For Alma Mater:

Fighting for Change at Historically Black Colleges and Universities

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ABSTRACT

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The contributions that Black Americans made toward advancing their own educational institutions have often been overlooked. These men and women were quite instrumental in developing, organizing, and determining the future direction of their own schools. From 1920 to 1950, a shift in attitudes and culture began to take shape at Black colleges and universities concerning more student autonomy and more alumni involvement. This shift in attitude was primarily due to Black students and alumni who rebelled against the paternalistic White power structure that existed at their schools. At the core of this conflict stood frustrated students and alumni petitioning their predominantly White Boards of Trustees/administration to recognize their status as institutional stakeholders.

This dissertation focuses on alumni and student activism at three HBCUs—Lincoln University, Fisk University, and Hampton Institute—between 1920 and 1950. What will be examined in this study is the role that Black alumni and Black students played in waging a campaign against White administrators to bring about institutional change at these three schools. Additional points of inquiry are (1) Who were the institutional stakeholders and what were their goals, (2) How did alumni and student activism influence administrative change, and (3) What compromises were made at these three schools to address students and alumni concerns?

There are no in-depth historical studies regarding student and alumni activism at HBCUs during this period in Black higher education. The absence in the literature is particularly
unfortunate because the period between 1920 and 1950 was an important time in the
development of historically Black colleges and universities. An examination of the protests on
Lincoln’s, Fisk’s, and Hampton’s campuses can help illuminate some of the issues that HBCUs
were wrestling with during the wave of campus unrest that swept the country between 1920 and
1950.
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J. E. A., Jr.
DEDICATION

To my Father, James E. Alford, Jr.,

who whispers in my ear daily and reminds me that I am still his son

… I am listening.
Chapter I  
INTRODUCTION

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) have played a significant role in the history of education in the United States. In many ways, HBCUs are responsible for the economic, social, religious, and educational development of many Black communities throughout the southern region of the country. During their early years, Black men and women who graduated from HBCUs, along with the students who were enrolled, were instrumental in spreading the mission and ideas of these Black institutions.\(^1\) When examining the history of education in America, the historical narrative, as it relates to African American education and the Black men and women who played an integral part in its development, has often been omitted or scantly dealt with by historians of education. Within the past two decades, more scholarship has been produced on African American education and, more specifically, the role that Black southerners played in mobilizing around their own educational efforts. Prior to the 1980s, most of the research concerning the development of education for African Americans, Post-Civil War Era, focused on the work done by northern missionaries and philanthropists. More recent scholarship suggests that African Americans were quite involved in aiding these northern groups in establishing systems of education throughout the South.\(^2\)

\(^1\)The terms *African American* and *Black* will be used interchangeably throughout this document.

In this dissertation, I will investigate the role that Black alumni and Black students played in waging a campaign against White university administrators to bring about institutional change at three HBCUs. This dissertation will answer the following research question: How did Black alumni and students influence administrative change at Fisk University, Hampton Institute, and Lincoln University between 1920 and 1950? Additional points of investigation are:

1. Who were the institutional stakeholders and what were their goals
2. How did alumni and student activism lead to administrative change at three Historically Black Colleges and Universities?
3. What compromises were made at these three schools to address students and alumni concerns?

This narrative builds upon the work of historians of education who have written about the history of African American education and, more specifically, Black higher education during the first half of the twentieth century. In selecting materials to construct my narrative, I followed traditional historical methods using a combination of primary documents and secondary literature. In addition, I consulted relevant archival resources located in the archives and libraries at Fisk University, Hampton University, and Lincoln University. I analyzed meeting minutes from the Board of Trustees, various alumni chapters, and faculty meetings. Additionally, I examined university catalogues, bulletins, yearbooks, newspapers, journals, artifacts, and history books that pertained to my area of investigation. And finally, I assessed student newspapers, correspondence to and from campus organizations, personal letters, and personal journals, all of


which to better understand how students and alumni acted as stakeholders at Fisk, Hampton, and Lincoln from 1920 to 1950.

By focusing on alumni activism and student unrest at three Black institutions, this dissertation will amend the current body of literature that has failed to acknowledge the contributions of Black alumni and students at HBCUs. Due to their activism and protest, these institutional stakeholders were not only able to affect subtle changes on the faculty, staff, and campus of their universities, but they were also able to transform the political and social climate at their colleges and universities in a more drastic way. As a result of their concerted efforts, these three schools witnessed (a) more student autonomy, (b) greater alumni representation/involvement, and (c) the integration of the faculty, staff, and senior administration.

The significance in examining the alumni, students, and administration at HBCUs between 1920 and 1950 is to provide a social and historical context for better understanding how these individuals influenced change and ushered in a new era of leadership and culture that had never existed before at Black institutions. Prior to the 1920s, alumni and students at Black colleges and universities were nothing more than silent partners in regard to the governance of their institutions. For this study, I chose to examine the thirty-year time period starting in 1920 and ending in 1950 because this period represents a turning point for many Black colleges and universities regarding a transition of power and leadership; in addition, colleges and universities across the country were hotbeds for student protest and alumni activism during this time. The 1920s and '30s represented two decades of campus protest across the nation that had a profound impact on the change of leadership at HBCUs during the 1940s. Black students and alumni found their voice and banded together to integrate their campuses, address Jim Crow segregation, form alumni associations, fight for seats on boards of trustees, and create organizations that spoke directly to campus administrators in order to address student concerns.

The importance in focusing on the alumni and students at Fisk University, Hampton Institute and Lincoln University is to critically examine the work that alumni and students did at their respective institutions to change them. Equally important to this narrative are the
institutional politics that were at play between alumni, students, and the boards of trustees. Just as alumni and students adamantly pushed their political agenda concerning campus governance, the board of trustees held tightly to the reigns of the institution and refused to be coerced into making radical changes to the administration on their campus. Trustee boards in many instances were in complete opposition to the changes that alumni and students were petitioning for concerning more student autonomy, alumni involvement on boards of trustees, and the appointment of Black faculty and staff to the institution.

Since their development, colleges and universities have grappled with the relationships that exist between their boards of trustees, alumni, and students. At times, this tumultuous relationship has unearthed debates concerning the role and function of these individual groups in regard to their campus involvement. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, boards of trustees, alumni, and students worked independently of each other to establish their position at their respective institutions in the United States. This section will broadly examine the history of boards of trustees, alumni, and students in addition to the rationale for identifying the three groups as institutional stakeholders.

For the purposes of this research, the term **stakeholder** will refer to alumni, students, and boards of trustees/the administration at Fisk, Hampton, and Lincoln. By examining the intersection of these three groups at HBCUs, a perspective can be given concerning the joint reaction the stakeholders had to the unrest that occurred on their campuses during the 1920s and '30s, which led to insurmountable changes in the '40s. Certainly, there are other members of the college community that can also be considered stakeholders, but these three groups were identified as the most important members because of their unique positions as students, degree recipients, and chief governing bodies. Black alumni and students were heavily involved in petitioning their governing boards to integrate their campuses specifically among their faculty and staff. In most cases, the administration and faculty at HBCUs were predominantly, if not all, White members who were disconnected from the campus community in which they served due to issues surrounding Jim Crow segregation. Moreover, the decision to omit faculty and staff
particularly as stakeholders was due to the fact that they were employees of the institutions for which they served and any type of opposition or protest on their behalf could have resulted in immediate termination. Furthermore, when examining the research on HBCUs, the inclusion of faculty and staff is often relegated to teaching and moral development. Little has been credited to them as being agents of political and or social change on Black campuses during the first half of the twentieth century.

Acknowledging the surrounding community as a possible stakeholder is important to understanding the support that may have been offered to the students and alumni groups during their struggle for campus integration. The Black church, Black civic groups, and Black fraternal organizations can all be considered as vital community support systems. However, their roles as stakeholders are confined to their external position, which placed them squarely outside of the campus community. Furthermore, the literature concerning this topic involving community participation is sporadic or missing altogether. In many cases, community involvement greatly depended on where the college or university was regionally located. Rural Black colleges were often located in isolated places, which made it quite difficult or virtually impossible for there to be any connection between the school and the community. Altogether, alumni, students, and boards of trustees were the best examples of institutional stakeholders and how a battle ensued among them to influence administrative change at Lincoln, Fisk, and Hampton between 1920 and 1950.

In the United States, the relationship that existed between boards of trustees, alumni, and students from the eighteenth century up to the twentieth century has been more or less cumbersome. The history of these three groups, as related to their role at colleges and universities, is undoubtedly complex. Boards of trustees’, alumni’s, and students’ functions and responsibilities as institutional stakeholders are very different, yet, in many ways, connected. The cross-section between these stakeholders regarding campus involvement is what has often blurred their complicated relationship. Frederick Rudolph aptly writes, “Trustee power was not unlimited. Much of its authority was necessarily delegated to the president. Much of it was
actually appropriated by the students. And at all times college governing boards were aware of such shifting influences as those exerted by alumni....”⁴ To better understand their various roles, a brief history of each group is necessary in order to realize the intersections that existed between them at their institutions.

The board of trustees was hardly an American idea, but a replica of European boards and corporations.⁵ Thus, once American higher education institutions were established, “the concept of trusteeship, in brief had been transported from England to its American colonies.”⁶ Boards of trustees are also known as boards of regents, boards of overseers, boards of visitors, board of directors, and corporations. Historically, this group consisted of laypersons whose purpose it was to administer the affairs of the institutions for which they served. Most recently, boards have included the president of the institution as a trustee member. One important aspect to this research project is to understand the unique position and role that the president of the institution has as a board member in addition to the power and influence that is entrusted to that one individual. Boards of trustees are endowed by statute of constitution with authority to make or approve all decisions involved in the governance of the college and university for which they serve. During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, trustees were faced with the daunting task of keeping their institutions relevant during the new era of higher education, overseeing student disciplinary issues, fostering alumni relations, and building academically sound institutions that were highly competitive among other colleges and universities during the Post-Civil War era.⁷

The power and authority that boards of trustees exercised at their institutions most often characterized the college or university’s identity. Trustees controlled every facet of the


institution, from admission standards to student life. They worked hard to maintain a positive image of their school in addition to keeping the institution fiscally secure. Following the Civil War, many higher education institutions were forced to re-evaluate their academic programs due to a shift in the mood of college-going students’ educational goals and the demise of the liberal arts curriculum. Boards were confronted by alumni, students, and faculty to make drastic changes to the academic structure at their schools to meet those students’ needs. For the first time in the history of higher education, boards of trustees seriously had to confront members of the college community who openly challenged their authority. One group that was in frequent opposition to the board was the faculty. Professors fought for academic freedom and wanted nothing more than to evade the oppressive grip of the trustees over the college curriculum. Just as the faculty were at odds with the boards of trustees, so were the alumni and students, who were integrally involved with their institutions. The alumni and student groups were the most effective in their approach by petitioning for seats on the board, forming alumni associations, creating student government organizations, and organizing among themselves acts of campus activism. What they found in their individual and concerted efforts was that boards of trustees were indeed vulnerable and were willing to compromise for the sake and reputation of the institution.8

Alumni groups’ involvement in college governance is often misunderstood, yet they have had a voice in institutional affairs for centuries.9 Like boards of trustees, the history of alumni participation in the United States dates back to the English colleges and universities. In America, alumni groups started shortly after the founding of the first colonial colleges: “Not until the late eighteenth century did alumni begin to organize formally, and not until the mid nineteenth did they first participate as representatives of their fellows on college and university governing boards.”

8Duryea, Academic Corporation, 170-175; Cowley, President, Professors, and Trustees, 37-48.

9The Latin words alumnus, “pupil, foster son” and alma mater, “fostering mother.”
Most groups or associations, as they would later be known, began with the meeting of college classes during commencement. These groups would meet in the spirit of camaraderie and companionship. Their bond as classmates brought them back to their alma mater annually, but the friendships they formed as students connected them for life. Out of these class meetings came an organized body of alumni who eventually elected class secretaries to keep records and disseminate alumni news. In 1821, Williams College in Massachusetts became the first institution to create an alumni association that was open to all alumni members regardless of their class affiliation. Williams’ purpose for organizing the group was for the “support, protection, and improvement” of their alma mater at a time when the college was struggling to survive. Needless to say, the alumni at Williams succeeded in saving their institution and inspired alumni from other institutions to form their own groups. By the end of the nineteenth century, alumni clubs had become commonplace for most colleges and universities in the U.S.\textsuperscript{11}

Once alumni groups were formed, these associations immediately became involved in the politics and management of their institutions. They were interested in the academics, finances, reputation, athletic programs, selection of faculty, and selection and vision of the president for the institution. In order to protect their interest, they petitioned for elected seats on their college and university boards of trustees. “Alumni have always had seats on the governing boards of American colleges and universities, but not until 1865 did any assume office as representatives of their fellow graduates.”\textsuperscript{12} Alumni board members who were elected as trustees for the purpose of representing alumni interests were very instrumental in dictating the future direction of their institution as well as saving the school from the dangers of closure. The Civil War, coupled with the growth of the university, threatened the existence of American colleges.

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\textsuperscript{10}Cowley, \textit{Presidents, Professors, and Trustees}, 137.

\textsuperscript{11}The Yale class of 1792 is reported to have been the first alumni group to establish the office of Alumni Secretary. On September 5, 1821, Williams established the Society of Alumni of Williams College, which is the country’s and probably the world’s first alumni association. Cowley, \textit{Presidents, Professors, and Trustees}, 137-138.

\textsuperscript{12}Cowley, \textit{Presidents, Professors, and Trustees}, 139.
Alumni associations played pivotal roles in assisting their schools and influencing their boards of trustees to make the necessary changes to keep their colleges operational. Some called for new leadership, others asked for a revamping of their academic programs, and some alumni even took complete control of their boards altogether. Alumni expanding influence “suggested not only that they had the will but that the colleges and universities were in no financial position to frustrate that will.” Nevertheless, by the twentieth century, the impact that alumni clubs and associations had on the governance of their colleges and universities would be lasting.

Just as alumni groups were active in their schools’ governance process, so were students. In fact, students had been quite vocal in expressing their views on issues that had been important to them throughout the history of higher education in the United States. In many ways, the time they spent on college campuses as students informed many of the future decisions they made as active alumni members. Comparable to boards of trustees and alumni groups, students at American higher education institutions adopted many elements of college life from Europe, particularly English universities. While student life reflected the English model, “English precedents fostered no concept of student involvement in college governance.” Quite similar to the establishment of alumni associations, which originated in the United States, American students organized on their campuses to address administrative and academic concerns. “American students affect academic policy and operations in three general ways: (1) through their self-governing structures, (2) through their reactions to educational procedures, and (3) through the stands that groups of them took on public issues.”

Students of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries came together on their campuses and joined student organizations, created student councils, established student government

13Rudolph, The American College and University, 189-90, 241-43, 428-30. For more information on the rise of the university in the United States, see Laurence Veysey, The Emergence of the American University, and John Thelin, A History of American Higher Education.

14Cowley, President, Professors, and Trustees, 105.

15Cowley, President, Professors, and Trustees, 105.
associations, and asked for greater representation in the governance process at their institutions. These student organizations and leadership positions promoted student participation as well as engaged students in the process of self-governance. Students at the University of Virginia and Amherst College were the first in the United States to experiment with student self-government. Soon thereafter, other colleges and universities witnessed the growth of student-led governing bodies on their campuses. In addition to creating these campus organizations, students were also quite instrumental in addressing educational procedures at their institutions by hosting debates, conducting public forums, and forming literary societies to shed light on what they considered to be an antiquated system of educational practices. Student critics bashed faculty for their lack of academic innovation and demanded higher academic standards and more social engagement by staging student protests. These campus rebellions led to academic changes as well as unearthed other issues regarding social and political causes that were pertinent concerns to student leaders. College campuses became breeding grounds for debating public matters, and at the helm of these debates often stood student leaders. From as early as the Revolutionary War to World War II, students have used their college campuses as a platform for vetting public opinion. Altogether, the history of student involvement is important to the development of higher education. “Despite their historic unruliness, students have both expedited and instigated pivotal changes in the fundamental activities of American colleges and universities.”

Most importantly, boards of trustees, alumni, and students found a way to work through their differences, and they came together on their campuses at a crucial turning point in the history of higher education in America. What was discovered at these institutions was that “the same organizational skills and tenacity that undergraduates had brought to college life ten or twenty years earlier now resurfaced in highly organized alumni groups and even on boards of trustees.” In addition, “student leaders might not have excelled in their studies, but they had

16Cowley, President, Professors, and Trustees, 108.

17Cowley, President, Professors, and Trustees, 109.
learned well the lessons of how to control the priorities of the campus.” What can be seen in these three groups are how they evolved into institutional stakeholders between the late nineteenth century and first half of the twentieth century. Their evolution was spurred on by an emerging new era in higher education and their astute awareness of the social and political issues taking place in the United States. Just as these issues were taking shape at the nation’s leading White colleges and universities between 1920 and 1950, the same was happening at Black institutions. The histories of these three groups are important to the development of Black colleges and universities as well. Understanding who these individual groups are as stakeholders at Black institutions will help better explain the dynamic relationship that occurred on Black college campuses during the first half of the twentieth century that led to their campus unrest.

At historically Black colleges and universities, the relationship that existed between boards of trustees, alumni, and students had primarily been dictated by the boards of trustees alone. For the first fifty years or more of their existence, HBCUs were wholly controlled by White boards of trustees and wealthy philanthropists. Not only did they command complete authority over these institutions, but they were also instrumental in shaping the administrative and academic structure of Black higher education from its inception. At the start of the twentieth century, many Black alumni and students began to question their boards regarding issues of integrating their campuses, more student autonomy, alumni participation on boards, and the future direction of their academic programs. Trustees were less than receptive to these ideas and flatly ignored or rejected any concerns brought before them by alumni and students. Though few were still familiar with the institution of slavery in America, many Black alumni and students thought this was a continuation of that repressive behavior and intrinsically began to fight for inclusion on their campuses. For the alumni and students who were graduates of or attending these institutions, this form of control had reached its point of contention. Beginning in the

1920s, they began their campaign for institutional and administrative change at Black colleges and universities.

This crusade for change began with the efforts of Black alumni and students. The involvement of these two groups at their alma maters developed similarly to what occurred at White institutions with the exception of race, which stood to be a prevailing and unavoidable issue on Black campuses. Whereas White students and alumni did not have to compete with or look to members outside their racial caste for assistance at their institutions, this was not the case at Black schools. Black alumni and students were marred by the reality of White influence and domination at their institutions and rarely experienced members of their own racial group in leadership positions. A change of consciousness was on the brink in America, and these Black graduates and students found their colleges and universities at a crossroads. It can be determined that on the campuses of Black institutions across the country, a social awakening was starting to take shape that involved notions of racial pride and self-determination.

The conflict that occurred on a number of Black campuses between 1920 and 1950 illuminated the boards of trustees’ inability to transcend racial biases concerning Black involvement at HBCUs. Prior to the twentieth century, trustees had not concerned themselves with the idea of appointing African Americans in chief leadership roles or to serve as faculty.

It had been well understood that the near absence of Black Americans holding graduate degrees necessitated the appointment of White faculty and administrators in the years after 1865. Half a century later, however, given the number of college graduates and graduate holders, the failure to consider Black Americans for these positions was less defensible and distinctly out of line with the missions of these institutions.\(^\text{19}\)

However, there were a few Black schools, such as Wilberforce in Ohio and Morris Brown in Atlanta, Georgia, where African Americans were able to seize control of their own schools.\(^\text{20}\)

\(^\text{19}\) Drewry and Doermann, *Stand and Prosper*, 84.

\(^\text{20}\) In 1856, a group of White Methodists established Wilberforce University in Ohio. Seven years after its founding, Bishop Daniel Alexander Payne purchased the institution for the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Since then, African Americans have controlled and managed the university. Raymond Wolters asserts that “as an
Nonetheless, at the majority of the nation’s Black colleges and universities, this was not the case, and at the start of the twentieth century, alumni and students were ready to address these issues head on with their boards of trustees.

One way this happened was through alumni activism. Black alumni groups and associations were established in many of the major cities in the U. S. These associations served not only as a form of support to their institutions, but also as “watchdog” groups. They were instrumental in holding the university accountable and in many instances were known to criticize the administration and board for unwelcome changes within the institution. As external members of the university, alumni groups collectively pulled together to protect their interests as stakeholders. Alumni associations managed to raise large sums of money for their schools, influence student reactions on campus, and garner enough influence to eventually gain access to seats on their boards of trustees as alumni representatives. For the first time in history, White trustees were brought face to face with issues of race and equality once alumni took their seats as trustees. Although at a few Black schools alumni had already been elected to serve as trustees at their alma mater, their appointments were not made as representatives of the national alumni associations. Most often, the president of the institution or members of the board of trustees would appoint alumni trustees to their position. “Alumni/ae trustees occasionally expressed views on key issues that were contrary to those held by alumni/ae organizations, and the trustees sometimes neglected to pursue any other means of assessing the views and attitudes of the graduates.”

Nevertheless, alumni at Black institutions gained access to their boards of trustees and were able to enact change from within. Their appointments would ultimately serve as key positions during the fight for integration, which in due course led to administrative and institutional changes on their campuses.

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all-Black institution, Wilberforce escaped many of the interracial problems that confounded other colleges for Negroes.” Wolters, *The New Negro on Campus*, 293.

21Drewry and Doermann, *Stand and Prosper*, 86.
Black students started to rebel on their college campuses in large numbers during the 1920s. Prior to this era of protest, Black students had adapted to the idea of White superiority at their institutions as well as outside them. To characterize the feelings of the Black educated elite regarding this matter, one Black professor at Lincoln stated, “The college itself has failed in instilling in these students the very quality of self-reliance and self-respect which any capable American leader should have, - and the purpose of this college, let us remember, is to educate ‘leaders for the colored race.’” Motivated by the belief that they were being controlled by White paternalistic administrators, students staged campus protests to address issues such as student dress codes, curriculum concerns, decisions related to campus social life, and the hiring of Black faculty and staff. In most instances, they were armed with the support of alumni and the Black community at large.

One of the most noted supporters of the Black student rebellions of the 1920s was Dr. W. E. B. DuBois. He was often both praised and ridiculed for his involvement with student protest due to the fact that many White boards of trustees, presidents, and interested citizenry believed it was he who gave birth to the idea and orchestrated the entire mass student movement on Black campuses. They held these sentiments, even though it was widely known that student strikes and protests were taking place at college campuses all over the country at Black and White institutions alike.

As a result of these campus politics, Black alumni associations emerged and student organizations were formed, and they both began to command more power on their campuses. Numerous factors led to the fight for change at Black colleges and universities between 1920 and 1950:

The rising tide of Negro protest was manifested in many ways – in the warfare of the Red Summer, 1919; in Marcus Garvey’s Black nationalist movement; in the resurgence of Black pride celebrated by the authors of the Harlem Literary

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22 Drewry and Doermann, *Stand and Prosper*, 86.

renaissance; in the development of Negro-controlled businesses and institutions; in the growth of the NAACP, the Urban League, and the Black press; in the substantial Black migration from the rural South to the urban North.24

All of these social elements gave impetus to protest. These issues, along with the changing forces in higher education, caused a collision between boards of trustees, alumni groups, and student leaders at Black colleges and universities at the opening of the twentieth century. This intersection among the stakeholders forced each group to make drastic decisions concerning their role, the school’s identity, and the future direction of Black higher education in America.

Chapter II

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Between 1920 and 1950, Jim Crow Segregation, the end of World War I, the Great Depression, and World War II were responsible for effecting significant change in higher education in the United States. During these 30 years, the United States witnessed one of the most prosperous, yet tumultuous periods in the history of the nation. The country was at the height of a burgeoning economy during the 1920s thanks to enormous growth in industry and new forms of technology, which made it possible to rapidly mass produce goods for export across the world. The young nation quickly gained its place as the leading producer of goods and services, as well as one of the most powerful countries in the world.¹ Although the United States was at its pinnacle of growth and prosperity, the conflict over racial equality constrained the growing nation and continued to divide the country along color lines.

At the close of the 1920s and early ’30s, the Great Depression and World War II slowly collided with higher education institutions in the United States. Colleges and universities had been expanding throughout the 1920s, but shortly after the Depression, many institutions fell victim to federal and state budget cuts. Private colleges also suffered when their endowments shrank and gifts from alumni and wealthy benefactors were cut or decreased. “Between 1930 and 1943, the overall income of Black colleges decreased 15 percent, and income from private gifts decreased 50 percent. Among the nation’s White colleges and universities, the situation was

similarly dismal.”2 Many private colleges, however, made up some of that shortfall by raising tuition, resulting in education costs that some students across the country could not afford.3

Although most higher education institutions suffered through the Depression, HBCUs were hit more severely; this forced them to make major budget cuts that had a tremendous impact on their institutions. They had to cut faculty salaries, financial aid, and other operating expenses to stay afloat. “Elementary and secondary departments were closed down, reducing students enrolled in pre-college programs from 24 percent to 17 percent of all students at Black colleges.” These financial setbacks, coupled with World War II, crippled enrollment on Black campuses, resulting in wealthy donors, trustee boards, and presidents having to closely examine the functionality of Black higher education. From their early years of inception up until the Depression years, HBCUs across the nation underwent drastic changes.4

When the United States entered World War II, the nation was in the depth of a Great Depression. Many Americans remained jobless, homeless, and with little hope that the federal government could react in time to bring about some sort of economic recovery plan. Due to the massive volume of men who were recruited for the war, several employment opportunities became readily available to African Americans and women – opportunities that had never before existed for these populations. Throughout the nation, African American workers and their families migrated to cities to participate in the workforce, just as they had done during the First World War. Bringing with it a great demand for supplies and services, World War II’s greatest impact was ending the Great Depression. Although the war brought about an economic rebound, many colleges and universities across the country witnessed a drastic decrease in male students. Right at the close of the war in 1945, the federal government enacted the G. I. Bill in 1944 as a

2Gasman, Envisioning Black Colleges, 18-19.


4Drewry and Doermann, Stand and Prosper, 77.
means of supporting the returning soldiers with federal grant money to receive higher education training.\(^5\)

For the many African Americans who had served in wartime, they had hoped their participation in the war efforts might improve their position in regard to race relations in the United States. “The changed consciousness many Black Americans experienced – the increased sense of empowerment and possibilities that wartime service and access to new jobs and educational opportunities in the North held out – subtly changed the atmosphere in which all decisions were made in Black educational institutions.”\(^6\) Black servicemen returning from the war brought back to the States new ideas of democracy and were determined to hold their country accountable for the unfair treatment of African Americans in the United States. These servicemen questioned their roles as Black Americans fighting a war for democracy abroad when they were being denied the freedom of democracy at home. “The force of such experiences abroad and back home spread throughout Black communities, finding voice among the small but growing groups of Black intellectuals connected with one or another of the colleges.”\(^7\) There was a change in climate at Black colleges and universities during the early part of the twentieth century, not only due to Black servicemen returning home from both World Wars, but also because of the Black students and alumni who staged campus protests and national campaigns to change their institutions. “The protest of the 1920s led to the forced resignations of several presidents of Black colleges and to unrest among Black students and alumni throughout the United States.”\(^8\) These individuals believed that they should have more control over their institutions.

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\(^5\)Brinkley, *The Unfinished Nation*, 760.

\(^6\)Drewry and Doermann, *Stand and Prosper*, 84.

\(^7\)Drewry and Doermann, *Stand and Prosper*, 83.

Half a century of education and progress had produced college-bred Negroes who were imbued with great racial pride and aspirations, who were convinced that their race had developed educators who were qualified to man and manage their own institutions, and who were in full spiritual rebellion against the paternalistic assumption that Blacks were not able to govern themselves.9

Although Black students and alumni were petitioning for changes at their institutions, they were still met with the stark reality that White foundations provided a sizable amount of funding to Black colleges and universities. A large part of these changes could be attributed to a growing Black-college-bred citizenry and a shift in social norms brought on by wartime. Something had happened at Black colleges and universities beginning in the 1920s that inspired an evolution of change from within.

Perhaps one of the most important developments to occur in the South shortly after the Civil War was the establishment of a universal system of education and the development of a mass education system for Black Americans. Reconstruction brought about a change in the political and social landscape of the South, which made it possible for the freedmen to take key political positions in their local and state governments.10 Although Black southerners garnered a great deal of political power, which led to the establishment of public education system in the South, they lacked the economic power that was necessary to sustain and control the future direction of these schools.11 The same is true for the development of the numerous Black institutions that rose out of the South during Reconstruction that would later become colleges and universities. In most cases, African Americans had no choice but to forfeit any ideas of


10Freedmen – former enslaved Black Americans.

11Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South*, 4-6; Drewry and Doermann, *Stand and Prosper*, 41-4; W.E.B. DuBois, *Black Reconstruction in America* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1935), 56-72. Black Southerners' rise to political power after the Civil War was wrought by the wealthy White Planter Class, who was exiled from their political positions due to their full support of the Confederacy breaking away from the Union. Although White Southerners lost their political clout throughout the South after the war, toward the end of Reconstruction they were able to regain control of the South, which signaled the demise of the freedmen's movement for universal education. Black Southerners did not possess the economic resources necessary to sustain control of their local and state government. Once the federal government relinquished control of the South back to the White Planter Class at the end of Reconstruction, the freedmen were forced out of office.
managing and operating the very institutions that were founded to afford them social equality and opportunities through education. Often left out of the larger historical narrative regarding their contributions to education in the United States, African Americans fought hard to establish themselves as capable individuals prepared to govern their own schools.

Philanthropists, missionary societies, and Black southerners founded the majority of the Black institutions located in the South shortly after the Civil War, with the exception of those few Black schools that began in the North prior to the war, such as the Institute for Colored Youth in Philadelphia, established in 1837. During the next two decades, four more institutions for Black Americans were founded. Avery College in Allegheny, Pennsylvania was founded in 1849; the Ashmun Institute in Chester County, Pennsylvania was founded in 1854; Wilberforce University in Ohio was founded in 1855; and an academy for Black girls in Washington D.C. was founded in 1851, which became Miner Teachers’ College in 1860. “The first of the small number of pre-war institutions established for the purpose of providing higher education for Black Americans was founded around the same time and for the same reason as colleges for White women: both groups were excluded from or had limited access to existing institutions of higher education.”

Black schools in the South began somewhat differently than those in the North. Whereas northern Black schools set out to train young Black men for the ministry or for professional careers in medicine, law, or business, southern Black schools were mostly concerned with educating the masses of newly freed men from the mental bondages of slavery and “immorality.” These southern Black institutions found their origins in the war-torn South, dedicated to addressing the immediate needs of a people newly freed from slavery. From Reconstruction up until the Great Depression, education in the South consisted mostly of private liberal arts,

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12 According to Drewry and Doermann there are no records of any of the Black institutions awarding baccalaureate degrees before the end of the Civil War. Ashmun Institute awarded its first bachelors degree in 1865 and renamed itself Lincoln University the following year, and the Institute for Colored Youth was renamed Cheyney and awarded its first degree in 1932. Drewry and Doermann, *Stand and Prosper*, 33.
normal, and training schools. The majority of the educational institutions founded for Black Americans used the titles of “college” or “university” to signify what they hoped to become rather than what they actually were. Nonetheless, Black southerners, along with the help of various missionary associations and philanthropic organizations, charted a course for Black higher education. “In the South the history of Black higher education from 1865 to 1935 involves largely a study of the interrelationship between philanthropy and Black communities – or at least Black leaders – in the development of colleges and professional schools for Black youth.” The rise of Black colleges and universities in the United States during the early part of the twentieth century was as critical to the country as the development of the first colonial colleges during the seventeenth century. Just as the colonial colleges’ primary purpose was to produce an educated cadre of men whose responsibility it was to lead the newly liberated colonist to a better spiritual and moral society, the same principles held true for Black colleges and universities during their early years in both the North and the South.

