freedom, a conservative activist organization, during which they drafted and discussed “any action

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<sup>31</sup> Administrative meeting minutes from George W. Williams, Secretary pro tem. February 13, 1969 Box 1, Folder 3. Allen Building Takeover Collection. University Archives, Duke University.

<sup>32</sup> Letter from Provost Marcus E. Hobbs to protesting students. February 13, 1969 Box 1, Folder 3. Allen Building Takeover Collection. University Archives, Duke University.

<sup>33</sup> “Black Uprising Shocks Duke U, Pioneer in Helping Minorities.” *The Bridgeport Post*. February 23, 1969, 16.

needed to prevent the “radicalization” and “liberation” of Duke”.<sup>34</sup> The “Scenario for Campus Revolt” detailed a series of hypothetical events initiated by the “unreasonable demands” of the occupation. The sequence involves police intervention, radical demonstrations, ousting the president, installing a new administration “timid to all militant action,” and a new institutional order in which “militants dominate campus life.”<sup>35</sup>

The alarmist language echoes the administration’s expectation that the events of the takeover portend escalation of violence perpetrated by black students. In the case of the Young Americans for Freedom, this kind of anxiety dwarfed in importance the legitimate claims of black students. The administration also retained that anxiety and added to it considerable worry over the university’s public image. Though they would eventually address each point of the Black Demands, they proceeded with extreme caution under what AAS president Chuck Hopkins termed “functional anger”<sup>36</sup> but the edit council later deemed “terrorist duress.”<sup>37</sup> The Allen Building Takeover and its aftermath established a precedent for the administrator-black student relationship that would persist in the following two decades. Administrators came to anticipate that black students would voice their contentions with campus conditions and demand administrative action. They could also expect that the public eye would follow any action taken on black students’ behalf. The concern of the following decades would be how to

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<sup>34</sup> Scenario for Campus Revolt by Young Americans for Freedom. February 13, 1969 Box 1, Folder 3. Allen Building Takeover Collection. University Archives, Duke University.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> “the black spark” by Chuck Hopkins in *Harambee: A Duke Afro-American Publication*. February 5, 1969. Box 1, Folder 2. Allen Building Takeover Collection. University Archives, Duke University.

<sup>37</sup> To the edit council, Martin Brofenbrenner, Kenan professor of Econ; from John Berr, Class of ’77, 1976. Box 1, Folder Active File Turner, 1975-1976. Office of Minority Affairs Collection, University Archives, Duke University.

address the needs of the black campus community while placating their opposition and preserving the university's public image.

### *Space*

Amid hostilities of the era and considering the common challenges of university life, the black community at Duke quickly realized its need for campus space to call their own. AAS first proposed the "Afro-American living-learning corridor" in the fall of 1969.<sup>38</sup> Prospective members would have to be sponsored and voted upon by AAS members, as well as complete an application detailing "what you anticipate this learning situation to be, and what you can contribute to it."<sup>39</sup> Admission to the corridor meant gaining a haven on campus, an area "conducive to [their] needs and fraternal associations" to help them cope with their "alien condition" on campus.<sup>40</sup> AAS saw an explicit connection among its members between academic failure and the lack of safe social space on campus. Because black students were socially alienated from the rest of the student body, many perceived themselves as less capable of academic success than their white peers. As mentioned previously, the university also failed to provide proper counseling and academic help to acclimate students to Duke's rigorous academic demands. The Living Learning Corridor would be one way to address this shortcoming.

The university's hesitance to implement this space request illustrates the anxiety produced by recent campus events and the resulting national attention. In addition to local coverage, reports on the Allen Building takeover appeared in the New York Times, Life Magazine, Christian Science Monitor, The National Observer, Newsweek, and the

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<sup>38</sup> Afro-American living-learning corridor proposal in 1969, Fall 1969, Box 1, Folder 1, Office of Minority Affairs Collection, University Archives, Duke University.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Petition to Dean of Men and Kerckhoff Committee, August 4, 1969, Box 1, Folder AAS (Afro-American Society) 1969, Office of Minority Affairs, University Archives, Duke University.

