CLASS, CURRICULUM, AND CULTURE:
How Higher Education and the Liberal Arts were Envisioned for Black Americans in the late 19th and early 20th Century

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On the basis of this thesis defended by the candidate on 5/3/12
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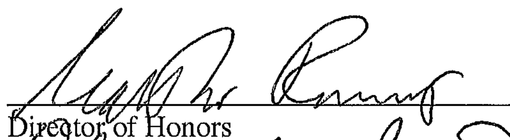
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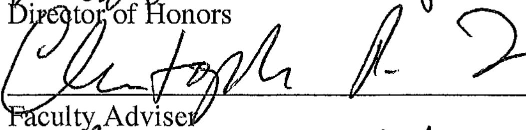
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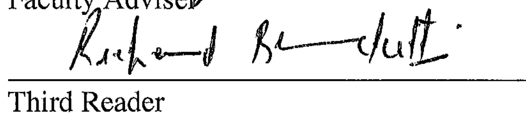
Third Reader

TO MY GRANDFATHER,
FAIRBANKS ARNOLD BERRY
(1905 - 1997)

MY FIRST HISTORY TEACHER

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INTRODUCTION

Recently, while driving through the streets of Nashville, a radio commercial caught my attention. "What do George Washington, Constantine, John Adams, Martin Luther, and Mark Zuckerberg [founder of Facebook] have in common?" the ad beckoned. It gave a quick reply: "They all had a classical education." The commercial, meant to promote a private school in Nashville, closed with the following declaration: "Don't just train your kids to be workers; train them to be *leaders*." The figures in the commercial cited are firmly grounded in a traditional belief that leaders are formed from a classical education. I found it curious that the leaders listed excluded some of the men – and all of the women – that are responsible for leading this country since its conception, especially since those leaders are also grounded in a similar tradition of classical training. This ad, just one example of the amazing longevity of this particular educational philosophy, leaves out the story that this thesis seeks to tell.

It is a story that begins with small, damp rooms, more fitting for mice than human occupation; inexperienced, but brave, leaders charged with liberating an oppressed people; scant organization, other than a shared ethos to guide a nebulous mission. This was the ramshackle reality for those individuals who battled for black education in any of its forms immediately following the U.S. Civil War. However uncharted, unorganized, and unprecedented it may have been, the idea of education was intricately tied to the idea of freedom for these former slaves. A privilege that had so often been withheld, blacks recognized the power of an education for themselves, their children, and their entire race (if only, at first, because it was something they were forbidden to receive).[1] When the promise of freedom was palpable, blacks began to conceive of a country where their sons and daughters would grow to become lawyers,

[1] Heather Williams, *Self-Taught: African American Education in Slavery and in Freedom.* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005),14.

physicians, and businessmen. In order for that dream to become a reality, black Americans would have to establish schools to nurture their collective intellectual growth.

Grade schools that taught the rudimentary skills of reading, writing, and arithmetic began to flourish throughout the South, but blacks educational hopes did not stop at this schoolhouse door. Almost as soon as the grade school was opened, rumors of a college, university, or a teacher-training Normal school began to bubble to the surface. And while the proverbial floodgates of education opened at the end of the Civil War for black Americans, some, generally from the North, attended predominately white colleges and universities that were receptive to black attendance on a case-by-case basis. The idea of organized higher education institutions for black Americans was an altogether shocking proposition, as most white Americans did not receive an advanced education.

While white institutions did exist, they were, for the most part, as autonomous and little more structurally developed than their black counterparts. Formal, organized education was breaking ground at this time in the United States, regardless of racial considerations.[2] But while higher education on the whole was beginning to expand at this time, white institutions – and the white individuals that matriculated therein – had their own history. This history saw a few gifted black students as the exception for advanced education, not the rule; there most certainly was never an organized effort to educate a significant number of black students within this history of American higher education. It was only with freedom that the idea of creating a higher educational institution specifically for blacks crystallized into reality.

As much as black colleges would open up doors to individuals who had previously been barred from advanced education altogether, the opening of these doors did not necessarily equate

[2] Edward Shils, "The Order of Learning in the United States: The Ascendancy of the University," in *The Organization of Knowledge in America, 1860-1920* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979), 19-47.

to education for all. Higher education for black students was still limited to a select group of individuals. Individuals who discussed black education were keenly aware that while education could create the next bright leaders of a democratic society, it could also train the individuals who would never reach such heights to be productive members of that society. Having the means to create a leadership class based on intellectual prowess – and the exclusion of less worthy individuals – would be the educational foundation for the leaders of the southern social structure.[3] The debates around black education emerged within this context of education's dual purpose. In every strata of education for blacks, Americans debated the nature of the education they should receive, aware of the implications different educational programs would have on the type of citizens the newly freed blacks would become.[4] Where the racial nature of advanced education for white students was implied, race was an explicit point of discussion black colleges and universities, as students were expected upon graduation to serve the black population in some capacity. Black college graduates would be well positioned to set the tone for how other black Americans would view their position in post-Civil War America.