At the start of the new century, Black institutions were met with the daunting task of updating their physical plants, increasing their endowments, and strengthening their academic programs in order to make the transition from training schools to accredited colleges and universities. Achieving these goals did not come easy due to the limited resources that most Black colleges and universities had become accustomed to, with the exception of industrial training schools like Hampton and Tuskegee, both of which boasted sizable endowments.

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13 According to Sherman J. Jones and George B. Weathersby in *Black Colleges in America*, 101-2: “In 1916 a national survey found that of approximately 92,000 students in Negro schools offering college-level work only a little over 2,600 (or less than 3 percent of the enrollment) were pursuing the college curriculum. Only three Black institutions in 1900 reported more than 100 students of college level in their programs – Lincoln in Pennsylvania, Wilberforce in Ohio, and Biddle University in Charlotte, North Carolina.”

14 There were several missionary associations that aided in the efforts to establish Black schools/colleges and universities in the South, they were: the American Missionary Association (AMA), the American Baptist Home Mission Society (ABHMS), The Freedmen’s Aid Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church, The Board of Missions for Freedmen of the Presbyterian Church, the African Methodist Episcopal Church, The African Methodist Episcopal Church of Zion, the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church, and several Black Baptist Societies. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South*, 239.
Philanthropists were more willing to give large financial gifts to Black institutions that implemented a vocational and industrial program as opposed to a more classical curriculum. This biased decision made by wealthy philanthropists to support one institution’s mission over another was in direct conflict with many Black southerners who adamantly opposed vocational education.

Perhaps one of the most well-known debates in the history of African American education was the issue of industrial versus classical education. Historians of education have done a great deal of research on this topic, mainly using the educational ideology of Booker T. Washington and Dr. W.E.B. DuBois to shed light on how the curriculum at HBCUs developed. For decades, the philosophical notions of Washington and DuBois have served as the benchmark for discussing the history of African American education. However, this debate predates both Washington and DuBois and began in the 1860s with the founder and principal of Hampton Institute, General Samuel Armstrong. Historians of education have long been divided with regard to the work Armstrong did at Hampton, as well as his educational philosophy regarding Black education. Armstrong’s “Hampton Idea” to “educate the head, the hand, and the heart” was widely criticized for its industrial/manual labor approach to addressing Black education in post-slavery America. Many of the northern missionary societies and a considerable number of Black southerners opposed Armstrong’s views on industrial education for Black people. They feared that Armstrong’s educational model would be both prescriptive and damaging to the social and economic progress of Black America. Although the missionary societies generally consented to manual courses, they tended to view such training as insignificant and as a derailment from a more classical model of education. “The vocal missionary leadership objected

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15 Anderson and Moss, Dangerous Donation, 198.

16 The terms industrial education and vocational education will be used interchangeably throughout this document.

to the Hampton Model on the grounds that it undermined the democratic rights of Blacks by assuming that Black students were destined for a subordinate industrial role in the southern economy.”18 On the other hand, powerful northern industrialists championed Armstrong’s model as a solution to instill notions of hard work, moral development, and self-determination throughout the emancipated Black South.19

At the turn of the twentieth century, the missionary societies were virtually bankrupt, and their campaign to develop and advance Black higher education was rapidly losing ground. Many educational leaders believed that “private education for Negroes should be replaced wherever possible by public schools, supported by taxation and controlled by Whites.”20 Because most private Black colleges and universities were financially controlled by individual philanthropists, these institutions suffered greatly when donors moved to consolidate their donations to one or two philanthropic foundations (mainly the General Education Board and the Phelps-Stokes Fund). They found themselves competing with other Black institutions for funding – mainly vocational training – that was limited in scope and earmarked for a specific kind of education. Due to limited resources at Black colleges and universities, many Black institutions found themselves either closing or having to merge with other Black schools just to survive.21 “Of the 217 in operation in 1920, more than 124 had closed their doors by 1940. However, some that had served only pre-college students in 1915 successfully made the transition to college status,

18Anderson, The Education of Blacks in the South, 67-68.

19Zaki, Civil Rights and Politics at Hampton Institute, 11.

20Anderson and Moss, Dangerous Donations, 5.

21Several Black institutions merged between 1915 and 1940: Scotia Seminary in North Carolina and Barber Memorial Seminary in Anniston, Alabama merged in 1930 to form Barber-Scotia College; New Orleans University merged with Straight College in 1930 to form Dillard University; Bethune College merged with Cookman College in 1923 to form Bethune-Cookman; and there were talks of mergers between the Black colleges in Atlanta (Clack, Morris Brown, Morehouse, Spelman, and Atlanta) during President John Hope’s administration that never came to fruition, with exception of Atlanta University and Clark College to form Clark Atlanta University. Drewry and Doermann, Stand and Prosper, 97; Gasman, Envisioning Black Colleges, 18-19.
completing the difficult job of securing faculty, developing curricula, and establishing a reputation as college-level institutions.”

While Black schools were struggling to successfully make their transition to become accredited higher education institutions, the alumni and students of these institutions were joining in the fight that was taking place across the nation in the form of alumni and student activism. The Black alumni and students who were integrally connected to the Black colleges and universities of the 1920s and '30s understood that the only way for African Americans to control the future direction of their institutions would be, first, to petition the board of trustees at their alma mater and fight for change.

Black alumni and students were dissatisfied with their caste position on their campuses and were prepared to fight against the controlling White power structure that had denied them fair administrative opportunities and social equality. “Fayette McKenzie was forced out of the presidency of Fisk by dissident Black students and alumni who were convinced that in striving for money, Fisk had sacrificed integrity and accepted White demands that it insult and humiliate Blacks to make them know their place.” The time had come for Black colleges and universities to reconsider the outdated practices of only hiring White faculty and staff and to take serious the men and women who were accomplished graduates of these institutions. Moreover, they would have to make concessions for the more mature and secular student population enrolled at these universities. At Hampton, “the dispute over evening chapel services was only one of many indications that students were dissatisfied with an administration that allegedly had failed to

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22 Drewry and Doermann, *Stand and Prosper*, 77.


24 Black students naturally objected to regimentation on the campus, but the discipline was tolerable in the late nineteenth century, when it was thought to be prompted by Christian piety and was applied to White students as well as Blacks. Yet the tradition of piety remained in force at the Black schools long after the leading White colleges had de-emphasized their concern for moral uplift and had begun to stress secular scholarship. Thus, many Blacks suspected that the extraordinarily strict regulations still in force in their schools during the 1920s were prompted by a racist belief that Negroes were particularly sensuous beings who could not discipline themselves and were not prepared to exercise free will.
adjust its academic and disciplinary policies, to make allowance for the fact that Hampton was no longer a school for docile elementary students, but for young men and women who could think for themselves.”

And finally, at Lincoln University, where students seemed to take a more passive approach to the overt racial inequalities looming around them, the alumni at that institution took a more active role in the selection of Lincoln’s first Black president. “The situation surrounding the appointment of Horace Mann Bond at Lincoln University was somewhat different. More than a decade of alumni-led protest against a White only policy for faculty appointments and the refusal of the trustees to appoint a Black member to its boards of trustees preceded it.”

The protest that ensued on Black campuses during the 1920s and ’30s in many instances resulted in stronger academic programs, more student autonomy, increased alumni involvement, and, most importantly, the hiring of Black faculty, staff, and the first Black presidents at Fisk, Hampton, and Lincoln during the 1940s.

As examples of HBCUs that experienced various forms of protest on their campuses, Fisk University, Hampton Institute, and Lincoln University were selected for this research project because they represented the best examples of activism at Black institutions between 1920 and 1950. Lincoln, Fisk, and Hampton were similar in scope because they were small private institutions located in both the North and South that achieved national recognition for having either the best Black liberal arts (Fisk and Lincoln) or vocational (Hampton) programs in the country. Although polar opposites in regard to their mission to educate Black men and women, the protests that occurred at the two southern institutions, Fisk and Hampton, during the 1920s and ’30s ironically dealt with the same issues of racial inequality and greater autonomy for students on campus. In contrast to the two southern schools, students at Lincoln University, located in the North, appeared to be unaffected by the growing social movements happening on


26 Drewry and Doermann, *Stand and Prosper*, 85.
their campus. “Most of Lincoln’s students were satisfied with the quality of their education and so pleased by the pastimes of the bucolic retreat that they did not object to the fact that in the 1920s Lincoln University … prohibited Blacks from serving on its faculty and board of trustees.” Although the students at Lincoln seemed to have been unaffected by what was happening on their campus, the alumni were not so pleased and began to form alliances among themselves to fight for Black administrative appointments.

The educational histories that have been written concerning Black colleges and universities have mostly dealt with their origins, their students, and the individual philanthropic organizations that funded them. Furthermore, historians have focused the majority of their scholarship on Black higher education, spanning the period from 1865 until the 1930s, but little has been done to examine how these institutions underwent a tremendous change between the 1920s and ’50s due to alumni and student activism. The significance in examining the impact that these stakeholders had on administrative change at Black colleges and universities during the first half of the twentieth century is to add to the current stream of literature that has neglected to make these events part of the broader historical narrative. What is missing in this body of literature is a collective account of how Black colleges and universities made a shift from the 1930s protest and managed to transition from White to Black leadership during the 1940s. Moreover, how did these institutions become more relaxed in regard to institutional policies, and what role did alumni and students have in making these deep-seated changes possible? This scholarship is important to the field of history and education because it acknowledges that Black alumni and students contributed to securing the future direction of their schools by petitioning trustee boards to make unprecedented changes at Black institutions.

27 While a student at Lincoln University during the 1920s, poet Langston Hughes conducted a student survey regarding student opinions in the hiring of Black faculty and staff at Lincoln. He found that two-thirds of the 127 students enrolled in the junior and senior classes were opposed to having Black professors. One of the reasons cited in his study was because Lincoln was supported by White philanthropists; therefore they should run the school. Wolters, *The New Negro on Campus*, 281; Drewry and Doermann, *Stand and Prosper*, 86.

28 Wolters, *The New Negro on Campus*, 281
Chapter I of this dissertation provided a contextual prospective for understanding what was happening in the nation during the first half of the twentieth century, which gave way for change at HBCUs between 1920 and 1950. Chapter II has looked at the history of alumni and student activism at HBCUs starting in the 1920s and how these schools were largely affected by campus rebellions. Chapters III through V look at the three institutions individually and provide an analysis of how alumni and student activism at Lincoln, Fisk, and Hampton brought about administrative change on their campuses between 1920 and 1950. Chapter VI will look at the results of these administrative changes and what compromises were made that ultimately led to more student autonomy, greater alumni involvement, and the integration of the faculty and administration at Fisk, Hampton, and Lincoln. I will then conclude by summarizing what has been covered in this dissertation project and by restating why this scholarship is so significant to the field of history and education.
Chapter III
A HISTORY OF ACTIVISM ON BLACK CAMPUSES

The student rebellions that began the twentieth century stretched across the nation during a time of war and prosperity. The close of World War I fueled the nation with promises of hope and wealth as well as a new era of democracy at home and abroad. The new century was further distinguished by several inventions of far-reaching proportions, unprecedented industrial growth, an increase in consumer demands, and the belief that the United States was invincible. As a result of a changing country following World War I, a new generation of college students found their voice on campuses across the United States and displayed streams of post-war consciousness that redefined the role of students forever in American higher education. In many ways, the college youth of the 1920s were rebelling against the paternalistic structure at colleges and universities as well as the social norms that past generation’s had expected them to follow.¹

This chapter will examine the protests that took place at historically Black private colleges and universities during the 1920s and 30s and how those protests had an effect on the following decade. As result of the protests, students and alumni challenged notions of racial inequality and inferiority on their campuses, which brought about institutional and administrative changes. These two stakeholder groups were often silenced and subjugated by White administrators and boards of trustees at their institutions. What naturally occurred at HBCUs during that period was

a mass movement of alumni and student unrest that led to protest quite similar to what was already occurring at traditionally White institutions across the country.

The 1920s was a time of student unrest on both White and Black campuses throughout the nation. The period represented an era in U. S. higher education history when students rebelled against what Paula Fass called “old fashioned authority.” Student strikes and protest involved such issues as drinking, smoking, living (dormitory) conditions, and sexual freedom. Some of the historically White colleges and universities that were involved in the student demonstrations, such as Harvard, Yale, Brown, Bryn Mawr, Temple, Amherst, and Lafayette, found it hard to control their student protesters and most often moved quickly to a compromise. Paula Fass has written extensively on this topic, along with historian Frederick Rudolph. Unfortunately, both education historians have all but omitted the activities that occurred at Black colleges and universities. Fass captures the mood of the nation by noting, “In the 1920s, youth appeared suddenly, dramatically, even menacingly on the social scene. Contemporaries quite rightly understood that their presence signaled a social transformation of major proportions and that they were a key to the many changes which had remade the society.”

For the Black college youths of the 1920s, '30s, and '40s, their acts of campus rebellion were different from those of their White counterparts. At HBCUs, alumni and students' protests addressed many things, mainly campus life, which included student government associations; Greek letter organizations; representation on boards of trustees and administration, and eventually the call for Black leadership. Historian Maxine D. Jones suggests that “student protest at Black colleges, however, was not necessarily a product of the roaring twenties. There had long been a pattern of resisting injustices on Black campuses.” The protests on Black campuses were not necessarily a reaction to what was occurring at White institutions. Long before the 1920s,

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2Fass, The Damned and the Beautiful, 6.

there was a small group of Black students, alumni, and academic activists who publicly condemned the inferior conditions that were being maintained at Black institutions. Black students at HBCUs capitalized on the idea that America’s fight for democracy did not include them and used as their premise for rebelling that freedom and equality were the rights of all Americans. While the reason for protest or the overall mission of student activism on Black campuses might have differed from what occurred on White campuses, the twenties ignited a mass movement of campus rebellions that changed the landscape of higher education at both Black and White institutions forever.4

The idea of fighting a war on democracy abroad and the reality of living in a nation that denied Black Americans those same rights at home ignited a change in consciousness. The young men who had left America’s Black colleges and universities as soldiers during World War I returned to their campuses frustrated and prepared to take up the mantle of protest along with those individuals who had already been transformed by the widespread effects of The New Negro movement in America.5 Thrilled with delights of a growing Black educated elite, conscious of the war efforts abroad, many Black Americans embraced the idea of The New Negro Movement, recognized the importance of Black leadership, and adopted a firm intolerance for Whites controlling their schools.

In order to fully understand the large-scale protest that occurred at Fisk University, Hampton Institute, and Lincoln University during the first half of the twentieth century, it is important to examine the history of campus activism that took place at similar HBCUs across the


5The New Negro was written by Alain Locke in 1925 during the Harlem Renaissance. The term implies a new era of thinking by African Americans, which in turn spun a “New Negro Movement” led by a generation of newly trained Black academics who used their talents to inspire social and political change for African Americans throughout the nation. This generation of men and women saw themselves as conduits of change and used their platform to speak out against the legal system of Jim Crow segregation.
nation.⁶ At these institutions, students and alumni stakeholders were concerned with such issues as racism versus egalitarianism, education for freedom as opposed to education for manual labor, and the idea of self-determination for Black students over complete institutional control by White administrators. The history of African American education in the United States points toward a unifying theme at Black institutions involving race pride, social freedom, and alumni involvement, which led to turbulence on their campuses during the 1920s, '30s, and '40s. Black students took an activist approach in confronting their colleges and universities to challenge notions of racial inferiority and for more student rights on campus, whereas Black alumni were petitioning their alma maters for more campus involvement and for representation on their boards of trustees as alumni members representing the vested interests of their associations.⁷ More importantly, both the students and the alumni were fighting to integrate the faculty, staff, and administration at their institutions.

The leading Black scholars of the period, such as W.E.B DuBois, E. Franklin Frazier, Carter G. Woodson, Alain Locke, James Weldon Johnson, Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen, and Charles S. Johnson, used their academic prowess as a means to speak to the racial issues that characterized the first half of the twentieth century. In addition to these men and Black women scholar/activists such as Mary McCleod Bethune, Mary Church Terrell, Sadie Tanner Mossell Alexander, and Lucy Diggs Slowe were also instrumental in their own right in fighting for

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⁶This study will only examine the protest that took place at historically Black private colleges and universities, with the exception of Howard University, which is classified as a quasi-private/public institution. As stated in the introduction, in order to establish realistic parameters for this research project, this study will concentrate solely on the unrest that took place at private institutions. The history, funding, and classification of private Black institutions varied greatly from that of publicly supported Black institutions.

⁷Paula Fass has written extensively on this topic, along with historian Frederick Rudolph. Unfortunately, both education historians have all but omitted the activities that occurred at Black colleges and universities. Fass’s The Damned and Beautiful and Rudolph’s The American College and University are two scholarly works that address the student rebellions/strikes that occurred on predominantly White campuses. To garner a better understanding of the protests that occurred on Black campuses, see Raymond Wolters’s The New Negro on Campus.
change concerning the Black youth of the ’20s, ’30s, and ’40s. In many ways, these men and women can be seen as academic-activists who were responsible for shaping the social and political discourse on race as it pertained to Black education in the United States. They were the architects of the student movements and gave encouragement especially to students strikers to resist the oppressive climate that was ever present on Black campuses. Those students who did not resist were heavily criticized by these Black scholars. “Black college students came under public attack from Carter G. Woodson, Langston Hughes, W.E.B. DuBois and other Black spokespersons and activists for their disinterest and distance from the pressing social issues facing the African American community.”

Giving way to the mounting pressures put on them by these leading Black academic-activists, Black students began to mobilize on their campuses at the start of the 1920s to express their views on democracy and education. Just as they began their fight for change at their alma maters, these Black scholars had already opened the door for protest to challenge White supremacy at HBCUs.

The two most outspoken of these Black scholars were DuBois and Woodson. DuBois led the charge for many students and alumni who opposed Jim Crow conditions that existed on Black campuses. DuBois was the chief motivator behind a number of the student protests that occurred on Black campuses. Like many of his academic counterparts who used scholarly publications as a platform to address social injustices, DuBois relied heavily on the 

Crisis

magazine to voice his disdain for what was happening at Black schools and his book, Black


8E. Franklin Frazier’s Negro Youth at the Crossways (1940), James W. Johnson, composer of Lift Every Voice and Sing (1899). Langston Hughes was a poet and son of the Harlem Renaissance; some of his most famous works are The Ways of White Folks (1934) and The Negro Speaks of Rivers (Published in the Crisis in 1921). Countee Cullen was also a renowned poet and son of the Harlem Renaissance. Mary McLeod Bethune was an activist for equal rights and founder of Bethune College for women, which was later renamed Bethune-Cookman. Mary Church Terrell was an activist and teacher at the famous M Street School in Washington D.C. Sadie T.M. Alexander was the first Black women to earn a Ph.D. in the United States, Lucy Diggs Slowe was an educator activist and the first Black woman to serve as Dean of Women at Howard, and Anna Julia Cooper, the eldest of the group, was among the leading Black figures of the time and principal of the famous M Street School in Washington, D.C.


Reconstruction in America, to explain the failure of post-Civil War relations, which ultimately led to Jim Crow Laws in the U.S. In addition to DuBois’ Crisis and Black Reconstruction, Woodson's The Journal of Negro History and The Mis-Education of the Negro challenged Black intellectuals, students, and graduates of HBCUs to critically examine the condition in which education was being used to “control the Negro in America” and to reinforce notions of Black inferiority at Black institutions. These academic-activists opened the door for Black students, alumni, and community leaders to scrutinize the ruling White authoritative regime that had the power to influence the minds and direction of young Black college-going men and women. They were responsible for sparking the ideas and laying out the blueprint for protest and change at Black colleges and universities between 1920 and 1950. These Black scholars influenced students to demand more Black representation and autonomy on their campuses. Black students and alumni read their scholarly work, attended their public engagements, and found solace in their approach to addressing the country at a time of racial indifference.10

Black college youth of the new century, fueled by the Black academic elite, were determined to change the oppressive culture at their institutions. The way in which they did this was to ask for the “dismissal of conservative faculty members, disrupted lectures by invited guests, called for amnesty for protest participants, and demanded that the dean of students be a student advocate, not hired arm of the administration.”11 The student strikes also consisted of students withdrawing from school, forming and joining radical student organizations, creating alliances with alumni groups, and petitioning their boards of trustees, among other things. During the 1920s, campus rebellions took place at the following HBCUs: Livingstone College, Hampton Institute, Fisk, Howard, Lincoln (PA), Shaw, Storer College, Johnson C. Smith,

10 Wolters, The New Negro on Campus, 18.

Kittrell, St. Augustine, Knoxville, and Wilberforce.” Black students were responding to a broad range of phenomena that increasingly touched everyone within and outside of the college community. Early examples of these protests can be seen at schools like Storer College in Jefferson County, West Virginia, and Livingstone College in Raleigh, North Carolina. The student protest at Storer was a result of three Black students who were suspended after being involved in a fight with local Whites. Similarly, action at Livingstone in 1923 led the president to report that “students had gone on strike and remained out nearly all the month of May, most of them not returning at all.” Although the protests that took place on Black campuses were aimed at dismantling the paternalistic and authoritarian leadership styles of the current White administration and president, it is important to note that as a part of their efforts, Black students were in part negotiating for a racially mixed administration and a push for the Board of Trustees to entertain the hiring of a Black president. Despite these efforts, Black students were more concerned with having an administration and president that were respectful, responsive, and sympathetic to the increasingly tense situation that was taking place on Black college campuses during the 1920s and ’30s.

There were numerous incidents that characterized the student strikes that took place at HBCUs during the first half of the century. The conflicts that arose on the campuses of private Black colleges and universities were couched in issues of racial intolerance and the desires of Black students to have a voice in student life and institutional governance. At Talladega

12Herbert Aptheker. “College Student in the 1920s – Years of Preparation and Protest: An Introduction,” *Science and Society* 33, no. 2 (Spring, 1969): 161. Kittrell College was a two-year historically Black college associated with the African Methodist Episcopal Church; it was founded in 1886 and closed in 1975. The college was located in Kittrell, North Carolina.


15According to Raymond Wolters’s *New Negro on Campus*, “Students at Shorter College in Harper’s Ferry, West Virginia, went on strike in 1922 in protest against the expulsion of three young men who had been involved in a fight with local whites. In 1923 the president of Livingstone College in Raleigh, North Carolina,
College in Talladega, Alabama, students declared that they were displeased with the “paternalistic administration” and their “ready made laws.” On numerous occasions at Talladega, students tried to organize campus clubs and organizations that reflected their cultural interest. With each try, they were met with strong opposition. One significant point of interest to Black college students of the twenties was the founding of Black fraternities and sororities. Black Greek letter organizations were established on Black college campuses by 1907, and by the 1920s they were beginning to make major contributions to the student movements at these institutions. Talladegans, like most other HBCU students, were impressed with the work and service that Black Greek lettered organizations provided to and for their race. “Very important among these was Alpha Phi Alpha, which in the twenties instituted a ‘Go To High School – Go To College’ campaign; they sponsored meetings in school auditoriums, on campuses, and with churches and Y’s throughout the nation.” Starting in 1919 at Talladega, students pleaded unsuccessfully with the trustees to allow fraternities on campus. Years later, a new group of

reported that his students had gone “on strike and remained out nearly all the month of May, most of them not returning at all.” Forty students at Kentucky’s small Lincoln Institute withdrew from their school in 1925 with a demand for more social privileges. At Shaw University in North Carolina, the White president, Charles Francis Meserve, was forced to resign in 1919 in the wake of angry charges that he had betrayed the race by closing Shaw’s schools of medicine, pharmacy, and law. Black protest continued at Shaw and in 1931 Joseph Leishman Peacock, the last white president of the university, resigned after repeated complaints that “he was not in sympathy with the Negro race and that the time had come for Blacks to assume leadership at Shaw.” Wolters, The New Negro on Campus, 277.

Talladega College is a private liberal arts institution that was founded in 1865 by the efforts of local freedmen and the American Missionary Association. It is also the oldest historically Black college in the state of Alabama. Although this research focuses on student and alumni activism from the 1920 to 1950, the first student protest concerning race matters occurred in 1887 and 1889 at Talladega College and continued on until the appointment of more Black faculty, the first Black president, and more student rights.

Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity Incorporated was the first Black Greek letter organization to be founded on December 4, 1906 on the campus of Cornell University in Ithaca, New York. By December of 1907, a year after its founding, the fraternity chartered its second and third chapters on the campus of Howard University and Virginia Union University, respectively, making it the first Black Greek letter organization to be established at an HBCU. On January 15 1908, Alpha Kappa Alpha was founded on the campus of Howard University, giving it the distinction of being the first Black sorority. Six other fraternities and sororities were founded in the following years: Kappa Alpha Psi (1911), Omega Psi Phi (1911), Delta Sigma Theta (1913), Phi Beta Sigma (1914), Zeta Phi Beta (1920), and Sigma Gamma Rho (1922), all of which were founded on the campus of Howard University except for Alpha Phi Alpha (Cornell), Kappa Alpha Psi (Indiana), and Sigma Gamma Rho (Butler).

Aptheker, “College Student in the 1920s,” 161-162.
student leaders petitioned trustees again in 1924, the board reluctantly voted to permit Alpha Phi Alpha and Omega Psi Phi fraternities to organize, and a year later Alpha Kappa Alpha and Delta Sigma Theta sororities were chartered, but with well-defined limitations. The newly organized fraternities and sororities were permitted to exist at Talladega under strict guidelines set forth by the board of trustees and the university administration. The board members claimed that they were concerned about “snobbery, Greek domination, and cliques,” which would cause academic excellence to suffer.19 Regarding the situation to establish Black Greek letter organizations on Talladega’s campus, one student added, “Talladega has started the year with so very many donts and cants (sic), that we really often wonder whether we are attending one of America’s leading colleges for Negroes or a reform school.”20 For students at Talladega, this battle meant more to them than merely establishing fraternities and sororities on their campus; they were pushing the administration to relax their rules on student governance and for the right to freely organize on their campus.

The fight to establish fraternities and sororities on campus was just one incident among many by students at Talladega to effect change in student life at their institution. By 1926, when the student protests on campus actually began, the student body at Talladega had endured enough and was ready for a change in administration and campus life. That same year, the student newspaper, the *Mule’s Ear*, published a plea by the student body to the administration for more freedom. They gave the following reasons for implementing change on campus:

First, we are already, because of our political subordination, robbed of the right to express our true political genius and to restrict us in college would throw us in the world unprepared for civic duties.…

2nd, denying us the right to self expression we are also robbed of the facility of group solidarity and the invaluable lesson it teaches.

19 Jones and Richardson, *Talladega College*, 93.

20 Jones and Richardson, *Talladega College*, 93.
Last, to restrict the natural tendencies of a group is uneducational, as well as harmful.²¹ Black students seized the opportunity to confront administrators at their institutions concerning issues of autonomy, racial equality, and more representation in institutional governance. They were armed with ideas of democracy and freedom brought on by the political and social climate that was building inside and outside of their campus community. No longer did they want their institutions or themselves to be seen as projects of charity or as a community of people who needed saving from “unscrupulous moral behavior” as the White missionary teachers and philanthropists had seen them in the past; instead they wanted to be recognized as young adults who were well prepared to think and manage themselves.

One institutional policy that hindered student autonomy on and off campus was *in loco parentis*.²² Black students were left with no other alternative but to forfeit their rights as young adults on their campuses. These students found themselves in the hands of institutions that not only enforced this policy with great vigor but also believed that it was necessary for the maintenance of racial stability and morality. The problem with this arrangement was that Black students and alumni felt that the White administrators and philanthropic organizations that controlled Black schools with their financial gifts used *in loco parentis* as a means to continue the racist ideology that was residual from slavery in America.²³ Black students banded together across various institutions, particularly at the private Black colleges and universities, to voice their concerns about what was often referred to as “plantation behavior” on their campuses.


²²_In loco parentis_ – meaning in place of parents – refers to the legal responsibility of a college or university to take on some of the functions and responsibilities of a parent.

²³Aptheker, “College Students in the 1920s,” 154. *In Locos Parentis* Law was known as *Gott v. Berea*. The court determined that Berea College had the authority to “act in the place of a parent” and that students at the college were obligated to conform their behavior to the rule since a “college or university may prescribe requirements for admission and rules for the conduct of its students, and one who enters as a student impliedly agrees to conform to such rules of government.” The court noted that a public institution, one supported “from the public treasure” had more exacting criteria to meet, but since Berea College was a private institution, the above implied contract between student and college was sufficient.
idea of controlling every aspect of student life and mandating that students follow a particular code of conduct to maintain order was no longer desirable on Black campuses.

An example of this took place at Howard University in Washington, D.C., which had long observed the customary tradition of singing Negro spirituals as a part of their mandatory chapel service. Due to a new sense of race consciousness that spread throughout the country, in 1925, students at Howard took issue with having to participate in what they described as “plantation behavior” when forced to sing spirituals during compulsory chapel services. The students brought their concerns before the administration and demanded that the university relax the rule. Students decided to refrain from any further singing of spirituals, and as a result of their actions, they were reprimanded by the university’s administration, which claimed that students were being insubordinate. One student recalls that it was more than just the singing; it was also the idea of having to attend compulsory chapel that eventually led to student unrest. Nonetheless, historian Rayford Logan contends that “the belief is still widely held that the strike by Howard University which began on May 7, 1925, was caused by resentment against the singing of spirituals in Chapel.”24 Had this been true, it would have been a natural reaction on the part of “The New Negro” against what he considered a reminder of the “Plantation Tradition.” President Durkee and his administration dismissed the students’ concerns, and on May 7th, Howard students began their strike by not only refusing to sing spirituals in chapel but also by staging sit-ins, refusing to attend class, blocking classroom doors to prohibit other students from entering, and organizing student-led speak-outs by the student council. Lastly, the student government association demanded control of all social activities involving student life and that there be student representation on the Academic Council.25


During the 1930s, Oakwood College, a small Black institution in Huntsville, Alabama, experienced a similar situation with their student body. Just as Howard students had done, “students started complaining about the conditions at the school, calling it a ‘plantation’ because of the heavy work schedule, low student wages, and the inability to accumulate academic credits due to their work loads.”26 Disgruntled students put forward the following statement to their General Conference regarding the matter,

We are tired of lying. In view of the fact that conditions at Oakwood Junior College are not favorable to mental, physical, and spiritual advancement, we the student body, are appealing to our interested brethren in the field for help. Too long, Oakwood has had to feel the brunt of despotic rules. Too long, we have been living under conditions entirely contrary to God’s plan of operation for Christian institutions.27

The students at Oakwood not only challenged the institution on issues of paternalism, but they also tried to appeal to the church, who they felt had a moral obligation to uphold Christian principles regardless of race. It was the consensus of the Seventh Day Adventist General Conference, the president of the school, and White church leaders that “coloreds could not supervise nor manage themselves.”28 Upset with this outcome by the General Conference and the administration, angry students mobilized on the campus of Oakwood College, and on October 8, 1931, they commenced to strike.