Washington Post.<sup>41</sup> The administration regularly communicated with the US Department of Health, Education, and Welfare regarding prospective violations of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act, which deals with race and color discrimination. Duke most often initiated the correspondence, each time attempting to confirm that fulfilling some request of black students on campus would not be discriminating against white students.<sup>42</sup> In the case of the Corridor, the Department advised that AAS have white students serve on the selection committee, which must select members without regard to race, creed, or color.<sup>43</sup> The university allowed the creation of the racially non-exclusive corridor, but still faltered when matriculating freshmen requested to live there instead of spending their first year in majority white housing.

The Mary Lou Williams Center was another of AAS' space making initiatives. First opened as an unfinished, nameless black cultural space in September of 1979, the center was envisioned as a permanent location to feature black culture through art pieces, poetry, and music and dance performances.<sup>44</sup> Duke President Sanford first expressed concern to his Council on Black Affairs that the center would contribute to social segregation but claimed that he was "sensitive to the needs of members of the black

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<sup>41</sup> Media Coverage-State and National Press, Jan. 1969-Oct. 1969, Box 1, Folder 2. Allen Building Takeover Collection. University Archives, Duke University.

<sup>42</sup> Letter from Richard Cox, Duke University Dean of Men to Higher Education Coordinator Solomon Arbeiter in the Office for Civil Rights of the United States Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, September 9, 1969, Box 1, Folder AAS (Afro-American Society) 1969, Office of Minority Affairs, University Archives, Duke University.

<sup>43</sup> Letter from Higher Education Coordinator Solomon Arbeiter in the Office for Civil Rights of the United States Department of Health, Education, and Welfare to Richard Cox, Duke University Dean of Men, May 22, 1969, Box 1, Folder AAS (Afro-American Society), 1969, Office of Minority Affairs, University Archives, Duke University.

<sup>44</sup> Memo from Vice President William Griffith to Caroline Lattimore, Dean of Minority Affairs Re: Mary Lou Williams Center for Black Culture, September 27, 1982. Box 3, Folder B.S.A. 1982-1983, Office of Minority Affairs Collection, University Archives, Duke University.

community to participate in cultural activities that are uniquely theirs.”<sup>45</sup> The selling point for the administration, stated in a letter from University Chancellor Kenneth Pye, was that in addition to affirming black culture for black students, the center would be “a place where white students would choose to come and thereby improve their knowledge and appreciation of black culture.”<sup>46</sup> This attention to the experience of white students in the face of making space for blacks shows development in the administration’s view of campus change on behalf of blacks. No longer concerned simply with addressing black needs, it also had to attend to how addressing those needs affected white students, and the resulting public image.

### *Population Increase and Retention*

In 1969, black students comprised approximately 1.13 percent of Duke’s eight thousand students. By 1987 the figure had increased to 6 percent. These numbers satisfied the Office of Admissions. Because the US Supreme Court’s Bakke decision in 1979 upheld affirmative action but ruled quota systems unconstitutional,<sup>47</sup> administrators had some breathing room when it came to minority recruitment efforts. The annual profession that they were “committed to increasing enrollment” was fulfilled in other ways.

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<sup>45</sup> Letter from President Sanford to Dr. C.E. Boulware regarding space request, May 14, 1979, Box 3, Folder Black Enrollment 1978-1979. Office of Minority Affairs Collection, University Archives, Duke University.

<sup>46</sup> Memorandum to Black Student Association from A. Kenneth Pye on Response to requests about matters of special concern to black students, 1/10/1980, Box 1, Folder Afro-American Studies, 1974-81, Office of Minority Affairs, University Archives, Duke University.

<sup>47</sup> “Aeolus” -The Bakke decision: Will admissions policies change? March 7, 1979. Box 3, Folder Black Enrollment 1978-1979, Office of Minority Affairs, University Archives, Duke University.