Unlike the history of white education in America, which often starts with the individual, the focus being the creation of civilized gentlemen, black education is birthed amidst the concerns of an entire people. Colleges and universities for black Americans did not have the luxury of creating liberal men in the traditional sense. Rather, these institutions had to navigate an education tradition that celebrated individual intellect with the overwhelming cries for racial uplift and equality. A black individual's education was never truly individualized, as those who received the education were expected to go back and uplift the entire race; or, at the very least, serve as a representation of progress for the entire race.

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[3] Wayne J. Urban and Jennings L. Wagoner, Jr., *American Education: A History* (New York: Routledge, 2009).
[4] James D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South: 1860-1930* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 62.

Perhaps the result of their collective entrance into the American political scheme, or the result of the persistent denial of basic rights, black education was thought as indicative of the potential of the entire race and, as a result, responsible to it as well. Regardless of the reasoning, there was nothing "natural" about this collective perception for black education. In fact, these explicit discussions of black education in terms of the entire race are unusual given the tradition of autonomy in the liberal arts. This collective perception was the result of various ideas of black education becoming ingrained within the debates that surrounded it. There were various ideas and expectations about black higher education, all with their own influences on the education institutions themselves.

But this idea of collective progress as a result of individual education is not the whole story. Students who received this education would begin to create their own spaces that stressed allegiances to one another to supplement their responsibilities to the race. Although students of the black liberal arts college did not abandon their sense of service and intellectual uplift of the entire race, they did begin to value other experiences, particularly those that provided social support in their struggle for education, as equal in importance to these institutional ideas of uplift. As these students continued to become future leaders, they had to negotiate the original mission statements of their institutions –predicated on the idea that black higher education was for the benefit of the entire race – with their own experiences.

These debates around black higher education generally centered on one's views on two educational programs: the liberal arts institution,[5] founded in the Western tradition that trained

[5] For the purposes of this paper, I will define a liberal arts institution in a similar manner as James D. Anderson in his *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935*: "Colleges such as Fisk, Atlanta, and Howard were viewed as social settlements that imparted the culture of New England to black boys and girls along with the culture of the Greeks and Romans." These black liberal arts institutions would eventually go on to include the study of black culture, but through the beginning parts of the twentieth century, it was "generally agreed upon that the transplanted New England college in southern soil was the proper way to educate the sons and daughters of ex-slave."

the most celebrated of early American thinkers, or the industrial or vocational institution, designed to manufacture competent workers able to meet the demands of an industrialized society. Championed by such prominent educational advocates as Samuel Armstrong and Booker T. Washington, and institutionalized at Hampton University in Virginia and the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, the industrial education philosophy was quick to garner the support of southern and northern whites alike. Encouraged by the program's silence on issues of social and political equality, many white individuals recognized this doctrine as a more feasible alternative to a philosophy of education that promoted equality between the races. Furthermore, the focus on training the model worker was attractive to an entire region that had just lost its economic foundation with the eradication of the slave system. Its economic focus, practical hands-on methodology, and gradualist approach to full racial equality proved boons to the industrial education approach.

But the seeming practicality of the industrial approach was troublesome for others concerned with educating freedmen and women. Proponents of the liberal arts curriculum often criticized the aforementioned silence within the industrial education philosophy around the issue of political and social equality. These advocates of classical training founded institutions with the expressed purpose of producing leaders who would be poised to challenge inequality with eloquence and skill. Nodding to the success of the New England college model, these liberal arts institutions valued a curriculum focused on literature, philosophy, and the languages, particularly Latin and Greek.[6] As both of these educational philosophies were primarily concerned with the

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[6] Although liberalism, as it applies to education, has been a fixture of curriculums at all levels, signifying, broadly, a grasp of various subjects, in addition to one's main course of study, the historic definition of liberalism is not so cut and dry. I will provide a more thorough explanation of liberalism in education in Chapter Two. For now, liberalism, the liberal arts, and a liberal education will be used interchangeably to signify courses of study that integrate literature, language, and other humanities, as well as a theoretical and philosophical understanding of the natural sciences.

formation of black American leaders, the debates over the proper course for blacks often turned vitriolic, as one camp was accused of pandering to whites and the other of elitism that did not take into account the economic realities of the majority of blacks.

The nature of the debates did not often take into account the reality of black higher education. Schools thought of providing a strictly classical education often provided exceptional professional training, a slight departure from a "pure" liberal arts course. In fact, Fisk was a pantheon for teacher training throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Furthermore, many of the faculty at schools considered industrial had, in fact, been educated at a liberal arts institution. Although the debates put institutions in finite categories, black colleges and universities worked – and taught – in a much closer relationship than espoused by either educational camp.