Students held secret meetings, organized demonstrations around the campus flagpole, confronted several administrators, and rallied the support of interested alumni. In 1931, a committee known as the “Excelsior Society,” which consisted of several students at Oakwood

26Holly Fisher. “Oakwood College Students’ Quest for Social Justice before and during the Civil Rights Era.” The Journal of African American History 88, No. 2 (Spring, 2003): 114. Oakwood College, the only Historically Black Seventh Day Adventist College in the nation, was founded in 1896 by a group of church elders who traveled from the North.

27Fisher, “Oakwood College Students,” 115. The General Conference is the governing body of the Seventh Day Adventists Church. In the case of Oakwood College, the body functioned somewhat in the same capacity as a normal board of trustees would at a college and university.

College, formulated a plan calling for the appointment of a competent Black college president, Black faculty members, as well as more emphasis on liberal arts education rather than vocational training. Much of the students’ discontent and frustration stemmed from their strong disapproval of Oakwood’s president, J.A. Tucker. They foiled a secret plan to oust him, which they called operation P.O.T. (Put Out Tucker). These activities set in motion a string of events that ultimately led to widespread campus unrest, thus Oakwood College came face to face with what the rest of the nation had already struggled with during the twenties.29

For assistance with their strike plans, Oakwood students solicited the spiritual support of the Black Seventh Day Adventist clergy; most notable were Elder Owen A. Troy Sr. and Elder George E. Peters, who were also alumni of Oakwood. Both Elders Troy and Peters were in full support of the student movement and felt that it was not only time for Oakwood to give students more autonomy on campus, but it was also time for the institution to consider the hiring of African Americans for key campus positions. That same year, Elder Troy wrote to the president of the General Conference for the Seventh Day Adventist Church, stating, “Oakwood needs building up and if we fail to bring in men [such as Arna Bontemps] who can do this, we cannot hope for the school to have the support that it should have.”30 Elders Troy and Peters involvement in the student protest marked a significant turn of events at Oakwood as well as substantiated the influence that alumni had in effecting change at their alma maters.

During the course of campus unrest at Oakwood, a campaign was waged against the institution due to the administration's paternalistic treatment of students as well as their “customs of separating the races.”31 The protest at Oakwood ended with both a victory and a defeat for


30Fisher, “Oakwood College Students,” 114. Arnaud “Arna” Bontemps was an African American poet, member of the Harlem Renaissance Movement, and Chief Librarian at Fisk University for 22 years. He was responsible for organizing important collections on African American art, literature, and culture at Fisk, the University of Illinois, and Yale during his academic career.

student participants. At the close of the strikes, negotiations took place between the student protesters, the General Conference, and the president of the college. The victory resulted in the immediate resignation of President Tucker. The defeat was that upon his resignation, he urged the General Conference to expel five of the student strike leaders from the college. Despite Tucker's final demands, the campus protests were a success, which brought much attention to the problems students faced at Oakwood College during the 1930s.32

As White boards of trustees and presidents at Black colleges and universities asserted their power to make academic and structural changes, they were often met with outright defiance by their students and graduates. For instance, students and alumni were outraged by some of the events that occurred at Shaw University in Raleigh, North Carolina. What happened at Shaw in 1919 and 1931 provides an example of how two White presidents resigned their office due to campus unrest. Charles Francis Meserve was forced to resign his post as president in 1919 by angry alumni and students due to charges that "he had betrayed the race by closing Shaw’s schools of medicine, pharmacy, and law."33 Despite the resignation of President Meserve, Shaw’s board of trustees chose to ignore the fact that the outgoing White president was forced to resign by angry alumni and students concerning issues of racial dissidence and again in 1920 appointed another White president, Joseph Leishan Peacock. What followed this appointment was a decade of campus unrest: "Black protest continued at Shaw during the 1920s, and in 1931 Joseph Leishan Peacock, the last White president of the university, resigned after repeated complaints that he was not in sympathy with the Negro race and that the time had come for Blacks to assume leadership at Shaw."34


33 Wolters, The New Negro on Campus, 277

34 Wolters, The New Negro on Campus, 277. Shaw University, founded in 1865, is the oldest historically Black institution to be established in the South.
Although pockets of campus unrest persisted throughout the 1930s, for many Black colleges and universities, the 1940s served as a decade of institutional transition. In 1943, White President Buell G. Gallagher resigned from his post as head of Talladega College, which sparked a whirlwind of discussion from students, faculty, and alumni concerning whether the institution would select its first Black president. Gallagher was said to be loved by all at Talladega and enhanced the influence and academic standards of the college to gain national attention. Although he was well received and respected by both Black and White Talladegans, at his departure the students were curious to see whether the Board of Trustees would look favorably upon a Black candidate for president, particularly Dean James T. Cater, who was appointed acting president while a search was on the way for Gallagher’s successor. Cater was an alumnus of Talladega, and, according to the 1927 yearbook, “every student either admired or respected Cater or stood in awe of him or both.” Although Cater had been Chief Academic Officer for a decade during Gallagher’s administration at Talladega, President Gallagher’s influence on the Board coerced them to select yet another White president, Dr. Alfred S. Clayton, to be his successor. While the board failed to select Talladega’s first Black president during such a pivotal point in the school’s history, George W. Crawford, Board Chairman, stated, “At an earlier time, placing paternalistic White administrators at the head of Black schools was almost unavoidable, but I think we should be entirely mistaken if we assumed that education or any of the other concerns of Negro life are to go on in the future under the same sort of management.”

To shed further light on what was happening on and off Black campuses during the era of protest on Black campuses, student rallies were held in various parts of the country, editorials

35Dr. Alfred S. Clayton was professor of philosophy and psychology during President Buell Gallagher’s administration. Dean James T. Cater not only served as acting president after Gallagher’s resignation; he was also credited with helping the school receive an “A” rating from the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools in 1931 and approval of the Association of American Universities. Cater was also a graduate of Atlanta University and Harvard. Before taking the Deanship at Talladega, Cater had served as Dean at Dillard University along with holding positions as math instructor, librarian, and director of personnel. According to Talladega’s alumni, he was well prepared for the job as president.

36Jones and Richardson, *Talladega College*, 144.
were published in the leading Black magazines and newspapers, such as the *Crisis*, the *Afro American*, and the *Chicago Defender*, and Black students found their own voice and began to speak out publicly against White-controlled schools. In 1923, Countee Cullen, a student at New York University at the time, gave a speech to the League of Youth, an organization that primarily consisted of Black college students, in which he stated:

> Youth the world over is undergoing a spiritual and an intellectual awakening, is looking with new eyes at old customs and institutions, and is finding for them interpretations which its parents passed over…. The young American Negro is going in strong for education; he realizes its potentialities for combating bigotry and blindness … the main point to be considered here is that it is working a powerful group effect…. Then the New Negro is changing somewhat in his attitude toward the Deity…. There is such a thing as working out one’s own soul’s salvation. And that is what the New Negro intends to do. 37

Cullen’s words defined a generation of angry and dissatisfied students who understood that the time had come for White Americans to accept the idea that Black leadership was on the horizon. During that same period, academic activist E. Franklin Frazier petitioned for a “Negro University, for Negroes, by Negroes.” He contended that “spiritual and intellectual emancipation of the Negro awaits the building of a Negro university, supported by Negroes and directed by Negro educators, who have imbibed the best that civilization can offer; where his savants can add to human knowledge and promulgate those values which are to inspire and motivate Negroes as a culture group.” 38 Frazier was clear in his ideas and was overtly criticizing the failed work of White-controlled “Negro institutions,” which he believed did little to uplift Black students. Quite similar to Carter G. Woodson’s argument, Frazier was contending that Negro institutions founded by Whites contributed greatly to the “mis-education of the Negro in America.”

In large part, campus unrest ensued at HBCUs across the nation. Unfortunately, the documented histories and research entailing the student activism that occurred on Black campuses are limited. It can be concluded that some type of activist conflict took place on a

37 Aptheker, “College Students in the 1920s,” 164.

38 Aptheker, “College Students in the 1920s,” 165.
number of Black campuses but little has been documented in their individual school histories to draw from. Not every conflict that occurred at Black institutions was in the form of organized student movements. Oftentimes, individual students stood alone in confronting administrators and/or trustees. Most often, these incidents were never documented or made public out of fear that such publicity might garner negative attention from the local and national community or from other dissatisfied students. Moreover, students were reluctant to participate in strikes out of fear that they would be expelled or suspended and sent home without retribution. The circumstances for many students became even worse after returning home to their parents. Black families had sacrificed a great deal of themselves and their financial resources to send their sons and daughters to college. These sacrifices turned into resentment as their children returned home from school facing suspension or expulsion. DuBois described the situation as such: “They turn upon their own children like wild beasts, ready to beat them into submission.”39 Whatever the case, the Black students who participated in the student movements of the 1920s, '30s, and '40s jeopardized their education, their family reputation, and possibly their future.

One important factor that helped support the student protest movement at the start of the twentieth century was the active involvement of alumni in campus affairs. Black alumni clubs began to emerge in large numbers across the nation, mostly in major U.S. cities, just prior to the start of the 1920s. However, some exceptional schools like Talladega College and Howard University organized their first alumni clubs long before the 1900s. Talladega alumni groups started as early as 1882 and from the onset took an active role in the future direction of the college. Alumni at Howard had also organized groups prior to the beginning of the twentieth century and, as early as 1912, had presented to their Boards of Trustees three African Americans, one of whom was Dean Kelly Miller, for consideration to serve as the first Black president of their institution.40


40 Jones and Richardson, *Talladega College*, 97; Logan, *Howard University*, 183.
These alumni groups oftentimes embraced the activist rhetoric of such notable leaders as W.E.B. DuBois and Carter G. Woodson. Although some favored the ideas of White boards of trustees and wealthy White philanthropists, who ardently suggested that the time was not right for Black leadership at Black colleges and universities, there were many who did not. A number of Black Americans agreed with DuBois, who stated, “We propose to speak for ourselves and to be represented by spokesmen whom we elect.”

DuBois and his band of alumni followers were not only advocating for Black leadership, but they were also in favor of stronger alumni involvement at Black schools. Despite their efforts, campus rebellions forced both sides to grapple with the changing climate that was occurring at Black institutions between 1920 and 1950.

Although the student movements were quite successful on their own, there are several examples of how alumni actually led the charge or aided in the fight for change at HBCUs. Two examples of this took place at Talladega College and Howard University. At Talladega, graduates worked together through their various local alumni associations and found strength in unity by doing so. Not only were they able to stay connected and extend their bonds of friendship beyond the walls of Talladega, but they were also able to provide assistance and financial support to their alma mater. What came out of their meetings were ongoing conversations about Talladega as well as ways in which they could help improve the quality of education and the students that the institution wanted to attract. “As the Alumni Association was temporarily giving greater support to Talladega, it asked for a larger role in planning school policy. It particularly wanted alumni representatives on the board of trustees.”

The alumni members consistently petitioned the board for more alumni seats. They were also adamant about choosing their own representatives to the board and not having them hand-selected by the

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42 Jones and Richardson, *Talladega College*, 151. Talladega’s first Alumni Association began in 1882, and it was as early as 1893 that the first graduate, Yancey B. Sims, was elected to serve on the board of trustees.
institution. In the case of Talladega’s alumni, they began to fight for institutional change at their school long before the students at the college began to organize their campus protest.

At Howard University, the relationship between the school and the alumni association was somewhat different and more controversial than what occurred at Talladega. Howard’s General Alumni Association had always maintained a level of involvement with the institution but never garnered enough power to effect any real change. During President James Durkee’s administration, the Alumni Association came together to confront Durkee on account of various administrative practices that the students and the alumni were not in concert with. Prior to the alumni stepping in, Howard students had already begun various campus demonstrations in protest of Durkee and his administration. Toward the close of the student rebellions at Howard, the nation had taken note of the incredible surmounting tension that was now occurring at Black colleges and universities across the country. The end of the student strike at Howard was marked by hostility, with the majority of it geared toward President Durkee. General Alumni Association President George Frazier Miller stated in his attack on President Durkee that “the strike was used as an additional cudgel with which to punish him.”

43 Not only was President Durkee offended by the actions of the students and the alumni association; he was outraged at being accused of not working in racial harmony at the nation’s largest and arguably most prestigious Black university. As a result of their contempt, the General Alumni Association continued to express their dissatisfaction with President Durkee and his administration, and on December 10, 1925, spearheaded charges that ultimately resulted in his resignation.

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President Durkee’s departure from Howard can largely be attributed to the student rebellions that took place at the university, but what sealed his fate was his alienation of Howard’s alumni. By usurping their functions and invading their rights by imposing upon them an Alumni Secretary of his own personal choice and by devising means for eliminating their


voices from proper participation in University administration, President Durkee lost their favor and became an early casualty in the string of protest that were erupting on Black campuses across the nation.\footnote{Logan, Howard University, 234.} Nevertheless, by 1925, the last year of Durkee’s tenure as president, Howard’s alumni had already won the fight for seats on their board of trustees, which made it possible for the appointment of the school’s first Black president.

The role that alumni played at their former institutions was very important; however, that role is often left out of the historical narrative as agents of change in Black higher education. Black graduates of HBCUs were quite instrumental in asserting their collective power as associations to affect policy at their former institutions. As will be outlined in this study, alumni at Black schools joined in the fight alongside student protesters to transform their colleges and universities into communities of high academic standards, to establish a race-conscious environment, and to desegregate their administrations. Not only were they engaged in campus politics, but alumni were also very much concerned with the welfare of the students who attended their alma maters. Failing to acknowledge their contributions to the campus rebellions of the 1920s, '30s, and '40s trivializes the importance of their role as institutional stakeholders and former students who were just as much a part of the paternalistic and authoritative indoctrination as the students who were currently attending Black colleges and universities.

Among the outcomes of this drive for freedom and position was a striving on the part of African Americans for placing members of their own race in leadership positions at their own institutions, positions that had traditionally been held by White members who considered themselves to be of the superior caste. A period of fifty or more years of training and education, coupled with the emergence of race consciousness, gave African Americans the confidence and courage to petition for their own leadership, which they hoped would ultimately lead to complete emancipation. “Students wanted to decolonize Black colleges, to make them truly relevant for
Black people.”46 The alumni were also fighting for control, with the hope that the face of Black colleges and universities would reflect the men and women they served. Most importantly, the crusade for change had begun due in most part to the courageous students at Black colleges and universities. In 1923, Mary Church Terrell contested that “students in our universities and colleges can do much to eradicate prejudice by starting a crusade which shall have for its slogan--down with discrimination against human beings on account of race, color, sex or creed.”47 She was speaking to all Americans, both Black and White, on college campuses everywhere.

What made the effort of change so difficult aside from issues of racial oppression was the fact that most schools were seeking to improve their institutions while at the same time holding on to the financial contributions of the vocationally-oriented White philanthropists. In such a dichotomy, Black students and alumni were bound to lose in order to keep and satisfy wealthy White contributors. DuBois argued, “It has gradually become a recognized rule of philanthropy that no Negro higher school can survive unless it pleases the White South. The South still wants these schools to train servants and docile cheap labor.”48 DuBois’ sentiments rang true, and he used his platform as leader of the NAACP and editor of Crisis magazine to make them known.

V.P. Franklin contends that:

Although W.E.B. DuBois, through his blistering commentaries in The Crisis magazine, helped to stir up the rebellions, the protest at Fisk, Howard, and Lincoln Universities and Hampton Institute represented efforts aimed at modernization of race relations on campus and a bid for intellectual and social independence on the part of students who openly challenged the traditional authorities. Student activism in the 1920s paved the way for larger reforms in the organizational structures and administrative practices in Black higher education.49

46Gasman, Envisioning Black Colleges, 121.

47Aptheker, “College Students in the 1920s,”166.


DuBois definitely did much to advance the efforts of the protest. Many of the students looked to him as a guide and mentor during the campus unrest. Likewise, many White administrators and philanthropists also pointed to him as the lead agitator, solely responsible in many cases for fueling the unwelcomed protest on their campuses. They accused him of publicly bringing negative attention to the inequalities that White administrators fostered at Black institutions.

While there were many other instances of student unrest and alumni activism that occurred on other Black campuses, the institutions outlined in this chapter provided some of the best examples for understanding the protests that took place at Fisk, Hampton, and Lincoln that will be discussed in the following chapters. The students’ petitions for democracy on their campuses ultimately resulted in relaxed school policies and freedom on campus to engage in more social activities. Black college students, armed with social conviction and a shared philosophy of change, garnered a widespread buy-in for their cause. Marybeth Gasman contends that “the students, who believed that Black people ought to control their own educational institutions, translated their broad concerns about political nationalism into a desire to determine educational policies at Black colleges.” The catalysts for these institutional changes were due to the alumni and student body pushing the board of trustees to consider Black faculty and administrators. Their efforts caused a revolutionary shift in the culture and structure of the institutions. It can be said that students and alumni were simply petitioning the board of trustees to make minor steps toward the inclusion of Black faculty and staff at these institutions, but what actually transpired was the unmasking of student and alumni protest/rebellion against the oppressive White power structure of the administration and board of trustees.

During the transformation of Black higher education at the turn of the twentieth century, three Black institutions, Lincoln University, Fisk University, and Hampton Institute underwent changes of mass proportions. These three schools witnessed a revolutionary period that was

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50Gasman, Envisioning Black Colleges, 121-122.
taking shape across American colleges and universities in the form of campus unrest. By the 1920s, the debate for Black control of Black schools was taking root.

The following chapters will look at specific incidents between 1920 in 1950 in which alumni and student activism flourished on the campuses of Lincoln, Fisk, and Hampton. During the 1920s, student strikes erupted at two of these schools involving a push for more student autonomy and institutional governance, while students at the third institution were indifferent about change and were more concerned about maintaining the status quo. Meanwhile, alumni at all three schools were fighting for more institutional involvement but in very different ways. For the period of the 1930s, campus unrest brought both the alumni and students together at all three institutions. And finally, the 1940s bore witness to the institutional and administrative changes that alumni and students at Lincoln, Fisk, and Hampton had been fighting for.
Chapter IV

FISK UNIVERSITY

The aim in founding Fisk and similar schools was to maintain the standards of lower training by giving leaders and teachers the best possible instruction, and more important, to furnish Blacks with adequate standards of human culture and lofty ideals of life. It was not sufficient to train Black teachers in technical normal methods; they must also, so far as possible, be broadminded, cultured men and women, who would scatter civilization among a people whose ignorance was not simply of the alphabet, but of life itself.¹

The three decades of unrest that took place at Fisk University from 1920 to 1950 were in part due to the administration's failure to maintain a harmonious relationship with its students and alumni in addition to Black institutional stakeholders believing that the time had come for Black administrative control. Student and alumni activism on the campus of Fisk University exploded during the twenties due to a shift in the direction of the university that was triggered by the Board of Trustees. At the start of the 1920s, Fisk’s Board of Trustees was met with a plethora of financial dilemmas and was desperately searching for ways to keep the institution fiscally afloat. Like most Black higher education institutions during the first half of the twentieth century, Fisk quite naturally considered aid from wealthy Northern philanthropists, who had come to the rescue of so many other struggling Black schools. Uncharacteristic of Fisk’s public persona, the trustees believed that aligning the institution with Northern philanthropists would help grow the school's endowment, expand its physical plant, and provide the university with a sense of security unrealized by most other Black colleges and universities, with the exception of ________________

Hampton and Tuskegee. In order to secure these funds from Northern donors, certain compromises had to be made. In exchange for Northern aid, Fisk witnessed a change in leadership, racial civility, and campus life. Unhappy with these changes, students and alumni found their voice and petitioned the Board of Trustees to make administrative changes on their campus. Three decades of campus activism and protest took place at Fisk before the Board of Trustees would give in to the demands set forth by students and alumni.²

Since its founding, Fisk University had maintained a level of freedom unlike many other Black colleges and universities. During a period in history when many Black institutions surrendered their schools to Northern philanthropists who supported industrial training, Fisk stood firm and continued to provide a classical education to its students. At the start of the 1920s, the character and mission of the university was changing but not without a fight from concerned students and alumni. Between 1920 and 1940, Fisk witnessed an on and off again battle between dissenting students and alumni who adamantly opposed the uncompromising changes that were being made by the Board of Trustees. Due to the preceding two decades, by the mid-1940s, alumni and students had managed to integrally place themselves in key positions within the university where they were able to subtly effect change. The three incidents that occurred at Fisk involving student and alumni unrest took place in 1924, 1934, and 1945. These various acts of unrest caused the nation to pause and closely examine the future of Black higher education. As stakeholders, students and alumni felt obligated to speak out against the unwelcomed changes that were occurring on their campus. In the end, they were able to safely secure Fisk’s position as one of the leading liberal arts institutions in the country for Black Americans as well as have a voice in institutional governance, more student autonomy, and the appointment of the university’s first Black president.³

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In order to understand the thirty-year period of unrest that took place at Fisk, it is important to examine the history of the institution prior to the 1920s. Not only is Fisk’s rich history deeply rooted in the struggles that took place on campus involving students and alumni, but the first few decades of Fisk's founding provide a story of triumph and resistance. Joe Richardson’s *A History of Fisk University, 1865-1946* traces the origins of the university to the days immediately following the end of slavery in the United States. Just three years after Abraham Lincoln’s *Emancipation Proclamation*, three White men--John Ogden, Reverend Edward P. Smith, and Erastus M. Cravath--founded the Fisk School in Nashville, Tennessee with help from the American Missionary Association.\(^4\) It was named in honor of General Clinton B. Fisk of the Tennessee Freedmen’s Bureau. He gave the new school a gift of approximately $30,000 and provided the institution with facilities in former Union Army barracks that he purchased himself. It was in the barracks that Fisk began its first classes on January 9, 1866. Fisk educated students of all ages, ranging from adolescents to seniors. The founders were dedicated to establishing an institution that was open to all types of students, regardless of their race, gender, or background.\(^5\)

Not long after the founding of Fisk, Principal Ogden’s vision to establish an institution to create teachers for the uneducated South was realized. He quickly devised a plan to transform the elementary program at Fisk into a full-fledged Black university. To bring his plan to fruition, Fisk was incorporated as a university on August 22, 1867. The purpose of Fisk, as stated in the corporation’s charter, was “the education and training of young men and women of all races.” Although college work was not immediately offered, a normal department was organized as

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\(^4\)The American Missionary Association (AMA) was organized on September 3, 1846 to answer the call of destitute freedmen during the outbreak of the Civil War. Among the colleges and universities founded by the AMA were Berea College and Atlanta University (1865); Fisk University (1866); LeMoyne-Owen College, Huston-Tillotson University, and Avery Normal Institute (1867); Hampton Institute (1868); Dillard University, Tougaloo College, and Talladega College (1869). Together with the Freedmen's Bureau, the AMA founded Howard University in Washington D. C. in 1867.

early as 1867 to train teachers. In addition to a normal department, courses in Latin, Greek, history, philosophy, and religion were a part of the school’s original curriculum. Following the opening of the normal department, in 1869 Fisk established a high school, a model school, a theology department, a commercial department, and the college. The college department program of study was rigid and carried very few students. Its curriculum was comparable to that in the majority of contemporary White liberal arts schools located in the North.6

The progress of Fisk’s students was so great that both the students and alumni were sought after to fill vacancies as teachers and school leaders throughout the Southern region of the country. By 1869, twelve students had excelled to a degree that they were able to go beyond the normal school to teach in the surrounding Black communities. They did such extraordinary work that “the American Missionary Association thought they were more effective than White instructors from the North.”7 Fisk teachers were found in every Southern state. The character of the university was not only defined by the quality of its students, graduates, administrators, and founders, but the school was defined by its mission to prepare prospective Black leaders with a classical education. It was not the school’s desire or mission to accomplish this through industrial training. Fisk’s third president, James G. Merrill, poignantly stated that “when the time came that White students who planned to become teachers, doctors, lawyers, ministers, and professors should learn to hoe and plow and lay bricks rather than go to literary and classical schools, it would be the right policy to shut off all our literary and classical schools for negroes in the South.”8

In 1871, Fisk students set out on a historic quest to raise much needed funds for their struggling institution. That group of students became known internationally as the famed Fisk


7Richardson, A History of Fisk, 15.

Jubilee Singers. During their singing tours, the chorus raised thousands of dollars for the institution. On October 6, 1871, the Fisk singers went on tour to Europe and performed before Queen Victoria, who was so impressed by their performance that she had their portrait commissioned by the royal court painter. They were so well received abroad that the Jubilee Singers were invited back to Europe a second time in 1875. This tour raised an estimated $150,000 for the university, which was used to construct Fisk’s first permanent building, Jubilee Hall. The Fisk singers were important to the history and growth of the university because they brought the school national attention, convinced the U. S. Congress to pass legislation to grant them much needed land to expand the school’s physical plant, helped build the library’s literary collection, and raised large sums of money that went toward advancing the university’s academic programs. Due to the courageous work of these singers and their visionary founders, Fisk was able to avoid aid from northern industrialists in addition to placing their school on a firm financial foundation for growth as an American university.9

At the start of the new century, Fisk had graduated well over 500 students. In 1900, the university records indicated that Fisk alumni accounted for: 1 college president, 8 college professors, 46 principals, 165 teachers, 20 ministers, 9 lawyers, 13 businessmen, and 16 students in graduate and professional school.10 Fisk's reputation was so great among the Black community that the school became a beacon of hope for families, who believed that a Fisk education could provide them a better way life. “Parents ambitious for the success of their children were known to scrimp, save, and sacrifice to send their offspring to this elite institution whose diploma conferred automatic status upon its alumni.”11

Although the school was making successful headway to becoming a university, Fisk did not abandon its initial mission to provide an education to any student who reached her gates. The

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9Richardson, A History of Fisk, 26, 30-3, 35-8.

10Richardson, A History of Fisk, 53.

institution continued its grade school and high school programs up until the 1920s, but by 1930, all such programs were eliminated in order to raise school standards with the hope of becoming a university in the truest sense. By the 1930s, Fisk was considered not only one of the best colleges for African Americans, but it was also considered one of the most outstanding colleges in the nation. Fisk’s academic reputation far exceeded the expectations of those who could not conceive the idea of a “Great Negro University.” In 1930, Fisk became the first Black college to be accredited as a class “A” university by the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools (SACS). An affiliate of the university commented, “If this association had not been so reluctant to rate Black schools, Fisk probably would have received the A grading before 1930.” An “A” rating was a major accomplishment that was granted to only a few of the Black colleges and universities prior to SACS integrating.

Fisk students and alumni generally thought of their school as a progressive liberal arts university that was dedicated to academic excellence above all else. The academic community, particularly Black scholars, revered Fisk for all the work the institution had done to prepare young Black men and women as professionals in the fields of education, medicine, law, and religion. James Weldon Johnson exalted the university’s achievements by stating, “Fisk is today a great university. It is a leader among the schools that have made progress of the Negro in America possible.” Although Fisk did not assume the full status of college or university immediately, the institution trudged slowly forward, advancing from grade school to high school to normal school and finally to a university thanks to its many constituencies who labored greatly for its success. All that had been accomplished at Fisk up until the mid-1920s had been done without compromise or wavering from the strong liberal arts curriculum that the founders and Northern missionaries had prescribed for the success of the university.