President Sanford authorized the creation of the Office of Black Affairs in June of 1972.<sup>48</sup> The office featured five faculty members and two representatives from each class of undergraduates.<sup>49</sup> As the newly appointed liaison between administrators and black students, the office aimed to “provide an instrumentality by which the university can be held accountable to the black community” and “be sensitive to the total needs of the black community.”<sup>50</sup> With these two goals, OBA sought to address the poor track record of communication between the two groups and the administration’s poor reception when black issues were voiced. In an important step, OBA admitted its lack of knowledge concerning the issues that black students face. It committed to spending “a large percentage of the time” interpreting “the nature of the environment, and student reactions to it,” so that they could then “allay anxieties and undo frustrations that, when left unattended, lead to academic difficulties.”<sup>51</sup>

Alterations to the summer transitional program began in 1972 as a result of this intentional interpretation. Begun in 1970, STP was six-week program designed to ease the transition from high school to college and featured English and math orientation courses, as well as seminar discussions of contemporary issues.<sup>52</sup> While admissions invited all incoming freshman to apply each year, the new 1972 policy stated that all

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<sup>48</sup> Report to President Council on Black Affairs: History/Operations of the Office of Minority Affairs 1969-1985 by Dean Caroline L. Lattimore, PhD. November 21, 1985.

<sup>49</sup> Advisory Committee Meeting, Nov. 1, 1974 – Advisory Committee to the Office of Black Affairs, Box 1, Folder Advising and other issues, 1973-1974, Office of Minority Affairs, University Archives, Duke University.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Bulletin for Undergraduate Instruction 1976-1977 Duties of the Office of Black Affairs, Box 1, Folder Active File – Turner 1975-1976. Office of Minority Affairs, University Archives, Duke University.

<sup>52</sup> Summer Transitional Program – 1974, Box 1, Folder Advising and other issues, 1973-1974, Office of Minority Affairs, University Archives, Duke University.

black applicants were accepted without additional proof of need.<sup>53</sup> The administration's objectives were two-fold: they wanted to "augment the skills essential for successful competition in Duke's academic environment" and foster "encouragement of a comfortable balance between the academic dimension and the social dimension."<sup>54</sup> As previously addressed, the former objective applied especially to black students, who found it difficult to adjust to Duke's atmosphere and keep up academically at the same time. However, the summer program addressed neither how black students should socially navigate the university nor how to gain more applicants. The Black Student Weekend would eventually begin to do both.

Efforts to increase the number of black students applying to the University had been hampered by hesitation on the part of applicants and current students alike. In the AAS' newsletter in the spring of 1970, a student wrote, "Those of us who know the situation we as black people are a part of here at Duke could not conscientiously interest other black people in coming here," and to do so would do them "an incalculable harm."<sup>55</sup> Students had to weigh the hostile Duke atmosphere against the obligation to preserve the numbers of the black community.

The Recruitment Committee and Minority Admissions Counselor Brenda Becton held the first recruitment weekend exclusive to black students in December of 1970.<sup>56</sup> The three-day weekend featured a buffet welcome dinner, a campus tour, and a dramatic

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<sup>53</sup> Summer Transitional Program – 1974, Box 1, Folder Advising and other issues, 1973-1974, Office of Minority Affairs, University Archives, Duke University.

<sup>54</sup> Duke University Undergraduate Admissions Counselor's Conference Office of Minority Affairs by Vergel L. Lattimore, III, Assistant to the Dean, Box 3, Folder B.S.A. 1979. Office of Minority Affairs, University Archives, Duke University.

<sup>55</sup> Afro-American newsletter A reply to brother Waldo, April 10, 1970, Box 1, Folder AAS 1969-1970, Office of Minority Affairs, University Archives, Duke University.

<sup>56</sup> Freedom newsletter, December 1, 1970, Box 1, Folder AAS 1969-1970, Office of Minority Affairs, University Archives, Duke University.

performance by black students.<sup>57</sup> In addition to her administrative role in planning the weekend, undergraduate sociology student Becton would also act as “the primary interviewing and subsequent personal evaluating component of the Black students’ applications.”<sup>58</sup> Admissions later reabsorbed this authority, but the initial specialization shows brief acquiescence to the idea that black administrators know best when it comes to black students. The 1972 recruitment weekend added a forum on “Black Students and Professors in a White University,”<sup>59</sup> likely addressing the issue of the campus environment while still attempting to recruit students. By 1978, Undergraduate Admissions ran four-day recruitment weekends with the assistance of the Black Student Alliance,<sup>60</sup> and further diversified the schedule by adding meetings with academic deans, separate meetings for engineering students, a quad party, a student panel discussion, financial aid counseling, and class attendance. Admissions counselor David Belton wrote in a foreword to the weekend’s schedule in the career center’s newsletter that he personally invited all undergraduate and graduate students to attend the events as an “opportunity for us to get together in unity and fellowship.”<sup>61</sup>

The recruitment weekends of the 1970s and early 1980s reflect the administration’s attempt to address the needs of black students without violating the laws that prohibit discrimination. Assistant to the Dean Vergel L. Lattimore put it this way: “In

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<sup>57</sup> Freedom newsletter, December 1, 1970, Box 1, Folder AAS 1969-1970, Office of Minority Affairs, University Archives, Duke University.