Troubles at Fisk eventually began in 1921 when a university trustee visited the campus for a religious meeting. While there, he was approached by several students concerning the current president’s attitude toward stifling campus life. Due to the students’ concerns, he was compelled to investigate the state of affairs at the university. Appalled at his discovery, at the next board of trustees meeting, he reported to his fellow trustees and the university president that Fisk was guilty of creating “a condition of repression and tyranny, of insult and discrimination such as no men or women should be subjected to.”\(^{14}\) Although university officials paid little to no attention to his report, his findings galvanized students and alumni to move quickly to petition the Board of Trustees for change. Neither side was willing to compromise their beliefs about how Fisk should be operated or managed. A battle quickly ensued, and in the midst of this conflict for control stood Fayette Avery McKenzie, Fisk’s White president, who had been accused of ruling the institution “like an overseer ruling his plantation.” His rumored membership in White supremacist organizations plagued his relationship with Fisk and the local Black community in Nashville. He gained national attention in the Black press for advocating Jim Crow laws and by using his position as president to influence other Black college leaders to do the same. What spurred on the first round of attacks by students and alumni was the lack of confidence they had in McKenzie’s leadership.\(^{15}\)

In 1915, Fayette McKenzie was appointed to lead Fisk University as its fourth president by a group of wealthy Northern philanthropists who vehemently tried to control the institution. Shortly before his appointment at Fisk, the General Education Board recommended that the school be placed in the hands of a philanthropic organization that had a history of supporting Black education, mainly through vocational training. This recommendation was to suggest that Fisk needed to secure more funding as well as secure its place in higher education as the leading Black university. McKenzie’s appointment came at a time when change was at the brink and the


university was positioning itself to become the principal center for Black education. President McKenzie was well aware that in order to do these great works, he had to remain in the “good graces” of wealth philanthropists and White Southerners as well as secure the necessary funding to increase the university’s endowment. Blinded by his desire to appease White donors, McKenzie soon realized that achieving these goals would not come without a cost. In exchange for monetary support from White Northerners, he alienated and angered Black Southerners. McKenzie’s actions created an intolerable environment at Fisk that led to the first round of campus unrest.16

On June 2, 1924, Dr. W.E.B. DuBois returned home to Fisk University for his daughter Yolande’s graduation. His visit set in motion the framework for the next three decades of alumni and student activism at Fisk. During the commencement weekend, he was invited to speak for the first time since he had publicly criticized the university in 1908 for its movement toward industrial education. DuBois took center stage at the annual alumni meeting and captured the attention of all in attendance with a message of rebellion and racial uplift. He began by stating that “Fisk University had fallen on evil days; it had gotten money and lost the Spirit of Cravath, Spence, Bennet, Chase and Morgan,” all of whom were founders and early supporters of the Fisk idea. At the heart of DuBois’ address was a public criticism of Fisk’s Board of Trustees and President Fayette McKenzie. He condemned McKenzie for disciplinary policies and dress code restrictions, for suppressing the schools newspaper (the oldest student newspaper among Black colleges), for having “deliberately embraced a propaganda” that discredited Black achievement, for refusing to allow fraternities and sororities or a chapter of the NAACP to operate on campus, for taking the girls' Glee Club down a back alley at night to “sing in a basement to Southern White men while these men smoked, laughed and talked,” and finally, for entering into a “Corrupt Bargain” with philanthropists and the South for funding in return for control of Fisk. At the close of his remarks, he warned everyone who had a stake in Fisk that the “great institution

must be rescued or it will die.” What angered DuBois and his band of followers the most was the way in which McKenzie’s administration treated students and his refusal to pay any attention to alumni recommendations.17

The compelling speech DuBois delivered at the meeting struck a chord with both alumni and student listeners. Alumni gave their full support to the students as well as to DuBois and his mission to bring down the Board of Trustees and move control of Fisk into the hands of alumni. DuBois’ thoughts were that “the alumni of Fisk University are and of right ought to be the ultimate source of authority in the policy and government of this institution.”18 Alumni made their claims known to the Board of Trustees by petitioning for seats as Board members. No longer were they willing to sit idly by and watch Fisk lose her soul to the desires of White industrialists. Outraged by a suppressive White Board of Trustees, faculty, and administration, alumni became deeply concerned that a message of inferiority was being delivered to Black students at the university. They moved quickly to the sides of student dissenters to lend their support in whatever way possible. During that same week of activities, dissatisfied students voiced their concerns to visiting alumni and described to them conditions within the university that were less than desirable, particularly as related to student life. Armed with convictions of their own, agitated students rallied around DuBois’ rebellious message of freedom and immediately began their attack on McKenzie and his unreasonable disciplinary policies.19

At the start of the fall semester, student leaders made several attempts to appeal to university administrators regarding Fisk’s disciplinary policies. Refusing to budge on the issue, McKenzie and his administration adamantly defended the rules by stating that “young Negroes


were much more susceptible to sex differences than White folks.”20 Angry students considered McKenzie’s statement to be insulting and demanded an audience with him and the Board of Trustees. Once again, DuBois came to the aid of the student leaders by proclaiming:

> Discipline does not mean the abolition of all rights to student meetings and organizations except under personal faculty supervision; discipline does not call for refusal even to listen to respectful student’s complaints; discipline does not demand the suppression of the student periodical, of the student athletic association and of practically every student activity. And, above all, discipline includes freedom.21

The students who met with McKenzie regarding the disciplinary policies went even farther to demand that all departments and offices be integrated. They suggested that a Black understudy be assigned to each department head and also that, if the president was to be White, the Dean should be Black. Just like the alumni, students were concerned with Black representation on the faculty, staff, and Board of Trustees at Fisk. Not only were they fighting for more student autonomy and relaxed disciplinary policies, but they understood that they had a responsibility to challenge the university to employ Black administrators and faculty members as well. No different than in the past, President McKenzie refused to compromise or even consider the students’ demands.22

In November of 1924, during the university’s Founders Day celebration, the Board of Trustees was on campus to announce a gift of a million dollar endowment. As trustees arrived on campus, students began to strike. “They rioted with tin pans and yells; they refused to attend classes and they demanded a hearing before the trustees.”23 Seizing the moment, student leaders presented the Board of Trustees with a meeting request and petition to oust McKenzie along with his paternalistic rules. A committee of seven student leaders succeeded in getting a hearing


before the Board and presented their desires for more student organizations, fewer compulsory exercises, greater consideration of student opinion, and recognition of alumni involvement. Lasting nearly ten days, the student strikes proved to be successful. Not only were the trustees listening; the chairman of the board, Paul Cravath, said he was “deeply impressed and pleased with the fair and manly way in which the students had conducted their case.”\textsuperscript{24} The consensus of the board was that all the student demands be granted except for the dismissal of McKenzie, and finally, all the trustees, barring McKenzie, voted for a student council and athletic association, modification of dress codes, and an alumni committee. The idea to allow fraternities and sororities to organize on campus was not decided and placed back in the hands of McKenzie.\textsuperscript{25}

This victory given by the Board of Trustees did not last long; President McKenzie refused to abide by the new decisions. On the morning of February 4, 1925, McKenzie addressed the student body during a chapel service to inform them that the administration would not consider the formation of Greek-letter organizations, that no changes would be made to the university’s code of conduct, and that there were no plans to re-establish the student newspaper. Immediately following chapel service, tension began to rise among the student body. The center of the commotion took place in Livingston Hall, the men’s dormitory.\textsuperscript{26} It was no coincidence that a number of the strike leaders were men, some of whom had served in the military and the Negro officer-training program at the university. Their perspective regarding the situation at Fisk had quite possibly been shaped as soldiers fighting a war for democracy and freedom abroad. The Dean of Students stated that “the general setting of the situation here is the condition of the world since the beginning of the World War and the spirit of the present-day youth, impatient of

\textsuperscript{24}Fisk University Library, Board of Trustee Minutes, Februray 1925


\textsuperscript{26}In addition to a men’s dormitory, Livingston Hall also contained a chapel room, science laboratory, classrooms, administrative offices, and faculty living quarters.
all guidance.” These male students had not only become impatient but sensitive to racial discrimination due to their experiences in the military and had developed a zero tolerance for conditions at Fisk. Around 8:00 p.m., Wednesday night, President McKenzie received word that several male students had begun to strike, creating dangerous conditions on campus. Gunshots were fired from the dormitory, most of the lights and windows in Livingston Hall were broken, and the pews were overturned in the chapel. By 10:00 p.m. that night, over one hundred male students made their way to Livingston Hall, taking part in the campus demonstration.

Fearing that the number of male student strikers would escalate out of control, McKenzie called in law enforcements to regain order at the university. Eighty White police officers raided the campus with riot guns. Before the demonstration worsened, students calmed themselves and began to disperse. They quietly entered their dormitory to prepare for bed, but McKenzie was so furious over their actions that he ordered Nashville police officers to apprehend all those who had taken part in the disturbance. Police officers entered the men’s dormitory and barged into the young men’s rooms, breaking down their doors as they prepared for bed. Some sleeping students, unaware of the situation, were assaulted and beaten. McKenzie had the young men escorted to his office in small groups, where he presented them with an ultimatum either to adhere to college rules, abstain from any further demonstrations, and condemn the riot, or leave Fisk at once. For those students who refused to comply with McKenzie’s ultimatum, he turned their names over to the authorities for inciting a riot on campus, for which five students were arrested and charged with a felony. So eager was he to take revenge on the students that he included in the list of names two male students who were not on the campus during the demonstration but whom he remembered being on the committee to drive him out of office. A


total of five male students were arrested at the request of McKenzie. He identified them as the “ringleaders,” and it was no coincidence that these were the same student leaders who had presented a formal petition to the Board of Trustees against his rigid administrative policies in November of 1924.29

The student protesters were carried downtown in a patrol wagon and locked up overnight, only to be charged with a felony that could not be proven. That following morning, McKenzie stood before a Nashville judge and confessed, “It’s a long story, your honor. These men have spoken against my administration and my policies all during the year. While I had no actual proof that they were in the disturbance, I felt that they might be behind this or anything of its nature.”30 President McKenzie had the charges against the students changed from a felony to disorderly conduct. As a punishment for their actions and to quell any further student disturbances, the five students were fined $500.00 and expelled. One of the arrested and expelled students was the president of the senior class, who was scheduled to graduate within the next three months. The reaction to the police terror and student expulsions gained national attention, and alumni groups and student leaders were furious over the outcome. Overwhelmed with disbelief regarding the president’s insensitive response to the student protesters, DuBois stated publicly, “Men and women of Black America; Let no decent Negro send his child to Fisk until Fayette McKenzie goes.”31 The idea that a White president at a Black university had turned his campus over to a mob of angry White southern police officers to beat the rebellious Black students into submission was more than alumni and the local Black community could bear.

On February 5, 1925, the morning following the campus raid, 400 students assembled in the chapel and adopted a resolution stating that they were in sympathy with the five students who were expelled. After adoption of this resolution, all of those assembled, out of a student body of


30Fisk University Library, Fayette McKenzie Papers, Strike correspondence.

600, walked out and notified the faculty that they would not return to class until their grievances had been settled and the five expelled students were reinstated to the university. In addition to their demands to overturn the expulsion, students reiterated their grievances concerning the right to organize a student government association, the right to maintain an athletic program, the right to issue a student publication, the right to join recognized Black Greek-letter fraternities and sororities, and a revision of the Fisk University code of conduct. A telegram was also sent to the Chairman of the Board of Trustees, Paul Cravath, urging that an investigation be made of the situation regarding the campus raid. Incensed students and their parents feared for their children’s safety at Fisk. McKenzie had created an atmosphere of terror and distrust on campus, which elevated the level of racial tension throughout Nashville. Student protesters declared that their dissent was mainly against the paternalistic methods employed by President McKenzie, his administration, and the Board of Trustees.32

A number of the White campus administrators and faculty members cited DuBois as the instigator of the campus uprising. In a letter written to a concerned alumnus, Dora Scriber, Dean of Women and English instructor, wrote that it was

Dr. DuBois’ address to the alumni at Commencement last June, and his agitation all this school year which inflamed a small group of students to try to weld the whole body of students into united opposition to the administration…. At least twice it occurred very soon after one of Dr. DuBois’ printed statements, with continuing cries of “DuBois! DuBois!” the small group of young men known to be leaders all the year in opposition to Dr. McKenzie.33

DuBois did not shy away from these public attacks. He assumed responsibility for speaking out against the Board of Trustees and President McKenzie as well as encouraging students to do the same. DuBois defended himself against the riot accusations by stating:

Many have done me the honor of suggesting that I instigated this and the former uprisings. I did not. I knew nothing of them until I saw the press dispatches. If I had been asked I should have advised against the “riot,” because I doubted the stamina


of the students to carry it through. But, without waiting for me or anybody, the students struck. They yelled, pounded trashcans, sang and broke windows. I thank God they did. I thank God that the younger generation of Black students have the guts to yell and fight when their noses are rubbed in the mud.34

J. C. Napier, a Black Nashville attorney and member of the Fisk Board of Trustees, resented DuBois’ interference, claiming that “the main actuating cause of DuBois’ assault was personal malice due to matters connected with his daughter’s expenses, etc. while a student.”35 Nonetheless, there was no factual proof, other than his speech to alumni and several printed articles in the *Crisis*, that DuBois had anything to do with the demonstration at Livingston Hall.

In support of the five arrested students, Fisk alumni began to organize in an attempt to free Fisk from the authoritarian tactics of President McKenzie and his administration. The General Alumni Association, representing Fisk graduates from all parts of the country, was established for the purpose of publicizing the problems on Fisk campus in the hope that radical reform could be accomplished. On Monday night, February 9, leading Negro citizens of Nashville began to voice their concern for the conditions at Fisk. Nearly 3,000 Black leaders, alumni, and students assembled near the school and strongly denounced the president’s handling of the disturbance. The consensus at the meeting was that the calling of law enforcement officers to handle campus affairs was unnecessary and shed light on the incompetency of the president and his administration. Their overall sentiment was that the time had come for President McKenzie to depart Fisk before matters got worse. Knowing that McKenzie’s ultimate fate rested in the hands of the Board of Trustees, students and alumni eagerly awaited the Board’s decision in the handling of this matter.36

As requested by both the students and the alumni association, the Board of Trustees conducted an investigation in regard to the February 4th campus demonstration.


36 Fisk University Library, “Fisk President’s Offer Accepted with Amendments,” *Nashville Tennessean*, February 10, 1925.
L. Hollingsworth Wood, Vice-Chairman of the Board of Trustees, announced that the investigation showed that there was no excuse for the student outbreak. The trustees went on record in support of the president’s actions in handling the disturbance. Although McKenzie had won a victory by maintaining the support of the Board of Trustees and the White citizens of Nashville, the battle to take back Fisk and for his resignation was still on the minds of students, alumni, and the local Black community. Due to the overwhelming amount of pressure from students, who refused to return to class, a drop in enrollment numbers, and negative press brought on by various alumni groups, specifically DuBois’ NAACP Crisis magazine, McKenzie surrendered to defeat. On April 23, 1925, President McKenzie announced his resignation to Fisk students, who believed that they had finally won their yearlong battle against his paternalistic administration. It was suggested by the Board of Trustees that a White president be maintained at Fisk in order to be in as close contact as possible with White philanthropic foundations. It was further suggested that the Dean of Men and Women and of student activities be Black, since it was felt that Black administrative personnel could best understand the social problems of Black students. Ultimately, McKenzie’s handling of the protest at Fisk sparked racial tension on and off the campus; his departure from the university may not have been viewed as overtly racial, but it did represent a departure from the old days of paternalistic leadership at Black colleges and universities.37

The student strikes that occurred at Fisk University during the 1920s were characterized by almost a decade of students and alumni fighting for inclusion in campus governance, but the decade that followed ushered in a new area of protest against Jim Crow segregation. With the new decade, Fisk students and alumni were preparing themselves for a new fight. The campus rebellions that exploded during the twenties at Fisk helped bring an end to authoritarian rule, giving students more autonomy on campus and alumni a greater voice in institutional

governance. A mountain of racial tension and frustration, which was lying dormant beneath the surface of the 1920s strikes, did not awaken until the 1930s. Exactly a decade after the 1924 campus rebellions, Fisk University witnessed yet another stint of campus unrest. Ishmael Flory, a graduate student at Fisk, was the impetus behind the campus protest that took place in 1934. This time, the fight was not an attack on paternalistic leadership; instead it was an attack on the moral consciousness of Fisk University regarding Jim Crow.

Ishmael Flory received a fellowship in sociology to attend Fisk after graduating from the University of California, Berkeley with an A. B. in economics. Upon his arrival at Fisk, Flory immediately became involved in controversial issues on and off campus. His first month at the university, he participated in gathering witnesses for Fisk’s President, Thomas Elsa Jones, regarding a lynching that had taken place one-half block away from the institution. In addition to that, he called a meeting on campus to which he invited the entire student body along with Prof. E. Franklin Frazier to discuss the inhumanity of lynchings in America, particularly in the Black South. In December of 1933, Flory, along with several other students, decided to organize a silent protest parade to bring attention to a lynching incident that had occurred near campus. The small group of students gathered at the protest meeting received much of their advice on organizing the parade from Mrs. James Weldon Johnson, who spoke to them about the work that the NAACP had done concerning such issues. Even though President Jones had come to the meeting to subdue the students’ emotions regarding the parade and the lynching incident, Flory, as chairman of the meeting, encouraged his fellow students to carry on with their ideas to have the parade.

The following day, an article appeared in the paper along with President Jones’ photo, stating that he had arrived on campus just in time to stop the students from marching on the state

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38 Born in Lake Charles, Louisiana, Flory and his family moved to California at the age of twelve.

Incensed student participants declared that Jones’ statement was not true, claiming that they had failed to march due to a lack of cooperation from city officials, who had denied them a parade permit. In an attempt to defuse the situation, President Jones called the student leaders to his home to explain to them his opposition to such a parade. Mr. Flory informed President Jones that “the parade ought to be held because it would serve as a stimulus to students in other Negro colleges and to Negroes at large to see that Fisk students had taken a stand against lynching and had developed an attitude of attempting to do something about it.” 40 Neither side was able to come to an agreement regarding the matter, but Jones seemed to have won, seeing that no parade took place. Mr. Flory’s involvement in the lynching incident set in motion a string of events that gave cause for University officials to pay close attention to him and the subtle commotion he was making on campus.

Another incident occurred shortly after the lynching protest when members of the Fisk community were imposed upon to accept segregated seating at a basketball game being held in the University Social Center. The Center was a shared facility for the three Black universities in the area. The event was advertised in advance, indicating that segregated seating would be provided for White patrons. The day of the game, Black people sat on one side of the center and Whites on the other. The problem occurred when the Black section of the center became overcrowded while the White section had ample space to accommodate the overflow of Black guests. Mr. Aaron Allen, a chemistry instructor at Fisk, refused to abide by the segregated seating policy and found a seat among the White spectators. Dismayed by Mr. Allen’s forwardness, the White crowd became irate, nearly resulting in a fight. Mr. Allen told the White people in attendance that “if they did not like it, they could get their money back”; he went on to tell the Black manager of the center that he was nothing more than a “sambo nigger.” Following the incident, Charles S. Johnson, head of Fisk’s Department of Social Sciences at the time, urged

40Fisk University Library, Thomas E. Jones, “State of Ishmael P. Flory RE His Dismissal from Fisk University,” March 8, 1934, Box 34, Folder 19, pp. 1-2.
Mr. Flory and other students to take action and stir up sentiment that would end in some sort of boycott of the center. Flory tried to rally a protest regarding the incident but received very little student support. He observed that the university did very little to fight against Jim Crow and failed to take a firm stand either for or against the matter. He also noticed that “students attended Jim Crow theatres and Jim Crow affairs without seeming to realize the significance of the thing or to have any feeling of shame when they did so.”

That same year in February of 1934, Fisk’s Jubilee Singers were invited to perform at the Loew’s Theatre. The concert sparked controversy among Fisk students because it was well known throughout Nashville that Loew’s enforced Jim Crow laws for any performances held in the theatre. Outraged that the university would commit to such an engagement, Mr. Lionel Florant, an undergraduate student from New York and former member of Fisk’s concert choir, approached Flory about organizing a small group of Fisk students to protest the event. Florant had resigned from the concert choir due to performances held before Jim Crow audiences in the past, and Flory had already developed a reputation on campus as a student activist for racial equality. Together, the two students organized a protest that began to unravel the immoral seams of Nashville and Fisk University. The first protest activity they planned was a whispering campaign against the concert to arouse reactions from the administration. Their plan was successful in that an Executive Committee met on February 12, 1934 to investigate the student’s concerns, but protest leaders felt that nothing was being done to stop the performance. A week later, it was decided by the Educational Policy Committee that the university would move forward with the concert.

The follow day, three students--Lionel Florant, Howard Bennett, and Ishmael Flory--met with the director of the Jubilee Singers, Mrs. Myers, to express their concern over Fisk students

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41 Fisk University Library, Thomas E. Jones, “State of Ishmael P. Flory RE His Dismissal from Fisk University,” March 8, 1934, Box 34, Folder 19, pp. 1-2.

42 Fisk University Library, Thomas E. Jones, “State of Ishmael P. Flory RE His Dismissal from Fisk University,” March 8, 1934, Box 34, Folder 19, p. 3.
performing at a Jim Crow theater. She reported their grievances to the Dean of the University, who, in turn, called a meeting with thirteen faculty members. Twelve of the thirteen members voted to cancel the engagement, feeling that the university should take responsibility for any repercussions involving the matter. The thirteenth member, Mr. Jesse F. Beals, a White faculty member and the university comptroller, disagreed with breaking the contract and insisted that the singers make their appearance. The news of the faculty meeting never reached the students or the singers, and as a result, students organized a public meeting to voice their concerns the following day. After unsuccessfully soliciting the help of the Student Council president, who was fearful that he might anger President Jones, student leaders garnered the support of the Denmark Vesey Forum to help bring the student body together. Within days of their meeting, protest organizers were able to present to the administration a petition with signatures of over a hundred students who objected to the Loew’s performance.

After learning that the university had no plans to cancel the concert, Flory decided to take matters further and wrote to the Black press about what was happening on the campus of Fisk University. On February 17, 1934, the *Afro American* published Flory’s article, which ultimately led to his forced withdrawal from Fisk and an outbreak of student and alumni protest. Flory stated:

I felt that if any group should stand out against Jim Crow, it should be the Negro universities, where some semblance of enlightenment is supposed to prevail. All of this information I published in the papers, linking the incident up with the time of 1924 when Dr. W.E.B. DuBois in a memorable speech denounced Jim Crow as it was developing at Fisk, which speech ultimately led to the ousting of the former president, McKenzie.

43 Fisk University Library, Thomas E. Jones, “State of Ishmael P. Flory RE His Dismissal from Fisk University,” March 8, 1934, Box 34, Folder 19, pp. 5-6. The club was named after Denmark Vesey, a former enslaved man from the Caribbean who purchased his freedom and became a carpenter and minister. He attempted to organize one of the largest slave revolts in American history during the 1820s. Vesey was unsuccessful at his attempts and was sentenced to death as punishment for his act.

44 The *Afro* or *Afro-American* was a leading Black newspaper founded in 1892 by John H. Murphy, Sr. in Baltimore, Md.
The president of the university demanded that action be taken against Flory immediately regarding the newspaper article. Jones met with student leaders and University Deans to inform them that Flory’s article misrepresented the university and was detrimental to the welfare of Fisk. A shocked Flory was surprised, since he had written articles in the past concerning the lynching and the basketball game incidents and was never issued a punishment from the university. In all three articles, Flory wrote about the injustice of Jim Crow laws, mentioning members of the Fisk community. What made this particular submission different was the personal attack he took against Fisk’s administration for accepting an invitation to have the renowned Fisk Jubilee Singers perform at a Jim Crow theatre. Although Flory was forced to withdraw from the university, all the work he had done at Fisk to bring attention to racial segregation and injustice had not been in vain. Furthermore, he was successful in stopping the concert from taking place.45

An appeal was made before the University Executive Committee to re-instate Flory, but they decided that for the good of the University, the decision should stand and Flory should leave. On February 24, 1934, President Jones gave Flory the balance of his fellowship of $133.33 and requested that he leave Fisk immediately. When four female students interviewed the president regarding the situation and requested that he rescind his decision, President Jones told the four young ladies, “If the whole three hundred and sixty students wanted to air the University’s dirty linen out on the front lawn, they would all go, too.”46 On February 28, 1934, more than twenty-five students representing practically all the student organizations on the campus called the Executive Committee before them. Refusing to show up, the Executive Committee requested that President Jones inform the student body that “they were not on trial.” Students accused President Jones and his administration of being unfair and failing to take

45Fisk University Library, Thomas E. Jones, “State of Ishmael P. Flory RE His Dismissal from Fisk University,” March 8, 1934, Box 34, Folder 19, p. 6.

46Fisk University Library, Thomas E. Jones, “State of Ishmael P. Flory RE His Dismissal from Fisk University,” March 8, 1934, Box 34, Folder 19, p. 7.
serious Jim Crow segregation matters at Fisk. No one believed that Flory had been forced to withdraw due to the article he had written; it was clear to everyone involved that the university was avoiding a direct confrontation with the White South and its rigid segregation policies.\footnote{Fisk University Library, Thomas E. Jones, “State of Ishmael P. Flory RE His Dismissal from Fisk University,” March 8, 1934, Box 34, Folder 19, p. 7.}

Immediately following the incident, President Jones published an article in the \textit{Fisk News} addressing the university’s position on the matter. “The whole spirit of the administration at Fisk is one of democracy. No one individual controls the Fisk program. On the other hand, each unit as represented by the students, faculty, alumni, Board of Trustees, and the public which it serves, has a say in the running of Fisk University.”\footnote{Fisk University Library, \textit{Fisk News}, March-April, 1934.} Jones went on to list his accolades, highlighting the work he had done to raise Fisk’s academic standards and how he had placed the school on a solid financial foundation. Jones’ article did not go over well with students and alumni, who were still convinced that Fisk was avoiding the issue of segregation, and rumors abounded that it was because the university was trying to appease White donors, on whom they depended for financial support. George Streator, a Fisk alumnus and Managing Editor of the \textit{Crisis}, had this to say of President Jones’ comments:

> You succeeded in convincing a lot of people about Flory – Firm in the belief that graduate schools cannot afford to be so picayunish, and further, that Fisk is just about what it has been for twenty years – just another institution for the training of Negro students in which the Negro student is trained to get along with the White South as it is now being run. Your speech to the students shows that you have not read carefully the history of McKenzie’s failures. He too, boasted of his power to raise money. That is not the whole job of a Fisk president.\footnote{Fisk University Library, Thomas E. Jones, “Letter from Alumnus George Streator,” Box 34, Folder 20; George Streator was one of the student protest leaders at Fisk University during the 1920s riots.} Jones had done so much to improve the relationship between the Black and White community at Fisk, and he had indeed placed Fisk at the forefront of Black higher education. Although President Jones and his administration’s reputation were nothing like McKenzie’s, this incident
placed suspicion in the minds of those, particularly alumni, who came to distrust White leadership at Black colleges and universities.

Following the students’ appeal to re-instate Mr. Flory, alumni joined the fight and asked the university’s administration for clarity regarding the Flory decision, in which they offered this statement from the University Bulletin: “Any student whose general attitude is such that the President and faculty deem his suspension from the institution to be for the good of the University, may be required to withdraw from the University without prejudice to his continuing study elsewhere.”

Alumni groups were dissatisfied with the University’s response and rallied together to have Mr. Flory re-instated. The Philadelphia Fisk Club wrote President Jones, stating, “The Club wishes to register a formal protest against the expulsion of Mr. Flory if the facts as published in the newspapers are true. The Club regrets the action of the music department in booking the Jubilee Singers at Loew’s Theatre, knowing the humiliation and embarrassment to which they would be subjected.” President Jones responded to the alumni club, claiming that “Mr. Flory was asked to withdraw from Fisk University because we found him to be thoroughly unreliable in his statements and unscrupulous in his methods of attack on the reputation of other both on and off the campus.” Although Ishmael Flory was never re-instated back into the university, his activism brought students and alumni together once again on the campus of Fisk University.

It is not clear whether or not the concert was canceled due to the student protest or due to the decision made by faculty members days before the petition was submitted to the administration. Whatever the case may have been, the students’ efforts proved to be victorious. Some might have believed that the university was using the incident as an opportunity to get rid of Flory, whom they labeled as a troublemaker, and others may have thought the university was

50 Fisk University Library, Fisk University Bulletin, Section I, Paragraph 2, p. 47.
51 Fisk University Library, Thomas E. Jones, Box 34, Folder 20.
52 Fisk University Library, Thomas E. Jones, Box 34, Folder 19.
not yet ready to deal with Jim Crow matters internally or externally and that Flory, being an agitator, would never give in until Fisk had chosen a side. Finally, the university’s perspective was simply that Flory was asked to leave Fisk because he publicly misrepresented the university in the Black press. President Jones contended that “our eight year period at Fisk can stand against statements of a revolutionist who was on the campus only four and one-half months and had never lived in the South.” Labeling Flory as a revolutionist was prophetic on Jones’ part. Flory’s campaign to bring racial awareness to Fisk carried on despite his absence. The issues surrounding racial equality that Flory raised at Fisk during the mid-1930s carried over into the next decade, just as DeBois’ 1924 message of racial uplift had carried over and resounded in the heart of Flory in 1934.

The student rebellions of the 1920s and ’30s had made a mark on Fisk, and the events that followed during the 1940s were a manifestation of the two decades of alumni and student activism. The Executive Committee of the General Alumni Association, with mixed emotions, accepted a letter of resignation from Thomas E. Jones, President of Fisk University, on November 10, 1945. After serving the university for nearly twenty years, Jones decided to leave Fisk and return home to his alma mater as the new President of Earlham College. Instantly, members of the Fisk community began to speculate about who would become the new president of the university. Alumni and students made it clear that they thought the time had come for Fisk to appoint its first Black president. Upon receipt of President Jones’ letter of resignation, the Executive Committee of the General Alumni Association drafted a letter to the Board of Trustees stating:

Since it is the responsibility and the purpose of the Trustees to elect a new president now, the alumni desire to state categorically that they have very deep interest in the type of man who is to be selected…. That he should be as free as possible of personal bias and personal convictions which would in any wise hamper Fisk in its efforts to function for the people whom it is primarily to serve. In thinking thus we remember, too keenly and regretfully, the unfounded assumption of some of our

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53 Fisk University Library, Thomas E. Jones, Box 34, Folder 20.
friends that the consideration and appointment of a Negro to the presidency of Fisk would be a mistake in that it would change the status of the college. We have but to call to their attention the several institutions which have made the change without any interruption in their progress.54

Although many thought Jones to be a good president based on the amount of work he did to improve conditions at the university, the idea of appointing a Black president seemed more appealing to the Black stakeholders at Fisk. It was not forgotten that troubles had plagued Jones’ administration during the 1930s concerning the university's refusal to take a stance against segregation. The outcome of that incident placed a shadow of doubt in the minds of many who questioned White leadership at Black institutions. Before Jones, there was the issue of his predecessor, Fayette McKenzie, who was forced out of office during the 1920s due to his paternalistic and oppressive leadership style. The consideration of a Black president had to be taken seriously or Fisk quite possibly could face yet another campus uprising.

Members of the Board of Trustees took caution when it came to alumni demands. It was quite evident that a number of the trustees favored appointing another White president but did not know if they could garner enough support from other board members to accomplish the task. The General Alumni Association strategy was to see to it that it never happened. They requested an audience with the Board during trustee meetings and presented recommendations for candidates of their choosing.55 As president of the university, President Jones was still an active board member and added this to the discussion. “It was pretty evident … that the trend we have witnessed in recent meetings of the board that the left wing pressure of the alumni will dominate the situation at Fisk more and more unless the board takes a stand against the type of thing.”56

54 Fisk University Library, Thomas E Jones, Box 35, Folder 13.

55 The General Alumni Association unanimously recommended Dr. Charles H. Wesley as Fisk’s first Black president. Dr. Wesley was an alumnus and Board of Trustees member of Fisk University. After graduating from Fisk in 1911, he went on to earn a Master’s degree from Yale in 1913 and a PhD from Harvard in 1925. At the time of the recommendation, he was the Dean of the College of Liberal Arts at Howard. Although Dr. Wesley was not selected as president of Fisk, he was appointed to the presidency of Wilberforce University and the founding president of Central State University. Fisk University Library, Thomas E. Jones, Box 71, Folder 15; Richardson, A History of Fisk.

56 Fisk University Library, Thomas E Jones, Box 35, Folder 14.
Even at his departure, Jones tried to control the situation at Fisk by attempting to rally support against the General Alumni Association. He went on to suggest to White board members that “pressure group insists that decisions be made not on the basis of merit but race or personal considerations. I hope that thee and other members of the board will give increasing attention to what I believe is a growing danger in the administration.”

To the satisfaction of Jones and several other trustee members, not all alumni favored a Black president at Fisk. In a letter written to the Board of Trustees, Dr. George S. Morse, an alumnus from the College Class of 1905 stated, “Personally, I feel that it is absolutely, positively absurd to even think of electing a colored President for Fisk at this time.” There were other groups who doubted the time was right for a Black president at Fisk; mainly those individuals were conservative White members of the Nashville community who believed in White superiority, Northern Industrialists who tried to control the school with their financial gifts, and a small segment of the Black community who feared that a Black President would tarnish Fisk’s academic reputation. Nevertheless, the decision rested in the hands of the Board of Trustees, which included a total of five alumni representatives, who were quite instrumental in the process of choosing the next president. Due to the 1920s campus rebellions, the alumni were successful in their petition to secure seats on the Board of Trustees; twenty years later they found themselves in a position of authority to take part in selecting the next president of Fisk University.

As the search for the new president of Fisk moved forward, an Interim Committee in charge of Administration was appointed to manage the university in place of the president. The

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57 Fisk University Library, Thomas E. Jones, Box 17, Folder 14.

58 Fisk University Library, Thomas E. Jones, Box 35, Folder 14.

59 The five Alumni Trustee Members were: Mr. James B. Cashin, Dr. William Lloyd Imes, Mrs. Sadie D. St. Clair, Dr. Charles H. Wesley, and Mr. Carter W. Wesley. Fisk University Library, Thomas E. Jones, Box 71, Folder 15.

60 Fisk University Library, Board of Trustee Minutes, December 6, 1927.
Board of Trustees appointed the Chair of the Sociology Department, Mr. Charles S. Johnson, to Chair the Committee. After careful consideration and the exploration of a number of Black and White candidates, On November 3, 1946, the Vice-Chair of the Board of Trustees.

Mr. L. Hollingsworth Wood, informed Mr. Charles S. Johnson that he had been selected to be the next president of Fisk University. Mr. Johnson accepted the appointment, stating, “I am no stranger to the purposes and policies of Fisk. For eighteen years I have been a part of them.” The dawn of a new day was taking place at Fisk. The first Black president in the history of the university had been appointed thanks to the efforts of students and alumni at Fisk.

After hearing the news of Johnson’s appointment, the Student Government Association proclaimed that “the Trustee Board made a wise choice of a leader for our school because Dr. Johnson represents the First Negro president-elect of Fisk University. But we feel that he is definitely qualified to guide the academic, social, economic and religious programs necessary for a well-balanced college curriculum.” Johnson felt a tremendous sense of gratitude in regard to the amount of faith that had been entrusted in him by students, alumni, and trustee members. He was most indebted to the alumni, who had fought the Board relentlessly to consider a Black president. Johnson candidly acknowledged that his decision to accept the presidency was “greatly influenced by the prompt and cordial response of many alumni, and by my conviction that there would be generous and substantial support of my administration.” Fisk alumni had set in motion a plan twenty years in the making to ensure that Fisk would be added to the list of other Black institutions with a Black president at their head. “It is very appropriate that my first message as president-elect of Fisk University should be addressed to the alumni. They are its

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61 Fisk University Library, Charles S. Johnson, Box 17, Folder 14.
62 Fisk University Library, Charles S. Johnson, Box 17, Folder 14.
63 Fisk University Library, Board of Trustee Minutes, December 6, 1927.
living past, its present character, and the vital elements in its future as an institution,” declared President Johnson.

Students and alumni launched strikes against the oppressive policies and White leadership at Fisk University between 1920 and 1950. The strikes/protests that took place during the twenties and thirties led directly to the resignation of one president and the direct influence on the Board of Trustees to appoint Fisk’s first Black president during the ’40s. The campus strikes/protests signified a period of forward progress in Black higher education. The actions of Fisk students and alumni best illustrated their refusal as stakeholders to sign over their inherent rights to Fisk to authoritarian White leadership. The point of immediate conflict was to display a level of understanding and solidarity around issues of racial dignity, independence, and self-respect. Fisk students were seeking recognition of their status as men and women instead of accepting increased White paternalism in the form of restricted self-governance. The alumni were petitioning for a voice regarding institutional policies on campus and seats on the Board of Trustees, as opposed to being ostracized and silenced. Through their protest efforts, both groups were successful in accomplishing their goals.

Suppose we do lose Fisk; suppose we lose every cent that the entrenched millionaires have set aside to buy our freedom and stifle our complaints. They have the power, they have the wealth, but glory to God we still own our own souls and, led by young men like these, let us neither flinch nor falter but fight and fight and fight again. Let us never forget that the archenemy of the Negro race is the false philanthropists who kick us in the mouth when we cry out in honest and justifiable protest.


Hampton is not a building, for it had existence before it had a building to house it. It is not a Board of Trustees, for those who made up its first Board have passed on. It is not a student body... [or] a faculty.... Then what is Hampton Institute?... It is an indefinable, intangible something, conceived in the mind and heart of General Armstrong. It could be moved a thousand miles away... and as long as it continued to fulfill the dream of Armstrong and his successors [it] would still be Hampton.¹

Campus unrest at Hampton Institute was centered on a variety of issues, the crux of which pointed toward an inflexible Board of Trustees and administration. The mid-1920s marked a pivotal turning point in the history of the institution, as a half century of strict paternalistic policies alongside problems of racial authoritarianism stood to be challenged. Frustrated students fought White officials to secure their social, political, and intellectual freedom on campus. The initial dissatisfaction began with students who complained that vocational/industrial training at Hampton had long outlived its usefulness and that the time had come to transition from a normal school to a university. A number of Hampton students believed that the school “had failed to adjust its academic and disciplinary policies to make allowance for the fact that Hampton was no longer a school for docile elementary students but for young men and women who could think for themselves.”² In addition to students pushing for higher academic standards and more student autonomy, they were also challenging Jim Crow segregation at their institution and urging the Board of Trustees to enact policies to establish Hampton as an integrated campus. “Hampton,

¹Zaki, Civil Rights and Politics at Hampton Institute, 7.

which in the 1920s accepted the dictates of White Virginia and provided a segregated Jim Crow residence and dining room for White visitors, was ‘the pet of philanthropy.’”3 Students brought these issues, among others, before the Board of Trustees and members of the Hampton community, demanding immediate change. In many cases, they stood alone, except when it came to the issue of segregation, alumni became involved and were readily eager to argue their position concerning the matter.

Starting in the 1920s, Hampton experienced three decades of unrest brought on by disgruntled students who understood that the institution simply was not receptive to change. What occurred during these three decades of protest was a fight for more student involvement in campus affairs, a push for Hampton to become a full-fledged university, and a unified movement by both alumni and students to desegregate their campus. Unlike other HBCUs during the first half of the twentieth century, students at Hampton emerged as the leading force behind the campus activism. During their quest, they were met with various forms of resistance from the Board of Trustees, the administration, and the alumni. Graduates of Hampton believed that students had no right to place so many demands on an institution’s administration that was doing so much with so little to help in the advancement of the race. Unfortunately, student protesters stood alone, garnering very little support from anyone outside of the student body. Quite naturally, members of the Hampton community had very little sympathy for the campus rebellions and attempted to quell student uprisings whenever possible. Refusing to accept the conditions at Hampton, organized students led the charge for change and brought about several periods of unrest in 1925, 1927, 1939, and 1948. Although Hampton students were at the center of most of the campus activism, it is important to note that alumni were very instrumental during the 1925 protest concerning Jim Crow segregation.

Founded on the shore of Chesapeake Bay in 1868, Hampton Institute began as a private Black normal and agricultural school in Hampton, Virginia. Shortly after the Civil War, the

American Missionary Association presented General Samuel Chapman Armstrong with the idea of leading an institution for freedmen. With endeavors to continue their educational crusade across the South, the American Missionary Association found Hampton, Virginia to be the ideal location to establish a school for free Black men and women. Who else better suited to lead this new school than Armstrong, a former officer in the Union Army and commander of one of the few Black infantry units during the war? Not only was the missionary society impressed by Armstrong’s military service, but they were equally impressed by his background as the son of a prominent missionary family who had labored for years to help the native people of Hawaii. Armstrong continued his family’s missionary legacy by working for the Freedman’s Bureau immediately after the Civil War in championing the cause of Black education. The missionary society found Armstrong to be the model candidate to direct their new school.

There is no doubt that the roots of Hampton Institute run deep in the life of Armstrong. Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute’s mission, “to educate the head, the hand, and the heart,” was all a part of Samuel Armstrong’s idea of a great institution for the newly emancipated men and women who had suffered from the bondage of slavery in America. His vision for the institution was born from the missionary work he experienced as a child, which assuredly had a strong bearing on him as a missionary principal at Hampton. Furthermore, his role as commander over a Black unit during the Civil War was also key to his vision at the institution; his experiences with these Black soldiers aroused his interest in the welfare of Black Americans. And lastly, his philosophical approach to industrial education was influenced by the relationships he forged with wealthy northern industrialists who were staunch proponents of vocational training for Black Americans. Armstrong’s Hampton was not just simply a manifestation of a

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4Gen. Samuel Chapman Armstrong was born in Maui, Hawaii and received his college degree at Williams College in Massachusetts. Upon completing his degree, he enlisted in the Union Army.

5Zaki, Civil Rights and Politics at Hampton Institute, 10.
missionary’s dream, but the core of its mission was to train Black teachers for the South in the area of vocational/industrial education.\(^6\)

In 1878, Hampton welcomed its first class of Native American students to the Institute. The relationship that developed between the school and Native Americans lasted for forty years. Hampton’s educational experiment with Native Americans was highly controversial. Armstrong was often questioned and criticized regarding the Native American students on campus. Many believed that they could not be civilized or Christianized; therefore, providing them the kind of educational opportunities that Hampton had to offer would be a waste of time and resources. For the most part, those who criticized the program were often proven wrong. Many of the students who graduated went back to their native territories and opened off-reservation schools modeled after the Hampton Idea. According to Armstrong, the Indian education program was quite successful in its mission to solve the “Indian Problem.”\(^7\) He saw similarities in the condition between both Native Americans and Black Americans. “He sought to restore self-respect within the Red men as in the Black men. Black men had lost self-respect in slavery, Red men through subjugation on reservations.”\(^8\) Native Americans and Black students co-existed on Hampton’s campus peacefully up until 1923, when the last Native American student graduated from the Indian program at the Institute.

Armstrong served as Hampton’s principal for 25 years, which gave way to an age of industrial education that swept across the Black South. Hampton was a model of independence and resourcefulness “combined with a self-sustaining institutional economy complete with a farm, dairy, machine shop, home economics, and shoe repair.”\(^9\) Armstrong’s vision for Hampton was far more than for economic success; he was also deeply concerned for the success of his

\(^6\)Zaki, *Civil Rights and Politics at Hampton Institute*, 11-12.

\(^7\)Schall, *Stony the Road*, 31.

\(^8\)Schall, *Stony the Road*, 11.

students. The influence that he had on the students at Hampton was evident due to the extraordinary work they were able to accomplish. “Armstrong’s legacy was absorbed by its students, and they applied it to their lives. Many students became teachers, professionals, and leaders within their communities fulfilling Armstrong’s desire to see them be of service to their communities.”

His most prized student, Booker T. Washington, assisted in the founding of Hampton’s sister school, Tuskegee Institute. Following Washington’s leadership at Tuskegee, another one of Armstrong’s pupils, Robert Russa Moton, was appointed to lead Tuskegee. The Armstrong years at Hampton not only brought national acclaim to the school’s unique educational program, but it also brought tremendous wealth and growth to the campus. Because of Armstrong, the “Hampton Idea” was strongly cemented into the minds and lives of his students, alumni, faculty, and staff. Armstrong served as principal of Hampton Institute up until his death in 1893, after which the Board of Trustees appointed Hollis Burke Frissell to be his successor.

The next half century of leadership at Hampton would go on to define the school’s history by enacting policies and forging community relations that set the school apart from other Black institutions of the period. For the principals and presidents that served Hampton from its founding up until the early 1940s, their legacy will live on in the works they did to build a first-rate institution. Men like Hollis Burke Frissell and James E. Greggs were committed to keeping alive the Armstrong legacy at Hampton. During Frissell’s administration, he made major strides in building Hampton’s industrial and vocational programs. “Frissell’s emphasis on vocational training was part of a larger effort to ingratiate the institute with those who believed that Blacks should be trained for subordinate positions in American society.”

Somewhat different from Frissell’s administration, Principal James E. Gregg's work at Hampton was most important because he was responsible for upgrading the Institute to the collegiate level.

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10 Zaki, *Civil Rights and Politics at Hampton Institute*, 12.

Although the Institute offered two- and three-year programs, it did not offer a bachelor’s degree as did other Black institutions of the era. As a normal school Hampton was markedly different in structure and content from Black teachers’colleges and liberal arts colleges. Hampton’s overt emphasis on industrial and agricultural education tended to overshadow its latent function as a normal school whose mission it was to educate African American for the teaching profession. The institute’s commitment was to economic development as opposed to the educative preparation of a Black intelligentsia. Gregg convinced the Board of Trustees in 1920 to seriously consider changing the normal school program because he had noted that “accrediting agencies in several southern states had begun to demand college training for all certified teachers.”\(^\text{12}\) Not only did he persuade the Board to expand the two-year program to a four-year program, but it was during his leadership at Hampton that the first Bachelor of Arts degree was offered in education. Because of the continuous controversy at Hampton regarding industrial training versus classical education, he reminded trustees, alumni, and the White community that “Hampton’s distinctive place of highest usefulness … is without question that of technical and professional college.”\(^\text{13}\) He guaranteed to all who would listen that “Hampton would not forsake any of the characteristics that made it famous in the years gone by – characteristics which included wholesome respect for hard work and hand skill, as well as for character, moral fitness, trustworthiness and dependability.”\(^\text{14}\) Despite Gregg’s promises, Hampton was accredited as a university in 1927. Even after moving the “institute” to “university” status, Gregg maintained that Hampton was not a liberal arts college and had no intention of becoming one.

During the 1920s, a new generation of college students entered Hampton, and they were prepared to challenge the majority White Board of Trustees and administration regarding issues of industrial education and for a controlling interest in the institution. The student demographics


\(^{13}\)Wolters, *The New Negro on Campus*, 236.

\(^{14}\)Wolters, *The New Negro on Campus*, 236.
at Hampton had changed; they were more mature and aware of the social and political world surrounding them. Long gone were the days of Armstrong’s Hampton; half a century had passed, and students were determined to force the institution to grow up and mature alongside them. Upon graduating from Hampton, these young men and women represented a new era of Black graduates who were more concerned than ever with the state of affairs regarding Black people in the United States. As students, they battled with paternalistic administrators, and as alumni, they fought against Jim Crow segregation. The issues they faced as students and alumni brought about a change in attitude: a new class of racially astute graduates was born, and they refused to accept being placed at the bottom of the social caste. Thus, three decades of campus unrest erupted on the campus of Hampton Institute. The chain of events that began the first round of protest mostly involved the local White community, the Board of Trustees, and Hampton’s National Alumni Association.

The trouble at Hampton started on February 21, 1925, with an overwhelming number of Black and White Virginians crowding Ogden Hall to see the Denishawn Dance Troupe perform on the campus. The dancers stirred up quite a commotion among the guests. A trustee commented that the performance was sold out due to the fact that “the dancers were practically naked and therefore everybody went.” The two thousand-seat auditorium was nearly filled to capacity, leaving very few seating options for late arrivals. Like most events held in Ogden Hall, everyone sat segregated according to their race. As the hall filled, White attendees who could not find special seating was forced to cross the color line and accept seats next to their “Negro friends” at Hampton. Dr. James Gregg, principal of the Institute, made this statement regarding the matter: “The members of each race have sat by themselves by natural instinct in all of our

15The Denishawn Dance School, headed by Ruth St. Denis and Ted Shawn, specialized in ballet and modern dance. Ogden Hall, which served as the campus auditorium for both school-related and public events, was built and dedicated to provide a place large enough to accommodate such events for both the student body and the community.

16Hampton University Archives, Dr. James E. Gregg Collection, Anglo-Saxon Clubs of America, July 10, 1925.
gatherings, and there has been no cause for complaint on that score.” Mrs. Grace B. Copeland, the wife of *Newport News Daily Press* editor, Colonel Walter Scott Copeland, arrived late for the event and was “ushered to the only remaining seats next to some Negroes.” Outraged that she was seated in the “Colored section,” Mrs. Copeland complained to her husband, who used his position as *Daily Press* editor to scold the institution for permitting racial mingling.17

On March 15, 1925, Copeland called Hampton to task regarding the matter in an editorial piece he published in the *Daily Press* entitled “Integrity of the Anglo-Saxon Race.” Copeland’s article condemned Hampton and Gregg for teaching and practicing “social equality between the White and negro race.”18 He warned Gregg, “We are going to have serious trouble if you do not protect our citizens and our womanhood against this horrible practice of social equality.”19 Copeland’s strategy was to arouse fear in the minds of White Virginians that the mixing of the races would lead to chaos and destruction. “There will be no power on earth to prevent the nigger from entering our homes and marrying your daughter,” Copeland commented.20 He went even farther to suggest that racial integration would eventually lead to “mongrelization” and that Hampton’s current policies, or lack thereof, did nothing to prevent such an act. Many members of the Hampton community were surprised at Copeland’s criticism and found it to be unwarranted, considering that his objection with the institution stemmed from nothing more than seating arrangements. For Copeland it was certainly more; he argued that there were “Beautiful White women in the nude with nigger youths gazing at them and there was the flower of our womanhood seated next to the Blacks.”21 Surely the Black patrons posed no threat to

17Hampton University Archives, Dr. James E. Gregg Collection, Anglo-Saxon Clubs of America, July 10, 1925.


19Hampton University Archives, Massenburg Bill Folder.

20Hampton University Archives, Massenburg Bill Folder.

Mrs. Copeland, but this did not stop her husband from seizing the opportunity to make an example out of the situation at Hampton. The news of the editorial spread throughout Virginia, and Copeland demanded that Gregg offer a public response to the claims that had been made against the institution. In a public letter to the Daily Press, Gregg replied that “Hampton’s policies certainly do not encourage social mingling of the races under circumstances which would lead to embarrassment of either side.” Nonetheless, Copeland had made his point regarding the situation. He did not stand alone in his public attack on Hampton and Principal Gregg. As he had hoped, numerous members of the local White community joined him and his crusade to force the Institute to set clear and concise policies concerning racial intermingling. Copeland maintained that “the fault [did] not rest with the White people of Virginia nor with the colored people. The fault rests, and will rest, with the management of the school at Hampton.”

Although Gregg had offered a response to the Daily Press with hopes that the matter would be settled, Copeland was not at all satisfied with the principal’s reply and several months later called upon the local branch of the Anglo-Saxon Club to organize a mass meeting at the city courthouse to discuss the “race problem” at Hampton. Copeland arranged for Mr. John Powell, the founder of Virginia’s Anglo-Saxon Club and father of the “Racial Integrity Law,” to address the concerned crowd. During his speech, Powell reminded the citizens of Hampton, Virginia that “the Anglo-Saxon race has no moral right to amalgamate with any colored race, for in so doing it would destroy itself…. Amalgamation would mean the destruction of the Anglo-Saxon race in America and the substitution of a race of mulattoes.” Powell, a staunch opponent of racial socialization, argued that he would rather “every White child in the United States were

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22 Hampton University Archives, Dr. James E. Gregg Collection, Dr. Gregg's response to Newport News Daily Press, July 15, 1925.

23 Hampton University Archives, Dr. James E. Gregg Collection, Daily Press, March 6, 1926.

24 The Racial Integrity Law required that all persons born in Virginia have a racial description of every person be recorded at birth and divided society into only two classifications: White and Colored.

25 Hampton University Archives, Dr. James E. Gregg Collection, Daily Press, March 6, 1926.
sterilized and the Anglo-Saxon race left to perish in its purity” rather than risk the chance of being mixed with Black blood.26 He warned the people of Hampton and Newport News that “if you don’t make a start now … you will wake up in the hereafter to find that your grandchildren are negroes.”27 Copeland and Powell had waged a war against Hampton Institute and had made a victorious appeal to the White public to join the battle; many of whom already opposed Hampton and believed that the school gave Black people false aspirations to become equal citizens in the U.S. Much of the resentment toward the institution quite possibly stemmed from the fact that White Virginians were uncomfortable with a “Negro School” that had accumulated such a tremendous amount of wealth. It was reported in the local newspaper that Hampton was “the richest institution in Virginia and money by the millions [is flowing] into its Endowment Fund.”28 White Virginians believed Hampton had become a school for “uppity Negroes” who were dissatisfied with their subordinate place, and something had to be done to remind them of their social position. At the close of the meeting, it was decided that the club would appeal to the Virginia legislature to pass a law that would require separate seating for all races in public assemblages within the state. Upon the club’s request, local representative Capt. George Alvin Massenburg drafted the bill and introduced it to the state's General Assembly. The Daily Press and the Anglo-Saxon Club were gaining statewide support, and it was only a matter of time before the proposed bill would be voted into law.29

26 Hampton University Archives, Dr. James E. Gregg Collection, Anglo-Saxon Clubs of America letter to Sidney Frissell, July 10, 1925. In addition to the Massenburg Bill, Powell introduced the possibility of adopting three additional bills regarding racial segregation: The bills dealt with illicit sexual relations between races, making it a felony punishable by a sentencing to time spent in the penitentiary.

27 Hampton University Archives, Dr. James E. Gregg Collection, Anglo-Saxon Clubs of America letter to Sidney Frissell, July 10, 1925.

28 Hampton University Archives, Dr. James E. Gregg Collection, Daily Press, March 6, 1926; Wolters, The New Negro on Campus, 237-42.

29 Hampton University Archives, Dr. James E. Gregg Collection, Daily Press, March 6, 1926; Wolters, The New Negro on Campus, 237-42.
The incident that occurred in Ogden Hall, coupled with Copeland’s and Mr. Powell’s rhetoric, had caused old issues of racial disharmony to resurface between the Black and White communities in Virginia. Once Hampton administrators, students, and alumni heard the news, their immediate concern became the future of the school and how race relations might be strained between the institution’s stakeholders and the local community if such a law were passed.30 Never in Hampton’s fifty-seven-year history had it been necessary to determine such a policy. Students and alumni at Hampton were both outraged and disappointed by the local community’s attempt to enforce Jim Crow policies on Hampton's campus. They appealed to the general public, stating, “We are of the opinion now that it is useless to try by legislation to debar any groups in this country from any of the higher and better things which this civilization offers.”31 Their thoughts concerning the matter were that for a half century, Black and White citizens of Hampton and Newport News, Virginia, had existed peacefully and without the need for such strict measures. Jim Crow politics had forced Hampton Institute into a social and political war between White Virginians and Black stakeholders. The Institute’s Board of Trustees stood squarely in the middle of the confrontation. While White political groups tried to force their issues, Black alumni and student groups petitioned the Board of Trustees to resist Jim Crow segregation on their campus.

Those individuals who opposed the segregation law made numerous pleas to the leading forces behind the proposed bill as well as to their elected state officials to rethink the proposed policy. At a hearing before the Senate Committee on General Laws at the capital in Richmond, many gathered to argue their position. Dr. J.F. Love, of the Baptist Foreign Mission Board, strongly opposed the measure, saying “it would apply to Chinese and Japanese students attending the University of Richmond and he believed it would be a reflection of the Whites.”32

30 Wolters, The New Negro on Campus, 238.
Rev. W.P. Johnson, a Black minister in Richmond, declared, “It would disturb the pleasant relations now existing and that it would cause unrest; that it would have a bad effect on the radical element among the negroes.” Love and Johnson were concerned about how such a law would go beyond the borders of Hampton and lead to unwanted misunderstandings among the races throughout the state of Virginia. The biggest concern came from Hampton’s Alumni Association and Board of Trustees, one group that feared the school’s reputation was at stake and the other that feared for the reputation of their race.

From the outset, the most heated debates came from alumni and the Board of Trustees regarding the proposed Jim Crow policies at Hampton. The stakeholders at Hampton seemed to have had differing opinions regarding the issue, but the greatest opposition to the bill came from Hampton’s Alumni Association. A poll of prominent graduates and ex-students from all sections of the country was conducted concerning the matter, which was submitted to the Board of Trustees. The report indicated that any attempt to enforce segregation on Hampton’s campus “would destroy the great usefulness of the institution to Negro People, and would lose the friendship and confidence and goodwill which it has taken the school fifty years to win.”

Alumni argued before the Board that “such a spirit as this manifested by these leaders is unchristian and unwise and founded upon prejudice and jealousy needs no contradiction. That such action is unnecessary is shown in the fact that the best elements in both races are self-respecting enough to avoid forcing themselves where they are not wanted.” The alumni flatly believed that the bill would only lead to strained race relations and serve as an embarrassment to Hampton. Dr. DuBois, editor of the Crisis, offered his views on the situation brewing at Hampton with these comments in the Crisis:

33Hampton University Archives, Massenburg Act folder,

34Hampton University Archives, Hampton Alumni Visitation Committee to James E. Gregg, April 19, 1926.

35Hampton University Archives, Hampton Alumni Visitation Committee to James E. Gregg, April 19, 1926.
When White folk … come voluntarily as our guests we welcome them and treat them with every courtesy, although we cannot expect for our students reciprocal courtesy from them. But when they demand the right to cross this color line which they themselves have drawn, and then to have a second and internal drawing of race distinctions inside a Negro institution, we say, No. You are not compelled to enter this colored world and it is monstrous when you do come as guest to ask us to insult these already twice-insulted people. … No other civilized group in the world is asked to accept such personal insult in their own homes and schools and in their own social life as you demand of these Hampton Negroes.36

Leaders of the Association were careful not to point blame at the Board of Trustees. Their condemnation was targeted at the public, specifically the Anglo-Saxon Club. It was hard for alumni to conceive the idea that the Board would even consider siding with the Anglo-Saxons and their band of followers. The Association summed up their position by firmly stating, “The one great hope of the alumni is that the administrative forces of the institution will always conduct policies in such a way as not to lose the confidence of her constituency.”37

The stakeholders with the most influence and power to change public opinion were Hampton’s Board of Trustees. Unfortunately, they found themselves embattled within their own body concerning the incident in Ogden Hall. Mr. Homer Ferguson, a trustee, who was in Europe during the performance, argued that “such a show should not have been given there.” He declared before the Senate Committee that “the condition complained of would be corrected or he and the other southern trustees would resign.”38 Ferguson had drawn a clear line between board members from the North and the South, implying that the South had its own code of rules to follow in the form of Jim Crow segregation, which he and other southern trustees intended to respect. Hampton’s Board members were clearly at odds as to how they would handle an imposed Jim Crow entertainment policy at the institution. In addition to the Board’s divisiveness, Gregg was also struggling with how to direct the institution through these turbulent


38Hampton University Archives, Dr. James E. Gregg Collection, "Ferguson was in Europe knew nothing about it," February 16, 1926.
times. He tried to reassure alumni that Hampton would not compromise her integrity and that there would be no cause for segregation laws to be adopted on their campus. Expected to uphold the policies at Hampton and challenge the proposed segregation bill, Gregg instead took an on-the-fence approach to addressing the racial problems plaguing the institution. He, in turn, tried to restore confidence in White Virginians that Hampton had no desire to teach social equality. His efforts were unsuccessful and only gave cause for more distrust from both alumni and the White community.39

Concerned that the situation at Hampton was growing out of control, the Governor of Virginia, E. Tee Trinkle, wrote Gregg to offer his opinion involving the matter. The Governor expressed his contempt with the situation and warned Gregg that he could not lend his fundraising support to a school that encouraged the “mixing of the races.” It just so happened that, at the time, Gov. Trinkle was in the midst of helping Hampton and Tuskegee with a big fundraising campaign and wanted to reassure Gregg that his support for Hampton would depend on the direction that he and the rest of his fellow Board members decided to take. Trinkle stated, “Naturally you must know that I do not approve of social equality between the races for I believe nothing worse could happen to the White and Black people of this country than for this doctrine to prevail.”40 As a means of quelling Gov. Trinkle’s concerns, Gregg wrote the following in a letter to the Governor:

Hampton Institute has always sharply disapproved of any such social intimacies as might conceivably lead to intermarriage or to illicit intercourse. In the delicate and difficult task of trying to be fair to our Northern White supporters, our large Negro constituency, and our sincerely-valued Southern White friends, we cannot hope, I suppose, to please and satisfy all three groups all of the time. You need not fear, and no one need fear, that Hampton Institute, either in its teaching or in its practice, will

39 Hampton University Archives, Dr. James E. Gregg Collection, "Ferguson was in Europe knew nothing about it," February 16, 1926.

40 Hampton University Archives, Dr. James E. Gregg Collection, Massenburg Law, February 16, 1926; Governor of Virginia letter to Dr. Gregg, July 8, 1925.
do anything to break down the truest and soundest tradition of the South with respect to individual and racial self-respect, courtesy, and justice.\textsuperscript{41}

Undoubtedly this was a political move by Gregg to secure the Governor’s support regarding the fundraiser, but it also led to speculations that Gregg had no real intentions to fully back alumni opposition to the bill. The Governor, the \textit{Daily Press}, and the Anglo-Saxon Club all had a tremendous influence on the decisions that were being made by Hampton’s administration. It was quite evident that Gregg and the Board of Trustees’ failure to confront White Virginians was out of fear that they would lose favor both socially and politically among their peers. Notwithstanding their efforts to appease both sides, Hampton was suffering, and students and alumni were growing restless over the situation.\textsuperscript{42}

Although the Alumni Association had hoped they could convince the Board to take a stance against the Jim Crow policy, it was evident that nothing would be done. They soon realized that all their efforts were for naught. The Board had failed to stop the legislation, and the Massenburg Bill passed both Houses of the General Assembly by an overwhelming majority, becoming a law in the state of Virginia.\textsuperscript{43} Just as Copeland, Powell, and the Anglo-Saxon Club had hoped, the new bill required the separation of “White and Colored persons” in all public assemblages, stating:

\begin{quote}
Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia, that it shall be the duty of any person, persons, firm, institution or corporation operating, maintaining, keeping, conducting, sponsoring or permitting, any public hall, theatre, opera house, motion picture show or any place of public entertainment or public assemblage which is attended by both White and colored persons to separate the White race and the colored race, and to set apart and designate in each such public hall … refuse or neglect to comply with the provisions of the section shall be guilty of a
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{41}Hampton University Archives, Dr. James E. Gregg Collection, Dr. Gregg’s letter to the Governor of Virginia, July 11, 1925.

\textsuperscript{42}Hampton University Archives, Dr. James E. Gregg Collection, Massenburg Law, February 16, 1926.

\textsuperscript{43}Hampton University Archives, \textit{Hampton Alumni Journal}, March 1926, p. 4.
misdemeanor and upon conviction thereof shall be fined not less than one hundred dollars no more than five hundred dollars for each offense.44

Once the measure was passed, a number of alumni and friends of the institution urged Hampton to litigate the matter in the courts. Trustee Robert Russa Moton, Hampton alumnus and Principal of Tuskegee Institute, warned that “if Hampton should retire without a vigorous protest it would alienate many alumni and other Blacks who expected Hampton to serve as a chief advocate of Negro interest.”45 Once again, the Alumni Association pressed the Board of Trustees to fight the matter, citing that members of the Hampton community should not be subjugated to Jim Crow laws on their own campus.

In the end, Gregg took the advice of Dr. R.E. Blackwell, president of Randolph-Macon College, who recommended that Hampton not fight the “audience-segregation matter in court.” Blackwell argued that to litigate the matter “would be taken as proof that Hampton was using non-segregation in Ogden hall as an entering wedge to break down all race distinction.”46 This would ultimately stir up bad feelings for Hampton, and the school would lose many of their Northern and Southern White friends who gave freely to the progress of the school. Dr. Blackwell declared, “We shall simply have to tell our colored friends that nothing will be gained by a court victory.”47 It was suggested that Hampton quietly close Ogden Hall to the public and confine its activities to its students, alumni, and the Black citizens in the community. He assured Gregg that “the whole matter will pass out of the minds of our people and the law will become a dead letter. The issue would inevitably die unless it is made a race issue by being carried to the

44Hampton University Archives, Dr. James E. Gregg Collection, House Bill No. 30.

45Hampton University Archives, Dr. James E. Gregg Collection, Robert R. Moton to James E. Gregg, March 25, 1926.

46Hampton University Archives, Dr. James E. Gregg Collection, Massenburg Bill, Letter from Dr. R.E. Blackwell to Dr. Gregg. April 20, 1926.

47Hampton University Archives, Dr. James E. Gregg Collection, Massenburg Bill, Letter from Dr. R.E. Blackwell to Dr. Gregg. April 20, 1926.
In addition to Dr. Blackwell’s advice, it was brought to the attention of the Board of Trustees by the school's attorney that the new law required only that public assemblages be segregated and that private meetings limited to invited guests would not come under the law. After careful consideration, the Trustees decided that “to comply with the law it would be necessary to discontinue holding public entertainment and that in the future all entertainments would be private, open only to the school community and invited guests.”