<sup>58</sup> A Proposal for the Recruitment of Black Students at Duke University – March 16 1970. Emphasis included. Box 1, Folder Admission and Recruitment of Black Students 1969-1970. Office of Minority Affairs, University Archives, Duke University.

<sup>59</sup> Campus Visitation for Prospective Black Students Dec. 8-10, 1972, Box 1, Folder AAS 1972, Office of Minority Affairs, University Archives, Duke University.

<sup>60</sup> ACPO (Academic and Career Placement Opportunities) Grapevine Vol. 1, No.3 by Office of Black Affairs February 1978. Box 3, Folder B.S.A. 1980-1981, Office of Minority Affairs, University Archives, Duke University.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.



realizing that all minority affairs/affirmative action programs now operate in the “shadow” of Allan Bakke and the like, we are prepared, in spite of the possibilities, to actively and intentionally function under the assumption that the continuing educational goal of Duke University is equality of opportunity.”<sup>62</sup> Rather than focus specifically on the uplift of black students, they focused outward, on how the change appeared to the outside community. They chose to assess campus atmosphere by comparing it to peer institutions. Thurletta Brown of Admissions stated in a 1972 interview, “The University now acknowledges the special needs of black students, and all in all compares favorably to other predominantly white schools.”<sup>63</sup> In the same article, advisor to black students Harold Wallace is quoted, “If a student is thinking of attending a predominantly white institution, Duke is no worse than anywhere else.”<sup>64</sup> Both carefully emphasize the context as a predominantly white institution to demonstrate that their interest is careful integration with special attention to how white students were being affected. This misdirected attention would persist as the university restructured to emphasize a more broad conception of diversity.

### *Waning Concern*

Concurrent to increased administrative connection to black students, the Afro-American Society began to experience discord amongst its members. The debate centered on the organization’s power structure. In December of 1970, AAS members presented a

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<sup>62</sup> Duke University Undergraduate Admissions Counselor’s Conference Office of Minority Affairs by Vergel L. Lattimore, III, Assistant to the Dean, Box 3, Folder B.S.A. 1979. Office of Minority Affairs, University Archives, Duke University.

<sup>63</sup> “Campus Visitation for Prospective Black Students,” December 8, 1972. Box 1, Folder AAS 1972, Office of Minority Affairs, University Archives, Duke University.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

list of grievances to the Central Committee.<sup>65</sup> It addressed several specific actions that reflected the group's isolation and seeming self-interest. The list of indictments included holding elections for the committee chairman during the summer rather than the academic year, funding a committee-exclusive retreat with AAS funding without explaining its purpose, and holding so-called "open meetings" off campus at undisclosed locations.<sup>66</sup> The committee's isolation prompted doubts as to its ability to know and willingness to address the needs of its constituents. Earlier that year, a freshman wrote in to the AAS newsletter to address the committee. The piece attacks the committee for its lack of transparency, asserting that, "at this center of [AAS] leadership there exists a vacuum which is being filled with verbal garbage on rhetorical bullshit."<sup>67</sup> He goes on to fault them with tendency to "alienate those black students who hold differences of opinion with them."<sup>68</sup> Far from the picture of unity painted by the Allen Building takeover just two years prior, the "bulwark of Duke Blacklife"<sup>69</sup> [sic] suffered from an inability to include the voices of all black students.

In the late 1970s, the AAS, since renamed the Black Student Alliance, aimed to refocus the organization with attention to its origin. It branded itself as "primarily a political organization" occupied with maintaining connections to the administration and solving problems particular to black students.<sup>70</sup> The new constitution read, "The organization is valid only so long as it is representative of and directly responsible to the

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<sup>65</sup> Grievances Presented to the Afro-American Society, December 8, 1970, Box 1, Folder AAS 1970-1971, Office of Minority Affairs, University Archives, Duke University.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Afro-American Society Newsletter: Views of a first-year brother: Just what the hell's going on? March 5, 1970, Box 1, Folder AAS 1969-1970, Office of Minority Affairs, University Archives, Duke University.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Memorandum to the central committee of the association of African students from Gwen Sherrill— Nov 27, 1972, Box 1, Folder AAS 1972, Office of Minority Affairs, University Archives, Duke University.