The hostility against Hampton Institute spurred from a select group of White Virginians who forced Hampton’s Board of Trustees to deal with Jim Crow policies on their campus. The National Alumni Association was coerced to join the fight, setting in motion the first wave of activism at Hampton during the 1920s by alumni to influence administrative and institutional change.

Shortly after tensions subsided concerning the Massenburg Bill, Hampton Institute was on the brink of yet another racial battle, but this time the unrest involved dissatisfied students. Conditions at Hampton were becoming drastically more volatile between students and the administration. At the heart of the matter were students demanding a greater degree of participation in institutional governance as well as more rights and freedom on campus. Students refused to back down and allow the administration to dictate unfair policies to them that they believed created “hat-in-hand and me-too-boss Negroes.” The controversy at Hampton began when students broke a longstanding tradition and refused to sing what they referred to as “plantation melodies.” Students found the musical arrangements to be demeaning and redolent of the olden days of slavery in America. Perhaps the catalyst for the student rebellions at Hampton during the 1920s was due to the student stakeholders who felt “Negro Spirituals” stood in direct contrast to the progressive changes brought on by the New Negro Movement in America. The singing of “slave spirituals/plantation songs” was a point of contention for a number of students.

48 Hampton University Archives, Dr. James E. Gregg Collection, Massenburg Bill, Letter from Dr. R.E. Blackwell to Dr. Gregg. April 20, 1926.

49 Hampton University Archives, Board of Trustees Meeting, Massenburg Bill folder, Februray 20, 1926.
at Hampton just as the songs had been for students at several other Black colleges and universities during the 1920s and '30s.  

Since Hampton’s founding, it had been customary for the entire student body to participate in singing Negro spirituals at Sunday evening chapel service. Not only was the singing of these melodic spirituals compulsory for the student body, but they were also forced to shamefully sing the songs before White members of the community, who found the “plantation songs” to be extremely entertaining. White guests at the Institute were encouraged to attend the Sunday services mostly because the administration and Board of Trustees believed it was good publicity for the school as well as a great way to attract potential donors. Quite similar to what the Jubilee Singers had done at Fisk, a number of Black colleges and universities adopted the idea at their schools to raise much needed funds. Starting in the 1920s, students began to develop a strong objection to the songs, believing that they greatly contributed to the demoralization of Black culture and progress. At Hampton, students began to raise the question concerning the relevance of singing plantation songs on their campus. Some students even refused to sing at all. In the spring of 1925, Hampton's choir disrupted a performance in Washington by walking off the stage in protest rather than sing spirituals to a segregated audience. Quite naturally, the administration disapproved of their insolent behavior and insisted that they adhere to the rules and traditions of the institution. Despite the administration’s threats, rebellious students stood firm in their beliefs, even at the risk of being disciplined or sent home. Although they had very little support, the students were not alone concerning the matter. Their biggest advocate was Hampton’s musical director, R. Nathaniel Dett.  

Mr. Dett, who was the first Black American to receive an academic degree for original music composition from Oberlin’s Conservatory of Music, served as an important ally of the

50 Wolters, The New Negro on Campus, 249-50. Slave Spirituals and Plantation Songs were also commonly referred to as Negro Spirituals.

51 Hampton University Archives, Minutes of Hampton Board of Trustees, April 22, 1926.
small group of student dissenters. He was adamantly against singing “plantation songs” and tried desperately to introduce other forms of musical arrangements to the institution that he thought reflected a more culturally conscious Hampton student. He hoped that the institution’s musical program would develop a new sound of music that echoed the “sophisticated style of the new Negroes of the 1920s.” The administration, and more specifically the Board of Trustees, was not happy with Mr. Dett’s decision and urged him to continue teaching the music that had traditionally been a part of Hampton’s rich cultural history. Moreover, Mr. George Foster Peabody, one of Hamptons’s most influential trustees, publicly opposed the musical changes and demanded Principal Gregg “to make Mr. Dett understand that we wish him to keep what is best in the old Negro folk songs.” For almost a decade, a feud between Dett and Peabody ensued, ending with Mr. Peabody as the victor and Mr. Dett leaving Hampton. Troubled by the loss of Mr. Dett and an unrelenting Board, students at Hampton found themselves on the verge of a campus-wide protest. With so much unrest at the institution and the knowledge that student strikes had erupted on other Black campuses, the administration became deeply concerned that it was only a matter of time before the rebellious spirit would take root at Hampton.

Just as singing was an issue for students, so was the administration’s paternalistic attitude toward student life. Hampton students saw themselves as mature college men and women, as opposed to adolescent high school boys and girls. School officials controlled every aspect of campus life, leaving students with little to no autonomy to make decisions concerning student affairs on their campus. On Saturday, October 8, 1927, a group of frustrated students decided to challenge the administration’s rigid rules by participating in a spontaneous demonstration on campus. Once again, the heart of the trouble began in Ogden Hall. That evening, while viewing a

52Wolters, The New Negro on Campus, 250
53Wolters, The New Negro on Campus, 251
54Hampton University Archives, Minutes of Hampton Board of Trustees, George Foster Peabody, April 22, 1926.
movie, students asked for the lights to be turned off in the auditorium, which was usually the norm for a film viewing. When the staff/chaperons for the evening refused to comply, angry students responded by “stomping their feet in protest” and yelling “lights out, lights out.” Notwithstanding the student’s frustration concerning the matter, the lights remained on for the duration of the film. Upset students departed Ogden Hall and immediately began to strategize their approach to addressing the conditions at Hampton. Student protesters considered a change in policy for viewing films in Ogden Hall to be “the climax of a long series of insults, and as they returned to their dormitories their resentment flared into rebellion.”55 The next morning, when students brought the matter before the school’s administration, the following excuses were given to the student body: “An instructor had twisted his ankle while stumbling in the dark the week before”; another was that “the lighting was being tested”; and finally it was said that “chaperons complained of too much kissing over there in the dark by mischievous students.”56 Whatever the case might have been, students dismissed the administration’s claims and moved forward with their protest plans.57

During Sunday chapel service, students at Hampton stood united in protest against what they deemed to be unfair school policies and a paternalistic administration. Angry students refused to fully participate in the morning and afternoon church services that took place in Ogden Hall. Almost the entire student body refused to sing the spirituals. Not only were the students rebelling against the previous night’s incident, but once again they objected to singing “slave spirituals.” What made matters worse was that Hampton had invited W.T.B. Williams, a field agent for the Jeanes Fund, and Sir Gordon Guggisberg, governor of the Gold Coast, to the school as special guests. Hampton students used this opportunity as a moment of protest and

55 Hampton University Archives, Box: Sit-In and Demonstrations, “The Strike at Hampton,” October 28, 1927.

56 Wolters, The New Negro on Campus, 254

57 Hampton University Archives, Box: Sit-In and Demonstrations, “The Strike at Hampton,” October 28, 1927.
rebellion against school officials, knowing the embarrassment it might cause the school's administration. Humiliated and upset by the students’ actions, Principal Gregg offered the following prayer during the chapel service: “Father forgive them for they know not what they do,” and then dismissed the assembly.\textsuperscript{58} In light of the events that were taking place on campus, nothing could have prepared Hampton's administration for what was to come next.

The following Monday, hundreds of students refused to attend class. Due to the students' insolent behavior, Gregg suspended class for the rest of the day and ordered separate meetings between the male and female students to take place in Ogden Hall. At those meetings, Gregg scolded the students for instigating an unwholesome environment on campus and refused to listen to their grievances. To make matters worse, Gregg dismissed the students' claims and tried to trivialize the incident to nothing more than a group of insubordinate and disrespectful students who chose to express their dissatisfaction over the administration's mere decision to leave the lights on in Ogden Hall. What Gregg failed to acknowledge was that the situation at Hampton had become more than just about defiant students and lights in Ogden; a changing culture of student activism was beginning to take shape on campus. The \textit{Pittsburgh Courier}, a Black newspaper, commented that “the present day youth cannot be treated in the same manner they were treated twenty-five years ago,” and that Hampton was “still run more like disciplinary barracks or reform schools … than like educational institutions attended by the sons of free men and women.”\textsuperscript{59} The incident in Ogden Hall merely symbolized the long overdue shift in climate at Hampton; for years frustrated students had opposed the administration's autocratic rule over campus life. Determined students organized on campus and coordinated their strike efforts to formally address Gregg and his administration. A Student Protest Committee, consisting of

\textsuperscript{58}Wolters, \textit{The New Negro on Campus}, 255.

\textsuperscript{59}Wolters, \textit{The New Negro on Campus}, 248.
twenty-one male students, was established to bring the students' grievances before Hampton's administration.

At the forefront of the campus protest stood the men of Hampton Institute. Male students locked their doors in James Hall and refused to submit to room inspections. In addition to that, several young men continued to boycott classes and refused to comply with school officials, who were demanding complete compliance. As a tactical measure, Hampton men were placed in charge of the strike efforts to ensure a firm level of respect and cooperation from both the students and the administration. C.L. Spellman, a member of the Student Protest Committee, pointed out that "not a single dollar's worth of institutional property was damaged during the time.... So complete was our control over the students that they would have literally torn buildings down brick by brick if the word had been given." From the onset, the main objective of the student body was to conduct an organized and peaceful protest. Unlike student revolts that occurred at other colleges and universities, there was never any intent to publicly humiliate, destroy, or attack the character and reputation of Hampton. All that was asked of Gregg and his administration was that they seriously consider the list of concerns that were being put forth by the student body.

On Tuesday, October 11, 1927, Gregg agreed to meet with the Student Protest Committee under the following conditions: that students return to class immediately and that order be entirely restored to campus. Students agreed to the terms with the understanding "that there be no ineligibility rules or punishment inflicted upon the participants of this protest." Reasonably, students thought that this was a fair request seeing that no one had been harmed and no property

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61 Wolters, The New Negro on Campus, 260


had been damaged during the campus demonstrations. After each side had come to a mutual agreement, Gregg called the Student Protest Committee to his office at 7 p.m. Tuesday evening with the hope of putting the student strikes to rest. The Committee presented Gregg with a list of seventeen grievances. This list of demands included better food in the dining hall, dancing on special occasions, a calling day for secondary students, better laundered shirts, longer Christmas holidays, and a more effective student council composed exclusively of students and without faculty participation. With regard to academic standards, the Committee requested that high-school students be allowed to study until 10:30 p.m., that a system of permitted "cuts" be inaugurated, that announced electives always be made available and to permit college students to enroll in more elective courses, that all courses listed and outlined in the catalog be offered, that in three of the schools the educational system be improved, that resignations be called for regarding a number of teachers whose apparent education was below that of the average student, and that in selecting future teachers, more emphasis be placed on formal academic preparation and less on religious spirit.64

Students at Hampton were greatly concerned that the institution had failed to change with the times, considering the occurrence of the New Negro Movement in the U.S. and the Progressive Era in Higher Education. Outdated policies, strict disciplinarians, and poor academic standards proved to be an unwelcome state of affairs. Students blamed the administration and even went as far as to say, “Dr. Gregg and all of his co-workers have spent more time trying to teach the Negroes their places, than they have spent trying to give them an education that would make them men and women capable of facing the world and its great problems.”65 Although the Student Protest Committee had taken careful consideration in presenting their list of demands to Hampton's administration, there appeared to be a strong degree of resentment and frustration


against a number of the student strikers. Even though Gregg and his administration agreed that several of the Student Protest Committee's demands were significant, their actions involving the matter proved otherwise. For years, Hampton's administration had exercised a certain level of paternalistic control over student life, and for the first time in the history of the institution, their authoritarian rule had been called to task by students. Administrators insisted that student strike leaders be punished for their insurrection as a warning against future protest and rebellious behavior. Gregg and his administration's decision to take disciplinary actions against the student protesters came as a complete shock to the student body. What happened next changed the entire peaceful discourse between students and administrators concerning the 1927-28 strikes at Hampton Institute.

Peace at Hampton lasted for only a day. By Thursday, October 13th, the student strikes had resumed. Outraged and disappointed students refused to give in to administrative demands to punish those who were responsible for the strikes. As expected, student protesters grew impatient with Gregg because he and his administration had failed to deliver on their promise of amnesty. On Thursday morning, a majority of the student body decided to support the admonished strike leaders by resuming the campus protest. Gregg responded to the renewed strikes by recommending to the Board of Trustees that the Institute be closed until further notice. The Board accepted Gregg's recommendation by vote and decided that Hampton should remain closed until order be completely restored and that insubordinate students be given the choice to pledge their allegiance to the Institute or leave. In addition to that, every student was forced to re-register and promise his or her loyalty and cooperation to Hampton.66 For all those students who refused to declare their allegiance to the Institute, they were cast out and instructed never to return.

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As for the student strike leaders who were elected to organize and spearhead the campus protest, the majority of them were automatically expelled without consideration. "Two hundred students were either banished or refused to take the new loyalty oath." Even though Gregg acknowledged that “the leaders in the strike were the foremost men on the campus,” he was not willing to spare them the embarrassment of expulsion. Upon the recommendation of Gregg and his administration, the Board of Trustees took immediate action against the following students.

A.V. Moore, Louis T. Snowden, W.A. Willie and John Casey, all four guilty of insubordination, and leaders in inciting others to insubordination in the present strike and reported as habitual disturbers and unsatisfactory in spirit and attitude, are herewith dismissed and will not be recommended to any other school for admission during the present school year.

Roger Laws – Evidence from Trade School instructors shows that Laws is a habitual trouble-maker and took a leading and regrettable part in the strike.

Albert L. George – Northern boy, agitator, attitude wrong, impolite – George himself thinks he had better go. Voted – may not return.

The discontent for both Moore and Casey was so strong and bitter that they were personally called before the Board and formally dismissed from Hampton Institute by Gregg himself. In addition, on October 17, 1927, it was recommended that Claude Amis, a promising student who was a major in the battalion and a recipient of beneficiary aid, be suspended due to being found "guilty of smoking on the grounds and speaking with extreme disrespect of the Alumni during the strike, of which he was an important leader." And finally, On October 18, 1927, Gladys


68 Hampton University Archives, Student Strike Collection, “The Hampton Strike,” *The Far Horizon*, (December 1927), 345.

69 Hampton University Archives, Box: Sit-In and Demonstrations, "Report to the Board of Trustees of Suspended and Expelled Students," October 27, 1927.

70 Hampton University Archives, Box: Sit-In and Demonstrations, "Report to the Board of Trustees of Suspended and Expelled Students," October 27, 1927.
Duncan became the first woman to be suspended from the Institute due to her involvement with the campus protest. It was stated that Ms. Duncan "had a good record but returned this year with a very different spirit – a spirit of disloyalty. An open insurrectionist, she refuses to sign any pledge of loyalty."\(^7^1\) The Board voted that Gladys Duncan be suspended without recommendation to any other school for the academic year. Following Ms. Duncan's suspension, six other young ladies were suspended for the remainder of the semester for "unsatisfactory conduct and unwholesome influence."\(^7^2\) Altogether, the disciplinary actions imposed by the administrative board resulted in the sanction, suspension, or expulsion of 67 students. Of that group, 5 were dismissed, 27 suspended, and the readmission of 10 was undecided. Those students who were dismissed were not allowed to return, and those who were suspended were not allowed to return during the 1927-28 academic session.\(^7^3\)

When Hampton reopened on October 25, 1927, several measures were put in place to control student behavior and to ensure that there would be no more insurrections. Soon after students signed their oaths of loyalty, re-enrollment commenced almost at once. Although a majority of the young women and many of the young men elected to remain on the campus under these conditions, many of the students left school over the weekend, and those who remained only did so awaiting word from their parents. Out of fear, students found themselves at

\(^{71}\)Hampton University Archives, Box: Sit-In and Demonstrations, "Report to the Board of Trustees of Suspended and Expelled Students," October 27, 1927.

\(^{72}\)Hampton University Archives, Box: Sit-In and Demonstrations, "Report to the Board of Trustees of Suspended and Expelled Students," October 27, 1927, p. 2.

\(^{73}\)Hampton University Archives, Box: Sit-In and Demonstrations, "Report to the Board of Trustees of Suspended and Expelled Students," October 27, 1927; Hampton University Archives, Box: Sit-In and Demonstration. The other six women who were suspended from Hampton during the student strikes were Gertrude Bethea, Eunice Gordon, Edna Holmes, Elizabeth Raynor, Jessie Tobey, and Luther Wilson. Hampton University Archives, Letter to G. James Flemings from Dr. R.P. Bridgman. In 1947, the President of the National Hampton Alumni Association, Walter R. Brown, made a recommendation to the President of Hampton Institute, Ralph P. Bridgman, to look into the records of all the young men and women who were suspended or dismissed in connection with the student strikes of October 1927, and who did not return to continue their studies at Hampton. Following the investigation, President Bridgman wrote a letter to each former student, stating, "I take pleasure in informing you that you are reinstated herewith and that according to our records you are now in good standing, in so far as your standing may have been effected by the October 1927 student strike."
a compromise with the administration. Their only options were to stay at the Institute and bear with the current attitude of hostility or return home and face the wrath of their disappointed parents. Just as they had hoped, Hampton's Board and administration had sent a clear message to students that insubordination would not be tolerated. The spirit of student activism had been crushed under the weight of a no-nonsense Board of Trustees who simply would not allow for any rebellious thoughts or actions to take place at Hampton. As the public weighed in on the circumstances at Hampton, it was heavily debated whether there was any merit to the students' claims and whether outside forces such as Black academic-activism and the New Negro Movement had pushed the students to incite the campus demonstrations.74

Several concerned individuals external to the institution believed that student leaders had been coerced by outside agitators to rebel against the administration. Some authorities credited the protest at Hampton as "the work of disobedient boys and girls who were led on to do what they did" and in addition to that, the press had "insisted that the strike was in the nature of a revolt against the White administration at Hampton.”75 The chief question looming about the community was whether or not Dr. DuBois had any involvement with the campus unrest. During the 1920s, DuBois' name had become synonymous with Black student movements at many of the Black colleges and universities throughout the country. Openly embroiled with the campus protest taking place at Fisk, many of his opponents believed that DuBois served as a behind-the-scene agitator and had chosen Hampton, among other Black schools, to push his personal agenda concerning Black higher education. Despite these allegations, “the students claim that ever since the iniquitous Massenburg Bill which required the separation of the races in public halls of Virginia, including Hampton School, that the Principal of the school has been less social with the students than ever before.”76 Moreover, angry students wholeheartedly believed that Gregg had


75 Hampton University Archives, Hampton Alumni Journal, December 1927, p. 5.

"placed in some of the trades departments of the school White men from the Ku Klux sections of the Peninsula." 77 Even more, students contested that conditions at Hampton had become almost intolerable because of a subtle influence, such as "putting White men over Negroes, some of whom could not write a sentence of English correctly." 78 A shift in student attitudes had occurred on Hampton's campus during the 1920s, and the once unassuming student body who had accepted uncritically and unprotestingly every rule put in place by Hampton's paternalistic administration was now ready to challenge that authority.

Not only was the student situation at Hampton complicated, but the matter became even more complex once the various alumni groups got involved. Among the Hampton graduates, tension started to rise and two opposing sides began to form. One group of alumni had no sympathy whatsoever with the student strikers, taking the stand that Hampton being a charitable institution, it would seem ridiculous for students accepting charity to strike. This group of alumni complained about the campus unrest and resented the fact that students grumbled about the food they were served, hated the disciplinary rules that were in place, and criticized their instructors for their poor teaching methods. On October 21, 1927, Mr. Charles H. Williams, Chairman of the Visitation Committee of the Alumni Association, along with Charles T. Russell and Mrs. Janie Porter Barrett, members of the Executive Committee of the Hampton Alumni Association, convened to determine whether the Alumni Association would support the student protesters or side with the Institute. "After a five-hour session in which the committee heard all aspects of the recent difficulty at Hampton Institute, it was unanimously voted to support the Administrative Board in the efforts to maintain discipline at Hampton during the recent strike." 79 The alumni who chose to support the institution felt compelled to do so because Hampton's reputation was at

77 Hampton University Archive,


79 Hampton University Archive, Minutes of the Meetings of the Hampton Board of Trustees, January 25, 1927 (RW254).
stake. Many graduates and school officials believed that the school might be in jeopardy of losing future philanthropic donations, and without that support, Hampton might suffer the same fate as other Black institutions that were struggling to survive during the 1920s.

The other perspective on the argument came down on the side of alumni who maintained that the students had been just in their approach. This group of alumni believed that the students' demands warranted a fair response; after all, many of the issues put forth were concerns that had been brought up during their time as students at Hampton. The issues surrounding the campus protest were familiar concerns. As former students at the Institute, they remembered all too well the rigid paternalistic conditions that plagued their alma mater. They desperately tried to pull at the heartstrings of those fellow graduates who knew firsthand how autocratic and repressive the administration was over student life. It was quite evident that there was a lack of faith on the part of the students and several of the graduates in the administrative board at Hampton, and in order for there to be any real peace at the Institute, this faith had to be restored. One alumnus commented, “We can be sentimental at times, but when the future of a great institution like Hampton is at stake, it is time to tell the truth and the whole truth, for the truth alone will set us and Hampton free.”

80 Some graduates felt that the time had come to finally stand firm before the Board of Trustees and say to them what should have been said as students. Mr. W.D. Elam, a three-time graduate of Hampton Institute, published this statement in the March 1928 Hampton Alumni Journal:

The reasons why Hampton students struck are not new issues to many of the Hampton graduates. Throughout my stay, Hampton students and graduates complained for the same outstanding reasons.... Many of the supposed leaders in this strike have developed their fighting ability at Hampton. They have had to fight for subjects in their courses; they have had to fight for their classmates who were sent away unjustly as they saw it; and they have had to fight for many of the things that they might not have gotten otherwise.... Members of the Alumni are more or less directly responsible for the development of the strike and to a large extent the students are trying to solve problems that belong to others.... You may ask why I blame the members of the Alumni for this condition. To be truthful, I would say that

80 Hampton University Archives, Hampton Alumni Journal, December 1927.
they have feared to speak the truth concerning their convictions to the powers that be. They have even denied that anything was wrong. Let us stop grumbling among ourselves about the shortcomings of Hampton, and take our criticisms to the proper authorities and if it is then necessary, take them to the world.81

Nonetheless, the alumni who supported the institution far outnumbered the graduates who sympathized with the student strikers. The Board of Trustees was quite successful in its efforts to control the alumni association's views concerning the student protests.

Hampton's administration and Board of Trustees seized every opportunity to discredit student rebels and convince the public that Hampton was still a school dedicated to industrial education for Negroes who well understood their place in the segregated South. Once the Institute reopened, “appeals were made to the Alumni for assistance in every way in selecting students who are earnest and who have fine standards of conduct and can be counted upon to cooperate with those in authority in maintaining Hampton’s ‘Good Name.’”82 Hampton was well aware of the fact that publicly, the scandal of student unrest had cast doubt in the minds of those who had long supported "the Hampton Idea." Since the Institute's early days, critics had ridiculed the school for its stance on industrial education, and now the protest had "given Hampton’s foes an extra weapon, and has amazed and discouraged some of its sincere friends."83 The trouble at Hampton wedged an unfriendly gap between its graduates and even more, between the alumni and the students. Nevertheless, student strikes erupted at Hampton just as they had at other Black institutions, and alumni were forced to take a position concerning the matter, even if it was not a popular one.

Although the Board of Trustees at Hampton had tried to subdue the student body by closing the school and forcing everyone who re-enrolled to pledge an oath of loyalty to the

81Hampton University Archives, Hampton Alumni Journal, March 1928, Written by alumnus W.D. Elam class of 1926; Mr. Elam's documentation also mentioned an anonymous student publication that was distributed on campus from time to time by dissatisfied students. He contended that some of the same charges made by the current student protesters were stated just as emphatically when he was a student at Hampton but these publications were quietly suppressed.

82Hampton University Archives, Minutes of the Board of Trustees, January 25, 1927.

83Hampton University Archives, Hampton Alumni Journal, December 1927.
Institute, a climate of disobedience and rebellion among students against the administration persisted for more than a year after the strike had ended. By this time, not only were students dissatisfied with the current state of affairs at Hampton, but many graduates and faculty began to question the leading authority at the Institute as well. To make matters worse, Gregg had not done much to contain or mediate the situation. Institutional stakeholders immediately cast the blame on him for allowing the school to spiral out of control. Once again, the Alumni Visitation Committee got involved, but this time their outcome was markedly different from what they had found before. They reported that "the professional staff was divided into factions whose contentions have separated the school into opposing groups" and that it was a "common practice for teachers and officers to discuss their differences before and with students with the result that students are allied with one or the other group of the warring camps to the detriment of their own work and general morale."84 Notwithstanding their past commitment to stand behind the institution, they believed that the time had come for Hampton to consider some administrative changes.

Although Hampton graduates were thankful for the band of White northern missionaries and philanthropists who, during the founding of the institution, had done so much in the cause of developing Hampton and providing educational opportunities for the Black South, these same graduates felt the institution could no longer avoid the possibility of appointing Black faculty and administrators. The 1927-28 strike had not overtly been about desegregating the institution as much as it had been about more student autonomy on campus. Compounded by students' resistance to an autocratic administration, alumni groups were able to use that leverage to force their issues on an already taxed Board that was losing control of the school. As the students continued to fight, the National Hampton Alumni Association made their point clear as well: "We desire for a mixed faculty which shall be composed of a larger proportion of Negroes than

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84 Hampton University Archives, Student Strike Collection, "Report of the Alumni Visitation Committee," April 25, 1929.
at present and that in administrative positions there be a larger colored representation.”85 In the end, students and alumni strategically brought their concerns to the forefront and made the Board take notice.

Principal Gregg was no longer able to pacify the disgruntled hearts and minds of those loyal Hamptonians who had once revered his leadership. He lost favor with the Black community because he was no longer in harmony with what Black students and alumni wanted at their school. In fact, the White papers suggested that "if the principal could not sympathize with the viewpoint of Negroes because he is a White man then he ought to resign and leave the school to be run by someone who is in sympathy with their viewpoint."86 In May of 1929, Gregg did just that; he rendered his resignation to the Board of Trustees, which they accepted immediately. Gregg's era at Hampton ended with much needed changes at the institution. While students gained more freedom on campus and strides were made to desegregate the faculty and staff, the matter of Hampton appointing its first Black president was still uncertain.

A decade later, students and alumni at Hampton found themselves involved in another string of protests that spanned the tenures of three presidents. Once again Hampton had become a hotbed of student and alumni activism. Whereas the 1927 strike dealt with improving student life, the next two decades of unrest primarily addressed issues of racial inequality in regard to Hampton's faculty and staff. The crux of the problem began with President Arthur Howe when, at the end of his administration in 1939, he implemented a retrenchment program that dismissed a number of Black employees.87 This move by Howe enraged both students and alumni. To show their disapproval, "student demonstrations took the form of refusal to sing in chapel services,

85 Hampton University Archives, Hampton Alumni Journal, December 1927.

86 Hampton University Archives, Newspaper clipping from the Norfolk Virginia-Pilot, October 17, 1927.

87 Hampton's fifth president, Arthur Howe, was married to Gen. Samuel C. Armstrong's youngest daughter, Margaret Armstrong.
non-attendance at the faculty reception and disobedience in a formation of the battalion."  

President Howe maintained that "the whole situation was most unfortunately complicated by the injection of the racial issue. Much of the feeling aroused was due to the opinion that students had too long been denied the right of self-expression; there had been discrimination in the retrenchment program and in the appointments to positions of importance."  

Even though the upheaval at Hampton may have had something to do with the retrenchment program, the actual cause of the unrest had more to do with the inequitable racial demographics of the administration, faculty, and other school personnel.

Half the student body, 528 students, protested the dismissal of a Black instructor by sending a petition to the Board of Trustees demanding that he be rehired and that they dismiss the White head of the department. Students claimed that he was guilty of racial bias in discharging the instructor. The Board was forced to evaluate the problem, and in doing so, they found that of the 305 officers, faculty, and other employees, 164 were White and 141 were Black, but most of the Black employees held subordinate positions. Concerning the 36-member Educational Board, 28 were White and 8 were Black, and finally the 10-member Administrative Board consisted of 8 White and 2 Black members. Despite their findings, the Board continued to act as if the situation had more to do with students being upset about a dismissed faculty member rather than the long history of racial inequality that existed at Hampton.

As a result of the Board ignoring their concerns, student protest began at Hampton with a group of 13 students who organized on campus to form "The Committee." The leaders of the Committee, W. Hale Thompson, William J. Holloway, Norman F. Dixon, and W. Axel Henri, worked together to bring about real understanding between students and administration. These

88 Hampton University Archives, Annual Report of the President, 1940, p. 9.
89 Hampton University Archives, Annual Report of the President, 1940, p. 9.
90 Hampton University Archives, Box: Trustee Records, Minutes of Special Meeting of the Board of Trustees, June 30, 1939.
four young men met with President Howe regarding the current situation at the Institute. Their concerns, like those of most students, were that Hampton systematically hired White personnel over Black, continued to employ ill-prepared instructors, and discouraged freedom of expression on campus. Eventually, the Committee was merged with the Student Council: "It was of great interest for the Student Council to have The Committee work with them rather than as a separate group due to the fact that the Committee had become the leading position on campus."\(^91\) The Student Council quickly began to devise a plan of action and took control of student affairs. Its first act was to create a Committee on Special Problems. This body was composed of members from the former Committee along with students who had volunteered to work with the protest.\(^92\)

The Committee on Special Problems identified four areas of concern at Hampton and made an appeal to the Board of Trustees to address the following demands immediately:

First, recognition of the democratic right of free speech as guaranteed by the Constitution of the United States of America. All too often a “hush-hush” policy is employed by institutional law-makers allegedly because students are “immature” and “young” and therefore know not whereof they speak. Admitting that students, like all other human beings, are sometimes incorrect in their judgment, it is nevertheless indicative of wrong attitude for school administrators to assume that student demonstrations are “natural and expected” in that student problem.

Second, competent teachers. Any educational institution should exist, primarily and functionally, for the proper training of its students. When the student is made secondary to other interests, then the institution has failed in its purpose. That teachers should be chosen for their student-welfare value is disputable. Teachers should be interesting persons who are interested in persons. There was a time when it was thought enough for a teacher to know his subject. Today teachers must know human beings. A teacher should be the finest kind of person.

Third, Negro dean of women. Numerous difficulties between the dean of women’s office and the women of the Institute are thought by many to be due to a lack of understanding on the part of the dean of women. The general feeling is that a qualified Negro dean can more effectively deal with the problems of Negro students.

\(^91\)Hampton University Archives, Box; Student Strike, *The Hampton Script*, "Coalition Brings End to Bitter Student Warfare," October 7, 1939.

\(^92\)Hampton University Archives, Box; Student Strike, *The Hampton Script*, "Coalition Brings End to Bitter Student Warfare," October 7, 1939.
Fourth, equalization in number and in rank of White and Negro personnel. For many years Hampton Institute has been favorably known for the excellent standard in racial cooperation she has set and maintained. Appreciating this fact, the students of Hampton Institute recognize the desirability of sharing the experience of finer Negro workers as well as of finer White workers.  

Unfortunately, neither the Board nor President Howe shared in their sentiments, and just as they had done during the 1927 strike, the administration failed to take the students' grievances seriously.

Following the students' valiant effort to address the issues at Hampton, the Alumni Association entered the battle to contest their position concerning the matter as well. They firmly believed that the problem at Hampton was due to the disparity between White and Black personnel. The National Alumni Association stated in their resolution to the Board:

Since the current unrest which has developed over a period of years is obviously due to an unequal distribution of Negroes as heads of departments and schools, we request that at least two Negroes be appointed as heads of schools and that a Negro dean of women be appointed, and also the extension of employment of qualified Negroes. Further, that a committee of five be elected to discuss the situation with the president and the following developments.

As fate would have it, the Board was able to avoid addressing the Alumni Association's resolution as far as President Howe was concerned. The student unrest proved to be more than he could bear, for three straight days prior to the National Alumni Association's meeting to discuss the resolution, Howe had sent the following note to the Board of Trustees: "Believing for many reasons that it maybe for the best interests of Hampton Institute, I herewith render my resignation as President and as a Trustee, the same, if accepted, to take effect at such time as it may be most desirable." His resignation was accepted immediately on January 27, 1940.

93 Hampton University Archives, Box; Student Strike, "The Committee," August 4, 1939.

94 Hampton University Archives, Trustees Records, "Minutes of Special Meeting of the Board of Trustees," June 30, 1939, p. 184.

95 Hampton University Archives, Trustees Records, "Minutes of Special Meeting of the Board of Trustees called to consider Howe's letter of resignation," June 30, 1939, p. 184.
As Hampton prepared to select its next president, controversy over who should lead the school quickly surfaced. This time the two warring factions were Hampton's older alumni versus the younger alumni. Quite naturally, younger alumni argued that the time had come to select a Black man for the presidency, but older graduates were not yet convinced that Hampton was ready for such a move. To resolve the matter without further conflict, the Board of Trustees struck a compromise between the two extreme alumni positions. In the end, a White president, Malcolm Shaw Maclean, was selected, but three of the high-ranking administrative posts were filled by Black personnel. Raphael O'Hara Lanier was made Dean of Instruction; Miss Flemmie P. Kittrell, Dean of Women; and William M. Cooper, director of summer study and extension. Previously, all these top administrative positions had been filled by Whites.\(^9\)

President Maclean's tenure at Hampton did not last very long. Quite unlike his predecessors, Maclean's administration was almost free from student criticism, and there were no reports of student unrest. In regard to the Alumni Association, there were areas of disagreement, but nothing compared to the blatant disapproval he encountered at the hands of the faculty, who outright despised Maclean's every decision. The faculty contended that they objected to President Maclean because of his quick decision to reorganize Hampton's academic programs. This move by Maclean brought about issues of insecurity among older and less qualified faculty, who felt they would be dismissed due to a raised level of faculty standards. What was really at the root of the trouble among faculty was their apprehension that White faculty and staff were being pushed out to increase the number of Black faculty and staff at the institution. Maclean was not oblivious to the situation and addressed the matter to the Board:

> Fears have been expressed, unfortunately by some staff members who are not clear in their own thinking on bi-racialism, and by some off-campus people who have no direct connection or concern with, or interest in, the Institute, that Hampton is abandoning its policy of a co-racial teaching staff and is becoming rapidly all colored. I have for this report analyzed our situation and find that on the administrative staff at the present time we have fifteen White administrators and

thirteen colored, nearly a perfect balance. On the teaching staff, we have seventy-seven White to eighty colored, again in equitable balance. Naturally, on the payroll list there is and should be a much higher proportion of colored. Some individuals have suggested that it would be well for the Board of Trustees to state definitely a policy for Hampton Institute on bi-racialism. My own present judgment is that this is not a necessity so long as it is understood among us that we intend, as a policy, to maintain a bi-racial staff and in the administrative and teaching forces, at approximately an equal balance.97

Maclean had set out to reposition Hampton's standings as more than just a first-class vocational school but to have it compete with the best colleges and universities across the nation. Unfortunately, World War II would not allow him to see his dream through to fruition. Maclean was called to duty, and on January 21, 1943, the Board of Trustees received his letter of resignation stating, "Permit me herewith to submit my final emergency report as President of Hampton Institute as I leave for active duty with the United States Navy."98 So ended yet another era of leadership at Hampton in less than a five-year period.

President Maclean did not leave Hampton without controversy. Upon his departure, he did what no other resigning president had done before him: he appointed his own successor, R. O'Hara Lanier, as acting president. Lanier, the highest ranking Black man at the school, was entrusted by Maclean to carry out the business of Hampton until a new president was chosen.99 Hampton's Board of Trustees was faced with yet another challenge. Who would be the next president of the Institute, and had the time come for a Black man to hold that office? To answer that question, students, alumni, faculty, and staff all weighed in on the discussion. Each group had their own prevailing ideas as to who would be best for the job. Quite naturally, students and alumni favored choosing a candidate that would be sensitive to the race problem at Hampton and

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98Hampton University Archives, Emergency Report of President Maclean to the Board of Trustees, January 21, 1943, p. 1.

99Hampton University Archives, Emergency Report of President Maclean to the Board of Trustees, January 21, 1943; Raphael O'Hara Lanier received his B.A. from Lincoln University in Pennsylvania in 1923 and his M.A. from Stanford University in 1928. He also received a Rosenwald fellowship to Harvard in 1931 and, soon thereafter, his Ed.D. from New York University. In 1948, Dr. Lanier became the first president of Texas State University for Negroes (now Texas Southern University).
that had experience working in the area of minority education. In September of 1943, the Board of Trustees named Ralph P. Bridgman President-Elect of Hampton Institute.

During Bridgman's tenure as president, Hampton made national news on several accounts. The first major occurrence was the unprecedented election of a Black man, Channing H. Tobias, as Chair of the Board of Trustees. The second factor was that an overwhelming number of alumni had been placed on the Board to replace outgoing Trustee members.\textsuperscript{100} And finally, not even three years into Bridgman's administration, students, faculty, and staff submitted a vote of no-confidence to the Board of Trustees on his ability to lead Hampton Institute. In a meeting on October 3, 1947, "students and faculty both demanded Bridgman's ouster, the student voting 522 to three and faculty 83 to five."\textsuperscript{101} In addition to the students and faculty vote, "Hampton's alumni association board voted 49-45 to ask the president to resign."\textsuperscript{102} To resolve this matter, Chairman of the Board Channing Tobias announced a plan to appoint two recognized experts in the field education to "study the recent action by students and faculty of Hampton Institute in voting overwhelmingly against the retention of Ralph P. Bridgman as president."\textsuperscript{103}

Even though the Board concluded that the charges made against President Bridgman did not appear to be supported by the evidence presented, his resignation was laid on the table, date of acceptance to be determined at a later time by the Board. On February 1, however, after the Board had adjourned, President Bridgman, in view of developments on campus, requested the Chairman to announce that his resignation had been definitely accepted. Dr. Tobias did so and informed members of the Board of his action and that President Bridgman’s resignation would be fully effective August 31, 1948, and that beginning February 20, 1948, he would be on leave

\textsuperscript{100} Hampton University Archives, Box: Board of Trustees, Folder: Channing H. Tobias, "Tobias Elected New Chairman of Institute," October 28, 1946.

\textsuperscript{101} Hampton University Archives, Box: Board of Trustees, Folder: Channing H. Tobias

\textsuperscript{102} Hampton University Archives, Hampton Alumni Journal, 1947

\textsuperscript{103} Hampton University Archives, Box: Board of Trustees, Folder: Channing H. Tobias, \textit{Daily Press}, November 13, 1947.
from the administrative responsibilities of the position of President. Mr. Alonzo G. Moron was appointed to serve as Chairman of the interim Administrative Committee, to preside over its meetings, and to represent the Committee in its dealings with the Board. As Chairman of the Committee, "he shall have access to the files in the President’s office; and that the clerical services of that office shall be available to him when necessary."104

By the latter half of the 1940s, Hampton Institute had changed tremendously. Over the past three decades, the school had witnessed a dynamic change in leadership from Principal Gregg to President Bridgman. These men, who had sacrificed so much of their lives to lead Hampton, were constantly under the watchful eyes of students, alumni, and the Black community. Each one of them had a hand in building the great institution Hampton had become just as each one of them had a hand in the rapid demise of student and alumni trust in the administration. Throughout the years, students and alumni had done all they could to hold the institution accountable to the people it served. Although Hampton graduates were thankful for the band of White northern missionaries and philanthropists who in the early days of the institution did so much in the cause of developing Hampton and providing educational opportunities for the Black South, these same alumni and students felt the time had come to consider the appointment of a Black president. Quite arguably, due to Hampton's changed Board of Trustees, now filled with alumni and a Black Chairman, the appointment of Hampton alumnus Alonzo G. Moron as the first Black president would be considered both inevitable and poetic. Unlike past moments in Hampton's history, this time when the question was raised as to who would become Hampton's next president, Board Chair Channing Tobias offered these words:

Such men as Dr. Mordecai W. Johnson, under whose administration for the past two decades Howard University has developed magnificently, both physically and academically; Paterson of Tuskegee, Dent of Dillard; Bond of Lincoln, Foster of Virginia State, Ellison of Virginia Union, Russell of St. Paul’s, Bluford, Shepard, Atkins, Seabrook and Williams of North Carolina’s State colleges. Jones of Bennett,

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104 Hampton University Archives, Box: Board of Trustees, Folder: Channing H. Tobias, President Ralph Bridgman resignation letter to Channing Tobias, January 29, 1948; Hampton University Archives, Box: Board of Trustees, Minutes of the Semi-Annual Meeting of the Board of Trustees. April 29, 1949.
Daniel of Shaw, Clement of Atlanta, Mays of Morehouse, Whitaker of South Carolina, and Davis of West Virginia – to name only a few at random – had already offered irrefutable proof of administrative abilities needing only the chance to flower.105

105 Hampton University Archives, Box: Channing H. Tobias, "Important Developments in The Education Field," November 9, 1946.
Chapter VI

LINCOLN UNIVERSITY

The Great Lincoln out of your womb you have been producing many a great sons and daughters of Africa. But now remember that you will produce the greatest that Africa has never produced before. The liberator, the Doctor, the Philosopher, the Minister, and lastly the great Prime Minister of mother Africa. To you my children who have been taken to America in a very pathetic and pitiful manner and who have gone through many bitter treatments, you have proved it in America and all over the continents that a Black man is worth a human being as any other.1

Although Lincoln University was widely revered for its academic reputation, the Black press and educated elite often criticized alumni and students for their passive stance regarding campus integration. Despite public criticisms, the Lincoln community was quite content with the status quo on their campus. Students considered their relationship with White faculty and staff to be amicable and conceded to the idea of not having control of their institution because White donors provided the university with most of its funding. One student commented that “student-faculty relationships outside the classroom, while friendly, [were] not in any way free or intimate.”2 In spite of these campus dynamics, by the 1930s, alumni found their voice and banded together across the nation to demand an active role in their campus governance. Students at Lincoln would


2Wolters, The New Negro on Campus, 280.
later join the fight, but not without the urging of alumni and other Black public figures of the period.

Unlike students at other HBCUs, Lincoln students were accustomed to a fairly autonomous campus life from the 1920s on. Students governed almost every aspect of student affairs. Having no religious affiliation or financial obligation to any church or philanthropic organization, Lincoln students were not subjected to the harsh disciplinary rules that restricted students at other Black colleges. Although campus life was open for students, their interaction with White faculty and staff members within the Lincoln community was not. White faculty and staff rarely involved themselves in student affairs and settled for restricting their interactions with students to the classroom. One student commented, “From chapel in the morning until classes were over in the afternoon, we saw our teachers only in the classrooms.”³ For the most part, Lincoln’s White faculty and staff separated their personal lives from their professional lives by retreating to their homes bordering the campus, “which gave student life a certain freedom not enjoyed by most Negro colleges. Indeed, dormitory life was entirely student-controlled.”⁴

Perhaps the uniqueness of students at Lincoln freed the institution from the worries of grappling with the same issues that occurred at other HBCUs across the nation. Lincoln men witnessed a certain privilege of autonomy that did not exist at other Black colleges and universities. The institution did not have the same worries as other Black colleges and universities concerning young high school students on campus because Lincoln did not house an academy division/grade school program; neither did they have to contend with the notion of strict curfews and sexual immorality concerning male and female students since Lincoln was a single-sex school for men. Although very much a part of the HBCU culture, Lincoln University provided a stark contrast to other Black


colleges and universities during the 1920s. The university community eventually had to come to grips with what was happening in the nation concerning Black higher education. During the early half of the 1920s, Lincoln alumni began a campaign of their own to address the hiring of Black faculty and staff. Students entered the discussion in 1929 and again in 1931. By the 1940s, alumni, students, and the board of trustees found themselves in an all-out battle for control of Lincoln. It can be argued that, as a result of the changing climate on other Black campuses across the country, alumni and students at Lincoln University were forced to take notice and began a movement of their own. In the end, there was a transition in administrative control brought on by alumni and students who fought the Board of Trustees to be recognized as institutional stakeholders.

The story of Lincoln University dates back to the early nineteenth century. Founders John Miller Dickey, a White Presbyterian minister, and his wife Sarah Ellen Cresson were the driving force behind the creation of the northern Black school for men located in Chester County, Pennsylvania. The school was founded in 1854 as the Ashmun Institute for Colored Youth and renamed Lincoln University in 1866 in honor of Abraham Lincoln for the work he did to emancipate the formerly enslaved Black Americans following the Civil War. From its inception, Lincoln attracted Black students from the North and the South as well as international male students from as far as Africa.

Founders John and Sarah Dickey established the institution because of their strong pious beliefs and with the hope of providing a scientific, classical, and theological education for young Black men. Minister Dickey served as Lincoln’s first principal and immediately chartered a course for the young school’s future. Having served as a

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5 Author and college president Horace Mann Bond provides a rich history of Lincoln University in his book, *Education for Freedom: A History of Lincoln University, Pennsylvania.*

6 Bond, *Education for Freedom,* 3; Lincoln declares itself to be the oldest university in the United States to have as its original purpose the higher education of youth of African descent.
missionary himself, Dickey was well aware of the issues facing Black Americans throughout the North and South. When met with the arduous decision regarding whether Lincoln would be a classical or industrial school, Principal Dickey decided that a classical education would better serve the men of Lincoln. The school's mission was to train ministers, men who would take up the missionary cause and use their Lincoln education for service to their community. Those who did not seek the ministry as a profession entered the normal school preparing for a life as an educator. These clergyman and teachers became the first generation of Lincoln graduates and fulfilled the dream of their founder and friend, Min. John Dickey.7

By the 1870s, Lincoln had appointed a new president to lead the university, Isaac Norton Rendall. President Rendall was met with many challenges as head of Lincoln, but the one that defined his administration was his unwavering ability to keep the university afloat without accepting donations and gifts from philanthropic foundations that advocated industrial and vocational programs at HBCUs. Due to his commitment to ensure Lincoln students a liberal arts education, “in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century Lincoln steadfastly resisted the pressures toward industrial training and as a result the school lost large financial gifts from wealthy industrialists.”8 Lincoln received help from the Presbyterian Church, but it was still not enough to cover the operating costs of the school. To offset those expenditures, the university was forced to raise tuition fees, making Lincoln the most expensive Black college in the nation.9

The school survived its financial woes, and by 1920, the student body at Lincoln had changed dramatically from the once meager and humble student body that first entered the institution during its infancy to a much more sophisticated, affluent group of


8Wolters, *The New Negro on Campus*, 278.

young Black men. The new Lincoln students were the sons of well-to-do families who believed Lincoln was an exclusive institution for only the best and brightest young Black men. This change in student population was due in part to Lincoln being such an expensive Black university, but also owing to the university’s tradition of educating the sons of its prestigious and successful alumni. These men were accomplished ministers, doctors, lawyers, and educators who proudly sent their sons back to their alma mater. These young men were expected to perform to the highest degree and take advantage of the great liberal arts education that Lincoln had to offer.\textsuperscript{10}

Lincoln men thought of their education as an ascent into the Black middle class. One student even commented that Lincoln students “thought of education exclusively in terms of prestige value.”\textsuperscript{11} Whatever the case might have been, Lincoln University was viewed by most as an affluent and premier liberal arts university. Robert Russa Moton, president of Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute, was so impressed by the school that he asserted, “No education institution in America … is more highly honored in the character and achievements of its graduates than is Lincoln University. Their name stands out in the record of Negro progress with brilliant distinction.”\textsuperscript{12}

Not only was Lincoln a stellar academic institution, but the school maintained an active campus life for its students. Lincoln boasted a formidable athletics program that was rivaled by most Black colleges of its era. Student life on campus was filled with sports activities, hazing pranks, and pledging fraternities, all of which were popular campus pastimes. For the most part, students were happy and content; they were consumed with the regularities of living in a small northern college community away

\textsuperscript{10}Wolters, \textit{The New Negro on Campus}, 279. During the first half of the twentieth century, “a great majority of Lincoln graduates went into the learned professions, 6 percent into law, 21 percent into medicine, 26 percent into teaching, and 32 percent into the clergy.”

\textsuperscript{11}Wolters, \textit{The New Negro on Campus}, 279.

\textsuperscript{12}Wolters, \textit{The New Negro on Campus}, 279-80.
from the segregated South. Perhaps Lincoln’s location in the North shielded it from the many racial activities that plagued so many other HBCUs located in the South. Although students, faculty, and staff lived separate lives, they co-existed on campus without the strict rules that plagued other HBCUs. In the end, what made things work at Lincoln was a commitment from the university to provide a quality liberal arts education and the desires of its alumni and students to achieve prominence among their race.

To say that Lincoln University was a leading force in Black higher education during the 1920s would be an understatement, just as it would be to say that the institution lagged far behind other Black colleges and universities concerning the battle for racial equality on their campus. Being one of the few Black schools situated in the North, it seemed quite logical that Lincoln would have embraced the idea of a racially mixed faculty and staff. Ironically, this was not the case. Lincoln's policy to maintain an all-White faculty and staff completely denied Black Americans a fair chance for employment at the very university that was founded to serve them. Publicly, Lincoln alumni and students were called to task concerning the matter. Unfortunately, students were so blinded by their own self-indulged lives on campus, they rarely objected to anything the administration did. Most importantly, they did not see themselves as student activists because Lincoln was isolated from the disruption of student protest taking place at other Black colleges in the South and campus life at the university did not allow for much disagreement with faculty and staff. Because they were allowed to live free from the autocratic rules that existed on other Black campuses, students rarely interfered in administrative matters. Lincoln alumni, on the other hand, had always been quite vocal but had very little success when it came to influencing institutional change at their alma mater.

At the start of the 1920s, Lincoln graduates banded together through their alumni clubs and associations to combat the dictatorial administrative policies that had been a part of Lincoln’s history since its founding. Their strategy was to unite as one body to
carry on the work of Lincoln University beyond the gates of their great institution. They organized local alumni chapters throughout the country and then formed a National Association as the parent body to govern the local chapters. As the National Alumni Association took shape, Black academic activists publicly reprimanded Lincoln, its alumni, and its students for their passive stance on racial equality. Working together under one umbrella gave alumni more leverage as they prepared to confront the Board of Trustees and prove to the general public that Lincoln graduates would not give in to tyranny. Chief among their critics was W.E.B. DuBois, who mocked Lincoln alumni in his *Crisis* magazine editorials. DuBois warned Black America, "Any person, even graduates of Lincoln themselves, who have sons to send to college would do well to hesitate before putting them in an institution where they are liable to emerge with no faith in their own parents, or in themselves."\(^{13}\) Lincoln alumni responded to DuBois' attacks by stating, "Parents who have educational plans for their sons may ignore Lincoln University chiefly because they have read and believe. They may not know that the oldest institution, established for the higher education of Negroes, has contributed inestimable share to the uplift of the Negro race."\(^{14}\) Armed with the conviction that Lincoln University belonged to the race of people for which it was founded, the alumni boldly set out to take command of their university. What was clear to them was that in this fight for control of Lincoln, institutional change would only come once they had seats on the Board of Trustees.

A champion in the cause of alumni advocacy was Francis J. Grimke, class of 1870 and pastor of the Fifteenth Street Presbyterian Church in Washington, D.C. Grimke, serving on the Board of Trustees at Howard, failed to understand why a school as liberal


as Lincoln would be so conservative in its views on appointing Black Board members and faculty and staff. He argued,

The time has come when Lincoln ought to abandon the unworthy position which it has occupied during these fifty years, and take its place by the side of Howard, Atlanta, Fisk, Talladega and the other institutions that are laboring for the uplift of the race. An institution maintaining the attitude of Lincoln, whatever else may be said of it, is not helpful in developing in the race a manly self respect.\textsuperscript{15}

Pastor Grimke had been openly fighting the Board of Trustees at Lincoln since 1885, and for the first few decades he often stood alone in his options to the administration. The 1920s campus unrest that swept the nation gave Grimke new hope. He had eagerly anticipated Lincoln students joining in the campus protest and voicing their opinions regarding the lack of Black employees at the institution. To his dismay, he found the student body to be apathetic concerning the state of affairs at Lincoln, commenting, "The students have been content to submit all these years to the humiliating assumptions of inferiority which underlie this whole Lincoln regime."\textsuperscript{16} If Lincoln were to change, the impetus to do so rested squarely on the backs of the alumni.

In 1924, Lincoln suffered the loss of their fifth president, Rev. John Ballard Rendall, who had began his work at the university in 1906. President Rendall's death proved to be quite significant to alumni because it ended a dynasty of father and son leadership that had spanned nearly sixty years at the university. John Rendall's father, Isaac Norton Rendall, had served at the institution before him, from 1865 to 1906. Not only was Rendall's death the end of an era; it also allowed the Alumni Association the opportunity to confront the Board concerning administrative changes as well as the possibility of electing a Black president. Finally, the time had come, and at last the Association had found their voice. They went before the Board and demanded that in the

\textsuperscript{15}Wolters, \textit{The New Negro on Campus}, 283.

\textsuperscript{16}Wolters, \textit{The New Negro on Campus}, 282-3.
future, University Trustees consult with the National Alumni Association's Executive Board before electing anyone to the presidency of Lincoln University. And lastly, they insisted that the university employ Black faculty and place alumni on the Board of Trustees.

Of course, this move by the National Alumni Association ignited ill feelings among Board members. The all-White Board did not feel the time was right to appoint Black Trustees out of fear that Lincoln would risk losing the support of their much needed White donors. Dr. John B. Laird, Chairman of the Board of Trustees, stated, "In a very few years Lincoln University would be the possessor of an equipment both scholastic and material that would enable her to be administered altogether by the people for whom she was founded."\(^{17}\) For the time being, it was agreed upon by the entire Board to continue under White management. Their position concerning the matter was to dismiss any further alumni claims and move forward with the presidential search. The Board of Trustees made it clear that under no certain terms were they going to allow the Alumni Association to dictate university governance. Alumnus W.W. Walker, pastor of the Madison Street Presbyterian Church in Baltimore, declared, "The time has come for every self-respecting alumnus of Lincoln University not only to resent manfully this insult on the part of the Board, but to accept its challenge and oppose it to the bitter end, the time has arrived for war."\(^{18}\) As the Board prepared to move forward with a new presidential search, alumni stood ready to fight them on every front.

Due to alumni opposition, the presidency at Lincoln University remained vacant for more than three years. Within that time period, Lincoln Trustees elected three White Presbyterian ministers for the position without conferring with alumni leaders, and each time the Alumni Association firmly stepped in to discourage the candidate. Trustees felt

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\(^{17}\) Wolters, *The New Negro on Campus*, 284.

\(^{18}\) W.W. Walker quote in the *Baltimore Afro-American*, July 10, 1926.
that it was important for Lincoln to continue in the tradition of having as her president a Presbyterian minister for both spiritual and financial purposes. This distinction was not a concern for alumni; they were more interested in a candidate that was fair, competent, and keenly aware of the issues facing Black America. Nonetheless, the first presidential candidate was rejected by alumni because he had served on the Board of Trustees at another Black university that was forced to close its professional school and merge with a neighboring institution to survive. On another occasion, the candidate was so poor that the National Alumni Association President, Dr. E.P. Roberts, wired a telegraph to him requesting that he "decline the invitation to become president." He later did. And finally, the third candidate was dismissed by the alumni because he was from the South and it was rumored that he had involvements with the Ku Klux Klan. Lincoln's Alumni Association had become so influential that they convinced everyone that was elected to decline out of fear of retribution from the Association and the Black community. Their actions against the Board had become so widespread that even DuBois himself had to acknowledge their great feat: "no president is going to stay at Lincoln University without the consent of Black folk."19

In October of 1927, Lincoln University successful appointed its sixth president, William Hallock Johnson. Johnson was favored by both alumni and students. He was also an acceptable choice for the Board because he was an ordained Presbyterian minister, which meant Lincoln would continue to receive funds from the Presbyterian Church. Ironically, the Board had searched for over three years to find a president suitable to lead Lincoln, only to find someone who was presently at the university and had served the institution for twenty-five years as a Greek and New Testament literature professor. Johnson's appointment represented a much needed compromise between the Board of

Trustees and the National Alumni Association. Throughout the search process, the National Alumni Association had put forth Dr. Johnson's name as president, but no action was ever taken. Although President Johnson was a White man, students and alumni felt he had the best interests of Lincoln at heart due to his years of dedicated service to the institution in addition to his proven record of working with Black Americans in a higher education setting. In the end, the alumni maintained that their opposition to the Board of Trustees and the search for a new president had little to do with choosing a Black man and more to do with having a voice in university governance. During President Johnson's inauguration, the Alumni Association used that opportunity to make yet another public plea for seats on the Board: "Both Dr. Roberts and Dr. Hall representing the alumni urged the necessity of appointing Lincoln alumni to the trustee board which at present consists of all White members. They declared that the entire alumni association is behind the administration of the new president."20

On Thursday, November 17, 1927, almost a month following Johnson's inauguration, the Board of Trustees agreed to appoint its first alumni representative to the Board. "Dr. Downs moved the adoption of the following as a statement of principle: We deem the time has come when there should be representation on our Board from the Alumni of Lincoln University. The motion was carried, the Chairman requesting that he be recorded as voting for the motion." 21 Four men were nominated, one of whom was an alumnus. Two out of the four were chosen, carrying the majority vote at a tie of eight.

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Alumnus Dr. E. Roberts received eight votes. The Board nominated him and chose him as opposed to his being appointed by the Association. Dr. Roberts was quite naturally a good choice, since he was currently serving as the President of the National Alumni Association. The Board's immediate decision to appoint an alumnus to the head governing body of the institution was not an act of kindness. This move by Trustees was more of a white flag of compromise, to say the least. But the National Alumni Association had made their point clear; the future of Lincoln would no longer be solely determined by White men. As for the Board's extended olive branch of peace, it was short-lived. Toward the end of President Johnson's administration, the National Alumni Association presented the Board of Trustees with a Memorial Resolution requiring further changes at the institution.

The document presented to the Board of Trustees on November 14, 1935 was entitled, "Memorial to the Board of Trustees of Lincoln University." Once again, the Alumni Association challenged the Board of Trustees to make administrative and policy changes at Lincoln based on notions of racial inequality and fairness. Their demands were as follows:

We ask first, that as soon as there is a vacancy on the Board of Trustee, a member of the Alumni who will be nominated and approved by the Alumni Association will be chosen for the replacement. This individual will be the accredited Alumni representative on the Board.

Second: We ask that the number of Negro professors be increased. It is not to be understood that we are now asking nor intend to ask for a majority of Negroes on the teaching staff. In order that this program for leadership and race relations may be carried out, we feel that the representation should be approximately fifty percent.


Third: We ask for the appointment of a dean of men who shall be a Negro. This appointment should be made as soon as possible. Certainly not later than during the school year 1935-36. The need of such a man is obvious to most of the faculty. The present attitude of the young Negro is such that the problems of discipline, of advice and guidance can be effected only by someone who is close to understand, and is a part of Negro life. No matter how broad-minded or sympathetic any member of the other group.

Fourth courses that will prepare students for participation and work in these social programs are imperative. Students shall not only have courses in general history but also in Negro history.24

The four areas of alumni interest grew out of the Association's concern that the University's administration was moving to slow to adopt policy changes. The matter that was most pressing for the Board of Trustees was the mandate by the Association to fill the next vacancy on the Board with an alumnus of the Association's choosing. Twice insulted, the Board had already turned one seat over to a Black member, and now the National Association was arrogantly demanding another. The request was no different than what countless of other colleges and universities, both Black and White, had petitioned for at their schools. The Association felt that an alumnus selected by the national body would better serve their needs rather than someone handpicked by the Board. Before the alumni concerns could be addressed, the Association was forced to wait due to the retirement of President Johnson from office.

President Johnson's tenure as Lincoln's sixth president ended in 1936 upon his voluntary retirement. This time around, there was no fuss over who would be the next president of Lincoln University. Walter Livingstone Wright was appointed the immediate successor upon the Board's acceptance of Johnson's resignation on November 14, 1935.25

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25 Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Trustees, November 14, 1935, Lincoln University Archives, http://contentdm.auctr.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/lupa/id/11837: (accessed September 25, 2011). It is important to note that Dr. Johnson brought to the attention of the Board of Trustees that his seventieth birthday was approaching, making him ineligible to continue as president of Lincoln. A
In 1927, Wright had been the second choice for president behind Johnson and was appointed to serve as the Vice-President of the university under Johnson's administration. The committee reported that when they asked Wright if he was interested in the position, he stated that:

He has been looking forward rather to some relief from his manifold duties in connection with the University, but if Lincoln must still be served, and if it was the best judgment, and the decision of the Board of Trustees that in the event of a vacancy in the office of President he should assume the responsibility, he would be willing to give such a call to highest service in behalf of Lincoln the most serious consideration.26

Just as Johnson had been, President Wright was beloved by both alumni and students. He had spent his entire professional and academic career at Lincoln. Needless to say, the transition of office from Johnson to Wright was seamless and quick.

President Wright's first order of business was to bring peace to the situation between the restless Alumni Association and frustrated Board of Trustee members. The President of the Board, Dr. W.P. Finney, had appointed a committee to address the alumni concerns that were presented to the Board in their November 1935 meeting. The Committee members consisted of Mr. Stevens, Dr. J.M.T. Finney, Acting President W.L. Wright, and Dr. E. Roberts, the first and only alumnus Board member. Dr. Wright led the way in trying about an expeditious resolution to the concerns. President Elect Wright met with the Alumni Conference Committee, which appeared before the Board in November, and at that meeting, the following recommendations were made:

FIRST: That a Dean of Men should be appointed to take office February 1, 1936, if possible.

SECOND: That the Board should agree to add to its membership in June 1936 an alumnus recommended by the Alumni; in June 1937, a second; and

committee was formed to examined the issue and when Dr. Johnson was approached concerning the matter it was reported to the Board that "it is his definite and expressed desire that he should be released."

in June 1938, a third; each for a term of three years, and thereafter one each year to replace the member whose term had expired, the details to be worked out later.