<sup>70</sup> Proposal for Black Student Alliance Constitution, 1978, Box 3, Folder B.S.A. 1978, Office of Minority Affairs, University Archives, Duke University.

voices of the majority of Black students on the campus as reflected in the composition of its membership.”<sup>71</sup> The restructured executive board reflected BSA’s commitment to hearing each of those voices. Reporting to the Central Committee were eight new standing committees: finance, program, promotions, political coordination, community relations, social activities, correspondence, and counseling.<sup>72</sup> The committees diversified leadership in the organization, making room for more voices to be heard and more concerns to be taken on. During the year in which the student government ruled that all Black Students enrolled at Duke are members of the Black Student Alliance,”<sup>73</sup> student representation became especially important. All members were subject to the decisions of the committees both in terms of how they affected life at Duke and how they represented black students.

Despite the creation of the Office of Black Affairs in 1972 and the President’s Council on Black Affairs in 1976, BSA functioned as the main focal point from which action on behalf of black students was taken. 1980 Chairperson Lynt B. Johnson encouraged members to rally around the organization, their “only tool” in the struggle for institutional equity.<sup>74</sup> The language reflects a specific desire to maintain the political solidarity of the organization’s 1967 origin, when it was in fact the only campus body dedicated to black issues. BSA’s Political Committee planned events in the early part of the decade to demonstrate renewed commitment to students’ political consciousness, including solidarity day and a biweekly workshop to discuss campus, national, and

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<sup>71</sup> Proposal for Black Student Alliance Constitution, 1978, Box 3, Folder B.S.A. 1978, Office of Minority Affairs, University Archives, Duke University.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Dear Fellow Black Student from Concerned Members of the B.S.A March 23, 1978, Box 3, Folder B.S.A. 1978, Office of Minority Affairs, University Archives, Duke University.

<sup>74</sup> Grapevine Vol. 1 Number 1: Soul Searchin’ by BSA Presiding Chairperson Lynt B. Johnson, 1980, Box 3, Folder B.S.A. 1980-1981, Office of Minority Affairs, University Archives, Duke University.

international issues.<sup>75</sup> The organization still aimed to prioritize its political arm above all else, perceiving the need of all students to engage critically with their surrounding environment and address the system that determined their circumstances. Though the struggle for institutional equity would never end, BSA's political focus soon waned.

In 1985, the BSA transformed its mission statement and organizational structure in two important ways. First, the mission statement added to its typical rhetoric of advocacy and cultural preservation a clause prioritizing the strengthening of the "bonds of community between black students."<sup>76</sup> Second, the Central Committee dissolved the committee for political coordination.<sup>77</sup> These changes introduced the most significant culture shift in the organization's history. The end of the political committee did not come about via a consensus that black students had achieved equity on campus, thereby rendering it unnecessary. In fact, two years later, the President's Corner in BSA's newsletter encouraged students who were victims of discrimination perpetrated by white students to document and submit to an archive of race-related incidents, concluding, "Remember: Black Power."<sup>78</sup> The use of the slogan invokes the group's past political solidarity, but the organization no longer saw fit to maintain constant operation of that arm. The change of the mission statement at the same time portends increased commitment to community solidarity without the sustained influence of political concerns. The restructuring of the standing committees paved the way for a social solidarity among black students that decreased significantly in political consciousness.

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<sup>75</sup> Grapevine Vol. 2 Number 3, September 1981, Box 3, Folder B.S.A. 1980-1981, Office of Minority Affairs, University Archives, Duke University.

<sup>76</sup> Black Student Alliance trifold brochure, 1985-1986, Box 4, Folder B.S.A. 1984-1985, Office of Minority Affairs, University Archives, Duke University.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Revelations! PRESIDENT'S CORNER 1987, Box 4, Folder B.S.A. 1987-1988, Office of Minority Affairs, University Archives, Duke University.

During that time the university began to diversify its administrative concerns with regard to students of color. In 1981 the president approved a faculty/administrator task force to study every aspect of black/white relations on campus.<sup>79</sup> The creation of the committee acknowledged the black/white divide on campus and demonstrated the administrations willingness to examine causes and seek solutions. The task force's final report again demonstrated the tendency of the administration to render non-exclusive any initiative aimed at black students. The report asserted that inclusivity should be the primary goal of all administrative offices dealing with minority groups. It specifically addressed the Director of the Cultural Center and its personnel, saying that they should purpose to "institute programs that make all races feel welcome." It also clarified the role of the Office of Minority Affairs, formerly the Office of Black Affairs. "The OMA should be a multi-racial organization dedicated to aiding in the adjustment of all minorities to University life," the report determined, including the opinion of one committee member who said, "The OMA should not be a place where blacks run to hid [sic] and merely receive an empathetic ear."<sup>80</sup> The image of black students hiding behind a protective administration does not track historically with the university's relationship to black students. However, its use signaled the end of listening to the concerns of black students. The transition from black to minority affairs meant less administrative attention to specific black concerns, which considering the BSA's de-politicization meant that fewer forces holding the administration constantly accountable for those needs.

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<sup>79</sup> Letter from Chairman of Task Force on Black/White Relations Shep Moyle to Faculty Member or Administrator, September 24, 1981, Box 3, Folder B.S.A. 1981-1982, Office of Minority Affairs, University Archives, Duke University.

<sup>80</sup> Memorandum To Caroline From Alice Re: Report of Students' Reponses to the ASDU "Final Report of the Task Force on Black/White Relations" (draft), Box 3, Folder B.S.A. 1981-1982, Office of Minority Affairs, University Archives, Duke University.

It seemed as though the administration intended the President's Council on Black Affairs to fill the void left by the de-specialization of the Office of Black Affairs. However, the committee during the 1980s focused mainly on recruitment efforts rather than campus issues. One member addressed this dynamic in the February meeting of 1983. He claimed that the committee was "skirting an important point" and that they needed to address the questions, "What is the quality of life at Duke and what should that quality of life be that can attract black students?"<sup>81</sup> Two other members contended that Duke was "not really as bad as it is often portrayed," and that instead of bad press "there should be more public discussion on campus about the good things that take place in regard to black students at Duke."<sup>82</sup> That meeting's focus again shows administrative attention to how the university as a whole looks to the outside world, to the detriment of addressing the specific needs of students. The quality of life at Duke was only an issue insofar as it hurt the university's public image and prevented students from applying. There was less concern for those who matriculated than for those still being recruited.

Two decades later, the Campus Culture Initiative confirmed the administration's commitment to inclusiveness. The committee's report emphasized that Duke's advocacy for diverse social and academic interaction on campus produced benefits for those who took advantage of the opportunity for "interracial interaction." Those students reported "significantly higher levels of skill development" in several professional and social skill areas that would prove beneficial post-graduation because contemporary workplaces require students to "develop and negotiate a more nuanced relationship with

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<sup>81</sup> Minutes of President's Council on Black Affairs – Feb. 15, 1983, Box 4, B.S.A. 1982-1984, Office of Minority Affairs, University Archives, Duke University.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

difference.”<sup>83</sup> In affirming their commitment to diverse interactions among students, the administration reveals that its primary goal is to expose students to a diverse population so that they can benefit academically, socially, and later professionally. By this logic, those who have already negotiated a nuanced relationship with difference stand to gain nothing from this exchange. Duke seeks to exploit the experiences of difference endured by its students of color in order to benefit those who do not have those experiences.

### *Conclusion*

The current relationship of Duke’s administration to black students reflects a commitment to diversity that upholds the caste system obvious in previous decades. The university benefits from including black students in its diversity quotient, and has therefore positioned its administration to quietly address the concerns of black students, tacitly discouraging the bold activism of the 1960s. Black students still acknowledge the need for activism when they suffer discrimination on campus. However, the lack of sustained, collective political consciousness, which was supported by organizations like the BSA, means that such protests only temporarily address discriminatory campus culture.

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<sup>83</sup> Report of the Campus Culture Initiative Steering Committee, February 2007, Box 1, Folder 1, Campus Culture Initiative Records, 2006-2007, University Archives, Duke University.

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