THIRD: That the other question raised in the Memorial should be considered by the Board at appropriate times and that the President of the University should consult with the Alumni Committee and the Alumni in general as far as possible, with regard to University affairs of common interest.27

The Alumni Association was ecstatic over the agreement. President Wright had proven to be a loyal friend and ally to the Association. Who better than him, Black or White, could speak knowledgeably about the history of struggles that had occurred on Lincoln's campus for both student and alumni? Thanks to his willing compromise, many much needed changes took place instantly. One example of this was with the selection of the new Dean of Men. Mr. Frank Theodore Wilson, Class of 1921 in the College and 1924 in the Seminary, was an alumni favorite. He was selected by the Board and approved to start the Dean's position by February 1, upon completion of his degree of Doctor of Education at Teachers College, Columbia University.28

Finally, progress had been made toward integrating Lincoln's faculty and staff and, most importantly, the Board of Trustees. In 1936, just as they had been promised, the newly elected alumni Board members were selected. By action of the Board, the first two out of the six members chosen by vote of the National Alumni Association to serve a three-year term were Dr. Walter G. Alexander of Orange, New Jersey, and Mr. George W. Goodmann of Boston, Massachusetts. Within five years, Lincoln's Alumni Association had made major strides in gaining key leadership positions at the university. Dr. E.P. Roberts, the first alumnus to ever serve as a Trustee, became yet another first. In 1941, he became the first alumnus and Black man to be elected President


of the Lincoln University Board of Trustees. He replaced the resigning Chair due to illness.\textsuperscript{29} The Alumni Association at Lincoln had come a long way in such a short time. By 1944, they had gained the necessary seats on their Board to effectively implement change at the university. They had also acquired an Alumni Office on camps led by a full-time alumnus with the title of Alumni Secretary. The goal of this office was to adhere to alumni concerns and strengthen alumni participation at the university.\textsuperscript{30}

The accomplishments made by the National Alumni Association as pertains to the Board of Trustees at Lincoln were monumental. Continuing a policy begun in 1927, the Board of Trustees of Lincoln University, by charter of a self-perpetuating body, steadily increased the representation of Black members to the Board until six of its twenty-one-member Board represented the race for whose advancement the University was established in 1854. For over half a century, the Board members had been composed exclusively of White men and had remained so in spite of constant petitioning from the alumni of the institution to integrate. Lincoln graduates maintained that "the best interests of the University itself as well as the constituency which it was designed to serve called for representation on its governing Board to resemble the population from which its students were drawn and for service among whom they were in training."\textsuperscript{31} To that end, the Lincoln University National Alumni Association set the stage for a new era of leadership at their alma mater.


\textsuperscript{30}Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Trustees, November 9, 1944, Lincoln University Archives, http://contentdm.auctr.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/lupa/id/11837: (accessed September 25, 2011).

Aside from the unique relationship that existed at Lincoln between Black students and White faculty and staff, students created their own social structure within the university that best suited their needs. Student life at Lincoln was most often described as jovial and exciting. The areas of student affairs that most appealed to Lincoln men were fraternities and sports. Fraternity life provided for a substantial amount of campus entertainment and activities, especially for freshmen. Quite often, “hazing was a favorite pastime, with incoming freshmen 'given the paddling of their lives' practically every night … they were called dogs. At Thanksgiving, just before the annual big game, in the dead of the night, all freshmen were seized and their heads shaved bald.”32 Student newspapers often indicated that fraternal affiliations, initiations, pranks, and social events were the highlights of day-to-day campus activities. Freshmen, new to college life, longed for the days they could join one of the four fraternities on campus. This rite of passage was so vital to one's college career at Lincoln that entering freshman were warned:

Most of us are flattered to tears when campus big shots flutter around us during the freshman year. And well may they flutter and flatter, for they have something to sell about which you can be mighty independent. These fellows who seem so important in your admiring eyes are engaged in a keen competition with other fraternities on the campus for you and your classmates. Just as it might be far better for a girl to go through life single rather than give her soul and body to the first man who makes a pass at her, so you may well be much better off as an independent than join a bunch of bums for fear that if you say "no" now you'll be a campus "old maid" forever. So you can take your own sweet time about pledging.33

Although each fraternity attracted a great deal of interest and had quite a large roster, these men were only concerned with the social aspect of fraternity life. The fraternities rarely, if ever, used their collective power to address the administration or undo any


social ills. Students who were fortunate enough to join one of these fraternal organizations believed that entry into that brotherhood gave them privileges and advantages that placed them above others, particularly non-Greeks.34

Sports, being just as popular on Lincoln's campus as pledging a fraternity, offered a different sort of admiration. Whereas fraternities were exclusive and tended to create rivalries among the various groups, sporting activities brought about unity and a collective school pride. Every young man, although he may not be an athlete, could cheer for "dear old Lincoln" no matter what his standings were in life. Lincoln, being an all-male school, quite naturally gave way to sports as the center of campus life. Lincoln's athletic teams, particularly the football squad, often dominated the Black colligate athletic conferences. Their biggest game of the year, "The Turkey Day Classic," was against their archrival, Howard University. This game was known throughout the HBCU community as one of the most contested showdowns in Black college football. A defeat at the hands of Howard brought shame and sadness throughout the campus. Just the same, sports were as important to Lincoln as academics, fraternity pins, and impressing the young ladies around town.

Even though campus life at Lincoln appeared to be gleeful, students were often chastised by members of the Black academic elite for not speaking out against their all White faculty and staff.35 While the majority of Lincoln students ignored the situation at the university altogether, there were some who spoke very candidly about the school's policy on race. Some students even joined the public in criticizing their classmates by contending that "the Lincoln man concerns himself too much with petty details and as a


consequence allows the larger issues to be neglected." The best display of student discontent at Lincoln during the 1920s took place when a senior by the name of Langston Hughes conducted a survey on racial pride at the university.

In 1929, Langston Hughes, then a student at Lincoln, caused quite an uproar on campus. For his senior thesis project in sociology, he decided to study campus life, its academic goals and standards, its social atmosphere, and its student/faculty relations. In his research, he addressed how Lincoln University, an institution that educated an all-Black student body, had no courses supporting Black racial pride; no course offerings showing the contributions of Black people to literature, science, history, or to American, African, or Caribbean civilization; and most importantly, no Black professors. Hughes' rationale for conducting the survey was because he heard many students on campus agree that there was something inherently superior in White teachers that Black teachers did not have. Hughes stated, "I wanted to prove that the students believing this were wrong, and that Lincoln was fostering – unwittingly, perhaps – an inferiority complex in the very men it wished to train as leaders of the Negro race. I wanted to show that the color line is not good on campus or off." To prove his claims, Hughes surveyed 129 upperclassman at Lincoln and found the following attitudes against Black faculty:

1. Favoritism, fraternity influences, and unfairness would exist.
2. We are doing well as we are.
3. Student would not cooperate with Negroes.
4. Lincoln is supported by Whites.
5. White faculty provide greater advantages for students.
6. Mixed faculty would not get along together.
7. Not enough capable Negro teachers were available.
8. Have read or know that conditions at colleges with mixed faculties are not good.


37 Faith Berry, Langston Hughes, Before and Beyond Harlem.
10. Negroes lack interest of student at heart.
11. Negro teachers are not morally capable.
12. Negroes here at present as instructors are not qualified.
13. Had Negro teachers before, so desire a new contract.38

Hughes later stated that it was “the height of absurdity for an institution designed for the training of Negro leaders to support and uphold, on its own grounds, the unfair and discriminatory practices of the American color line.” He went on to say, “The college itself has failed in instilling in these students the very quality of self-reliance and self-respect which any capable American leaders should have.”39 Equally irritated with the situation at Lincoln, W.E.B. DuBois argued, “They certainly have not actively and conscientiously instilled in their students a knowledge of what the Negro has done in the past, or what he is doing now, and of what he is capable of doing…. The failure of Lincoln to do this is bearing bitter fruit.”40 Unfortunately, very little came of the survey other than it serving as confirmation that Lincoln students were blinded by White superiority at their small northern school.

In 1931, several years after Hughes' survey, students at Lincoln were polled again concerning a mixed faculty. This time, a member of the newspaper staff thought it would be a good idea due to the Board of Trustees having just voted to approve the first Black department chair to serve in the university's history, Dr. Joseph Newton Hill. Dr. Hill was appointed to head the English Department. The newspaper's goal was to determine whether students opinion in the matter had changed any since Langston Hughes' senior thesis findings three years prior. The survey asked nearly one hundred upper classmen the following question: "Mr. Hill's admittance as the first colored professor here, means the possible opening for other competent Negroes, hence a mixed faculty. Are you in


favor of a mixed faculty; that is, instruction by White and colored professors?" As reported in the Lincoln News on October 1, 1931, the answers to the survey varied, but almost ninety-five percent of the upper classmen were in favor of a mixed faculty. Those students who were in opposition stated:

I am against a mixed faculty because if we had Negroes as professor, I fear familiarity between teacher and student would become so great as to be detrimental.

I am skeptical because I believe colored professors would let fraternity feelings influence them, giving their Brothers all the breaks.

I am absolutely "thumbs down" on Negroes as teachers. I've had enough of them. Where I went to college before I came here to Lincoln, the Negro professors were entirely too stiff and hard to get along with. They were so "high up" you were afraid to approach them. They were almost impossible to get along with, and partial besides.

Colored professors just would not "take" out here.

If Negroes were professors here, there would more than likely be general dissension due to frat partiality.

There would be partiality because the colored professors would know the families of many of the students and because of this, family acquaintance and influence would probably have much to do with the grade a pupil received.41

Quite the opposite, the majority of those interviewed were excited about the idea of Black faculty joining the university. It was reported in the student paper that the response was so great in favor that all the answers could not be reported. Those who did make it into the news had this to say about a mixed faculty:

1. I am heartily in favor of a few Negroes on the faculty because it's an easy matter to find excellently trained colored men to fill any chair on the campus.

2. I'm in favor of a mixed faculty but I'd rather see it preponderantly White, because it is the Whites who established the school. It is they who have been its chief financial supporters all these twenty-seven years.

3. I'd rather have a competent Negro professor than an incompetent White one, any day.

4. Most of the educated Negroes have to teach down South where pay is low and conditions are bad. Hence, I'm in favor of Negroes on the faculty at Lincoln because it will be an opening for competent colored men to teach in a northern college.

5. Since we are Negroes, we ought to have Negroes on the faculty.

6. Lincoln ought to be thrown on the scrap heap if she, in nearly eighty years of existence has not produced men capable enough to return to the Alma Mater.

7. I don't give a darn who the let come in. He can be Black or White, just so he knows his stuff. However, Lincoln hasn't given Negroes a chance and I think the school ought at least do that.

8. I'm for competent Negroes for it would open a new field for well-trained colored teachers.

9. I believe colored men on the faculty would help raise the prestige of Lincoln University.

10. A mixed faculty here will create a better feeling between the races and a better feeling between the student and faculty in general.

11. A mixed faculty would promote a democratic atmosphere at Lincoln.

12. I believe the school would attract a better class of colored professors than White professors, anyhow.

13. I believe it would be an asset to the race.

14. I think Negro teachers would understand their own race better than Whites would.

15. It would be an opportunity for Negroes in the educational field.42

Although the mood of the student body had drastically changed within that three-year period from Hughes survey to the one conducted in 1931, many of the same concerns remained. The common themes between students for and against a mixed faculty were having competent professors, Black faculty who would not allow fraternal affiliation to interfere with student academics, and lastly recognition that White donors funded the university. The sudden change in students regarding Black faculty and staff may have been due to alumni involvement in pushing for more institutional accountability regarding racial equality.

Altogether, the three decades that defined student activism on Black college campuses seemed to have eluded Lincoln, the university was transformed over that period due to alumni efforts. Having experienced a self-governing/autonomous student life, the idea of unrest may have appeared strange if not counterintuitive for both the students and the administration. Even though there were moments of student dissatisfaction and questioning, as seen in the 1929 and 1931 surveys, these rare instances simply do not measure up to the activist spirit that was present at other HBCUs throughout the nation.

The Lincoln University of the 1920s saw very little unrest. The campus was virtually unaffected by the racial troubles and mounting protest that were taking place at other colleges and universities across the country. Nevertheless, by the late 1920s, Lincoln had joined the fight for racial equality at their institution thanks to the National Alumni Association and Langston Hughes' 1929 student survey, which brought attention to the racial conditions that resided in the walls of Lincoln and in the hearts and minds of her students. Within a fifteen-year span of time, not only had Lincoln alumni found their way to the Board of Trustees, but they had managed to assume the position of Chair and push for integrating the faculty and staff at their university. The activist work alumni did in petitioning the Board of Trustees to make drastic institutional changes set a new course for the university.
At the close of the 1944-45 academic year, President Wright decided that the time had come for him to retire after nine years of service as president. He had rendered his letter of resignation to the Board or Trustees three years prior to the date of its acceptance, but the Board had requested he remain in office through the war years and until a new president was named.\(^43\) Due to the War, the Board moved slowly in their search for Lincoln's new president. Once again, the National Alumni Association took major steps to ensure that a candidate be chosen who was both in sympathy and in synchronization with the people he would serve. It seemed that the Alumni Association's move to gain more seats on the Board was not a moment too soon. For the first time in the university's history, the search for a new president weighed in the hands of a Board of Trustees that had as members a large number of alumni and an alumnus as Chair.

It was yet to be seen whether this group would champion the cause of a Black president or uphold the tradition of selecting a White Presbyterian minister. Lincoln graduates were well aware that the nation was waiting and the future of Black higher education rested on their shoulders. A number of candidates were considered for the position, but in the end on June 20, 1945, Lincoln alumnus Dr. Horace Mann Bond, Class of 1923, was appointed as the university's first Black president. With the backing of the National Alumni Association and alumni Trustees, Dr. Bond was elected unanimously by a Board partially his peers who, less than fifteen years ago, had not even been permitted to join.\(^44\)

And right here, it seems to me, is where the college shows its greatest wisdom. It is training for the Negro race not White leaders, but their own leaders. The Negro race wants its own leaders. It follows them. The men who train in Lincoln with both White and colored teachers, go out into every

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walk of life to work among their own people, and they are the biggest part of the solution of the so-called Negro problem.\footnote{45 Lincoln University Bulletin, Vol. 44 February, 1939 No. 1, J. Frederick Talcott, Trustee and Host at Luncheon, Ex-Governor "Al" Smith Makes Appeal for Lincoln, Lincoln University Archives, http://www.lincoln.edu/library/specialcollections/LUbulletin.html (September 24, 2011).}
Chapter VII

CONCLUSION

At the dawn of a new era in higher education, from 1920 to 1950, Black Americans worked alongside northern White missionaries and philanthropists to advance their colleges and universities. These men and women were present figures in the national debate regarding how they should be educated. Not only were Black Americans knowledgeable of the type of education they thought would better serve them, but, central to that point, they had a greater understanding of who they wanted to instruct and lead them to that goal. Contrary to the dominant discourse regarding the history of Black education during the first half of the century, Black Americans were quite vocal about who they thought should manage their schools. Up until James Anderson's work on Black education in the South, historians of education frequently implied that Black Americans stood silently by, with very little influence on the future development of Black higher education. Counter to those claims, Anderson opened up a new field of scholarship by looking at how Black Americans persisted in developing an educational system that was in agreement with their own needs and desires. To that end, this body of research has put forth several examples of how Black alumni and students, beginning in the 1920s, entered an all-out war against White administrators/boards of trustees for control of their schools and to bring about institutional change.¹

¹Drewry and Doermann, *Stand and Prosper*, 39.
From 1920 to 1950, Black alumni and students waged a successful campaign against the administration at Fisk University, Hampton Institute, and Lincoln University. Their activist efforts altered the course of higher education, more specifically Black higher education, by recasting the terms in which Black colleges and universities would be managed and operated. These Black institutional stakeholders organized grassroots movements on their campuses during a period of racial dissidence, and in striving for freedom and equality, a community of Black alumni and students rebelled against the paternalistic and repressive system of White leadership at their schools. Over a thirty-year period, protest occurred sporadically at Fisk, Hampton, and Lincoln. White administrators tried to quell the various demonstrations that took place on their campuses out of fear that the institution's reputation would be in jeopardy. Nonetheless, the students and alumni that were involved in the many protests insisted that more was at stake than the public image of the institution; in fact, they felt that as stakeholders jointly connected to their alma mater, they had a moral obligation to fight for change. Their desire for more social privileges at their institution, faculty and staff of color, an end to Jim Crow segregation on their campus, high-quality academic programs, and a greater voice in institutional governance all stemmed from the "New Negro Movement," which students and alumni at Fisk, Hampton, and Lincoln adopted on their campuses beginning in the 1920s. In their view, the objectionable policies at their schools were based on racist notions that Black Americans could not manage themselves, and if given the opportunity, they would become too much of a danger to the impending progress of the institution.\(^2\)

Altogether, alumni and student stakeholders at Fisk, Hampton, and Lincoln effectively transformed their institutions, their administrations, and their policies to accurately reflect the population and community for which the schools were established.

At Fisk University, students and alumni worked together on their campus to bring about institutional change. Unlike what occurred at Hampton and Lincoln, students and alumni at Fisk united in their efforts to fight the administration. Led by the institution's most notable alumnus, Dr. W. E. B. DuBois, they were more organized and direct when it came to stating their demands to the administration. Part of Fisk's success was due to the work DuBois did in bringing together alumni and students as well as using his *Crisis* magazine as an uncensored publication to scold White administrators at HBCUs.

Altogether, the activist spirit exhibited by students and alumni at Fisk was a symbol of racial pride and brought about a shift in consciousness not only at Fisk but throughout Black higher education. Unlike Hampton and Lincoln, the strikes that occurred at Fisk forced the administration to reach a compromise with both the students and the alumni. Because both groups of stakeholders worked together on their campus to support each other’s activist efforts, the administration at Fisk ultimately gave in to the joint demands and wishes of the alumni and students. For the most part, Black stakeholders at Hampton and Lincoln worked separately regarding their protest efforts, which at times caused the two groups to be at odds with one another. The compromises that were made by Fisk's administration to address student and alumni concerns were to establish an athletic association, a student council, and Greek-letter fraternities and sororities on campus for students. As for alumni, they were given representation on the Board of Trustees and a greater voice in institutional governance. Most important to this movement was that students and alumni at Fisk were able to negotiate the hiring of faculty and staff of color, which ultimately led to the selection of the first Black president in 1946. Over a course of thirty years, Fisk had changed, thanks to the combined efforts of its students and alumni working together to combat an autocratic administration.³

Hampton Institute, quite differently from Fisk and Lincoln, witnessed three decades of constant turbulence on their campus, which was mostly led by disgruntled students. At the early stages of the protest period during the 1920s, it appeared that students and alumni at Hampton might work together just as the students and alumni at Fisk had done, but no real collaborative effort occurred between the two groups during the 1920s and 1930s due to disorganized alumni who remained divided over the future direction of Hampton. More senior alumni preferred the "old days of Hampton" and fought to maintain the status quo, whereas younger alumni did not share their sentiments and in many ways found themselves to be more aligned with the ideas and values of students at Fisk. When it came to issues concerning race, a number of Hampton alumni did not feel as strongly about the institution's administration mirroring the population of students it served in contrast to alumni at Fisk and Lincoln, who was calling for at least half of their faculty and staff to reflect their student body. Although Hampton's alumni opposed Jim Crow segregation on their campus, as a united group, they failed to see the larger picture concerning racial equality and racial pride as it related to campus life, hiring practices, and leadership at the Institute. On the other hand, aggravated students rebelled at Hampton in a way quite similar to what took place at Fisk. The Massenberg Bill, coupled with the administration's complete control over campus life and the echoing voice of DuBois, compelled Hampton students to wage an unyielding protest against their school to bring about a change in institutional policies. For over a decade, students stood alone in the battle for social and racial equality at Hampton. By the late 1930s and 1940s, the mood at Hampton had changed drastically, and discouraged alumni joined the side of students in petitioning their predominantly White Board of Trustees for institutional change. The compromises that were made by Hampton's administration to address the students and alumni protest activities reflected the escalating racial issues growing at the institution, quite similar to what was taking place at Fisk and Lincoln. Students were granted more social privileges on campus, and the academic standards at the Institute
were raised. In regard to alumni, Hampton graduates were elected to serve on the Board of Trustees. As was the case for many other Black schools, particularly Fisk and Lincoln, from the 1930s to the 1950s, these schools witnessed a racially changing Board of Trustees, and the faculty and staff soon followed. Hampton's fate proved to be no different from that of other Black schools coming of age during the new progressive era of higher education; in fact, due to the changes that occurred on the Board, an alumnus was appointed as the school's first president in 1949.4

Alumni and students at Lincoln University had an altogether different relationship from what occurred between stakeholders at Fisk and Hampton. Largely due to a complacent student body, the movement that occurred on Lincoln's campus was mostly owed to the alumni, who joined together through alumni associations to challenge their all-White administration. Lincoln students were an anomaly compared to students at other private HBCUs during the 1920s through the 1940s. Unlike the students at Fisk and Hampton, Lincoln men were more concerned with maintaining the status quo rather than rebelling against racial inequalities or for more student autonomy. Virtually, there were no student protests on Lincoln’s campus during the 1920s, and the two decades that followed were marred by slight attempts by a few student leaders but never to the extent of what occurred at Fisk and Hampton. Perhaps the unique structure, character, and student population at Lincoln freed the institution from the worries of grappling with the same issues that were occurring at similar HBCUs in the South. Lincoln men witnessed a certain privilege of autonomy that simply did not exist at other Black colleges and universities, especially Fisk and Hampton, during the era of student unrest in American higher education.

The alumni, however, were instrumental in affecting institutional change by petitioning the Board of Trustees to amend their repressive institutional policies and

4Zaki, *Civil Rights and Politics at Hampton Institute*, 12-39; Schall, *Stony the Road*. 
allowing them to take part in school governance. Just as the alumni at Fisk, Lincoln graduates were quite vocal and influential as stakeholders at their institution. In part, these two schools’ alumni experienced leadership from within, for example, Dr. DuBois at Fisk and Rev. Grimke at Lincoln played a significant role in leading and setting the tone of activism for their alumni groups. Unfortunately, at Hampton a leader never arose. Quite possibly, this could have been due to how the alumni at each school saw themselves and their institutions. Fisk and Lincoln, both liberal arts institutions that claimed as part of their mission the education of l embraced a vocational curriculum dedicated to teacher preparation and service leaders in the Black community, were starkly different in comparison to Hampton, which training. The compromise that occurred at Lincoln between the administration and graduates gave Lincoln's National Alumni Association great power within the institution's governance structure. The alumni were able to elect their own members to the Board, and eventually an alumnus was named Chair. Comparable to Hampton, these changes ushered in the first wave of professionally trained Black faculty and staff as well as an alumnus as their first Black president in 1945.5

As Black men and women were appointed to the position of president, there was still doubt in the minds of White and Black people as to whether or not they were ready for such a great responsibility. Future research on this topic would explore the challenges these presidents faced during their quest to strengthen their schools’ academic programs, grow their campus facilities, and secure funding for their institutions. Since the majority of HBCUs were founded during a time of racial oppression and segregation, many of the White financial benefactors that contributed to Black institutions used their power and financial influence to only support White male presidents. In turn, boards of trustees at Black institutions were cautious to elect Black presidents to run their colleges and

5 Bond, Education for Freedom.; Wolters, The New Negro on Campus, 278-93.
universities. These trustee boards held the belief that Black men had not reached the academic or social status that was needed to efficiently administer or secure the proper resources to keep the school afloat. “Institutions supported by northern denominations were far slower to consider Blacks for administration than for teaching posts.”7 The hesitation to appoint Black Americans to the office of the president during the early stages of Black higher education can be understood as more than just an attempt by White benefactors to control Black schools with their financial gifts, but it can also be seen as a lack of faith in the educative preparedness of Black leadership.

Another area that requires further inquiry is to examine why these highly educated White men chose and/or considered the presidency at Black colleges and universities during a heightened period of racial ambiguity in the U. S. Given that most Black institutions in the South began shortly after the end of slavery in America, there were not many Black Americans prepared to take on the administrative post of the presidency.8 In most cases, whereas Black institutions were controlled by White organizations, these groups were more concerned with appointing White presidents that supported the educational mission of White industrialists and the various denominational groups with which they were affiliated, rather than supporting a classical program of education.

The thirty-one colleges existing at the time of the first Bureau of Education study might be characterized as New-England style schools established by White Americans to provide higher education for Black Americans, even though Black denominational groups established five of them. The presidents and faculty members of those five colleges were Black.... The remaining 26 colleges, with college-level enrollment totaling 2,522, were

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7Anderson, The Education of Blacks in the South, 56.

8Private Black colleges such as Wilberforce University in Ohio, Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, and Bethune-Cookman College in Florida were founded by Blacks. They had Black presidents from the beginning. In addition, many of the public land grant institutions founded primarily to educate Black teachers for the South’s segregated school systems also had Black presidents since their initial founding.
established by – and received a substantial part of their income from – northern denominational groups. Most of their presidents were White and White church groups determined college policy. Over the course of the next half-century, however, they became “Black colleges” in a fuller sense. Not only were their students Black, but their policies and curricula came to be shaped and implemented largely by Black administrators, faculty, and trustees. Their leadership shared with their students the experience of living as Blacks in the United States.9

The White founders and supporters of Black institutions were hesitant to entrust control of the colleges and universities to Black leadership. In addition, it was believed that White college presidents would be far more successful in raising funds for their institutions among foundations and wealthy White philanthropists.10 In many ways, these White presidents saw themselves as conduits of social change who dedicated their lives to the religious and moral development of Black southerners. It was their Protestant duty to serve at these Black institutions. In turn, their religious and cultural backgrounds dictated many of the decisions they made as president. Quite similar to other American college presidents of the period, the majority of these White presidents were clergymen who had graduated from one of the colonial or antebellum institutions in the North.11 As a collective group, little has been written about White presidents at Black institutions and why they chose to work at HBCUs, other than for factors surrounding their moral and religious beliefs. Nevertheless, the numerous White presidents who served at Black institutions were largely responsible for setting the stage for what these institutions were to become. They influenced major decisions that had a lasting impact on the future direction of HBCUs.

9 Drewry and Doermann, *Stand and Prosper*, 80-81.


Finally, a more comprehensive investigation of the first Black presidents to take office immediately following the protest period from 1920 to 1950 would better shed light on who these men were, their educational backgrounds, and what they accomplished while in office. Many of the Black colleges and universities of the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s responded to student and alumni activism with a changing of the guard, with Black administrators and faculty assuming leadership roles and professorships at these institutions. The end of an era of White paternalistic leadership slowly faded away as Black institutional stakeholders demanded change and took ownership of their schools. Important to this historical narrative is that all three institutions examined in this study elected their first Black presidents within five years of each other, partly due to the extraordinary chain of events that occurred on their campuses regarding alumni and student activism. Lincoln alumnus Horace Mann Bond, appointed president of Lincoln in 1945, Charles S. Johnson, appointed president of Fisk in 1946, and Hampton alumnus Alonzo Moron, elected president of Hampton in 1949, were in many ways byproducts of the campus unrest that took place at HBCUs starting in the 1920s and ending in the ‘40s. These men were all examples of Black presidents who served at their institutions following the decades of national protest on Black college campuses across the nation.12

These presidents took office during an especially critical period in the development of Black higher education. Black institutions were undergoing radical changes from within. The catalyst for these changes was in part the alumni and student body pushing their boards of trustees to consider Black faculty, Black administrators, and eventually Black presidents. Their efforts caused a revolutionary shift in the culture and structure at

12Drewry and Doermann, *Stand and Prosper*, 84; the first Black college presidents did not gain access to leadership at Black colleges and universities until the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. At most institutions, this transition of leadership occurred almost fifty years after the first Black colleges and universities were founded. Early Black presidents such as Bishop Daniel Payne (Wilberforce), Matthew W. Dogan (Wiley), Booker T. Washington (Tuskegee), John Hope (Morehouse), and Mordecai W. Johnson (Howard) are the fathers/pioneers of Black higher education leadership. Their appointments were unique because they were the first of their kind to take office, and in many ways their institutions consisted of nothing more than normal schools and pre-collegiate programs.
their institutions. It can be said that students and alumni were simply petitioning the boards of trustees to take minor steps toward the inclusion of Black faculty and administrators, as well as more social freedom at their institutions. However, what actually occurred was the unmasking of student and alumni rebellions against a segregated board of trustees, which led to the first Black presidents to be appointed at a number of HBCUs immediately following the era of campus protest.  

The significance in examining the thirty-year protest period that occurred at Fisk, Hampton, and Lincoln from 1920 to 1950 is to gain a broader understanding of how Black alumni and students successfully dismantled the prevailing White power structure at their institutions. Black alumni and students were instrumental in influencing administrative change by petitioning their boards of trustees to amend their racially oppressive institutional policies. Most important to this research is that the changes that were made at these institutions had a lasting impact on the administrations and more specifically on how alumni and students saw themselves as essential stakeholders in the governance of their schools. Quite naturally, as Black colleges and universities began to graduate young men and women who had been denied entry into professional careers due to Jim Crow, alumni turned to their alma maters as the focus of Black ambitions. Additionally, these Black stakeholders engineered a new movement in Black higher education that brought a swift end to White control and leadership at Black institutions. At each of the three schools, the alumni and students may have gone about their protest efforts in a different manner, but it was adamantly clear that they all were working toward the same purpose: seizing control of their alma mater.  

This research contributes not only to the vast array of scholarship on Black education in America, but it also provides a much needed addition to the current body of literature that currently exists on higher education in the U. S. Historians of education

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13Drewry and Doermann, *Stand and Prosper*, 84-87.
Laurence Veysey, Frederick Rudolph, and Roger Geiger have all captured the historical trajectory of American higher education, with very little attention given to the development of Black colleges and universities. However, within the past twenty-five years, historians Jacqueline Jones, Cally Waite, Marybeth Gasman, Ronald Butchart, and James Anderson have all put forth a body of work that re-examines these histories to include the work that Black Americans did to develop their own schools. This dissertation/research is situated squarely in the middle of what both groups have presented as scholarship to understanding the history of education in America. And finally, what this research on Black alumni and student activism has done besides shed new light on an era of protest that had not be thoroughly examined before is look at the contributions and work done by Black alumni. Throughout the literature on Black education, there has been little to nothing said about Black alumni and their place in higher education. Their contributions to their alma maters have rarely been discussed in any literature. This research opens up a new field in looking at these individuals and garnering a greater understanding and respect for the work Black alumni did to help shape Black higher education in the U. S.

Historically Black colleges and universities were conceived in the hearts and minds of both Black and White Americans, but only one group has been credited for the benevolent work they did in building, funding, and leading Black institutions. In regard to the Black men and women for whom these schools were founded, their struggle in the fight for education has been altogether forgotten. This historical narrative is important to American history because it amends the current body of literature suggesting that Black Americans contributed very little to educational history and to the development of Black Higher education in America. This research implies that Black Americans were not only fighting for freedom of equality and inclusion, but they were also fighting to be accepted as Americans. The impetus behind the Black college rebellions that occurred in the first half of the twentieth century was chiefly to integrate Black colleges, create more student
autonomy, and provide greater alumni involvement. What occurred as a byproduct of this movement was the appointment of the first Black college presidents to office. Certainly, there were campus incidents that occurred at these three schools from 1920 to 1950 other than what I chose to focus on. However, the events I selected were of particular importance because they were the key determinants to bringing about institutional change at three Black schools—Fisk University, Hampton Institute, and Lincoln University.
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