While individuals have written at length about the nature of the debate between these two educational camps, providing the foundational work for a project such as this, the majority of the secondary literature around black education focuses on the primary education movement. Those that tackle black higher education either provide a history of specific institutions or provide criticisms of the industrial philosophy. Few historians have explicitly described the relationship between the ideals the black liberal arts institution was founded upon and how individuals positioned themselves with respect to those ideals. Furthermore, many historians tell the story of black education in the South as if it occurred in a vacuum, not contextualizing these colleges within the wider societal trends of the time. One such cultural trend that had a profound effect on American higher education (including black colleges) was the notion of social order and community development, commonly pulled under the umbrella of American progressivism.[7]

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[7] Urban and Wagoner, "Organizing the Modern School System: Educational Reform in the Progressive Era, 1890-1915," in *American Education,* 194-227.

These ideas provide perspective on how the black liberal arts institution grew from an idea into the colleges responsible for educating some of the most influential black Americans of the twentieth century. Nevertheless, in order to analyze those relationships, it is imperative to understand the works that preceded this one.

James D. Anderson's *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935* continues to serve as one of the preeminent texts on black education. In this book, Anderson asserts that the Hampton-Tuskegee model of industrial education and the liberal arts ideology were diametrically opposed due to the fact that their strategies targeted the same population: teachers. Extremely critical of the Hampton-Tuskegee approach, Anderson argues that the industrial model represented the desire of many to cultivate complacent blacks, apathetic towards equality because they knew their place within southern society. The economic argument, supported in large degree by the Northern white industrialists and philanthropists who provided the financial supports to keep these institutions afloat, covered up the conservatism that influenced this educational model.

While the observations about philanthropists influence on black colleges provided insight, there is room for further examination in the themes Anderson presents. In his chapter entitled "Training the Apostles of Liberal Culture," Anderson sees the goal of "racial equality in civil and political life"[8] as justifying one philosophy over another, regardless of the fact that white philanthropists were important to the survival of colleges representing both philosophies. Because philanthropist support was critical to all black colleges, the influence that Anderson criticizes white philanthropists of having at industrial institutions was felt at liberal arts colleges as well. This thesis looks to fill in some of that analysis to provide context as to the complicated

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[8] Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South,* 240.

environments *all* black colleges and universities were operating within. Additionally, it is important to understand the responses of black individuals to either educational course. Philanthropists did play a role in the formation of the black liberal arts college; however, to state the biases of this particular group and not examine the effect of those biases on the black liberal arts college leaves an important aspect of the story untold.

Recently, historian Adam Fairclough tackled the issue of black education by making the southern teacher the agent of change in this decentralized movement. Fairclough's *A Class of Their Own* showcases missionaries and ministers, scholars and charlatans, and all the individuals that occupied the lectern in those schoolrooms as the frontline workers in delivering either educational ideology. The teacher, to Fairclough, provides insight into the educational odyssey of southern blacks. Fairclough puts particular emphasis on the missionary nature, overwhelmingly the result of a Christian-derived sense of morality, of southern teachers. Educated primarily in the North, these teachers, black and white, saw pedagogy as a calling, one in which they answered with a certain level of self-righteousness. Fairclough's reading of the history of black education in the South places the bulk of the influence on the shoulders of these grass root reformers. Departing from the previously held notion that the majority – and most influential – teachers were Northern white women, Fairclough's analysis includes black men and women as influential on the education movement of southern blacks.

Similarly, Heather Williams' documentation of black education, *Self-Taught*, outlines the ways in which black Americans – generally former slaves – directed their own learning, even before the close of the Civil War. With freedom, slaves saw an opportunity to obtain that which had been unobtainable. Often drawing on the importance of religious institutions and the military

in educating individuals, Williams illustrates that freedmen and women were active agents in their battle for education, regardless of the mediums they used to receive it.

Both Fairclough and Williams favor the bottom-up approach to black education. However, neither historian mentions how blacks continued their educational pursuits beyond basic schooling. Public education was a concept foreign to the South, and to black Americans in particular, but the desire for education did not stop at the grammar school. The number of colleges that began to dot the South following the end of the Civil War can only be described as a phenomenon unique to this time and place. Although most of these institutions were colleges in name only, the number of institutions, and their relationship to the black public schools for the supply of black teachers in the segregated South, makes them an important aspect to any history on black education in the South. While Fairclough and William's work highlights the roll of black Americans in grammar and secondary schooling, the role of black Americans and their colleges and universities must be part of that story. Given the reality that a *true* college education was out of reach for even those former slaves that could make it to the pseudo-universities up until the First World War, those with college degrees represented a unique subpopulation that were the embodiment of black American's wildest educational dreams.

While my thesis builds upon the analysis provided in these works, I am primarily concerned with the way in which various intellectuals, both white and black, idealized the black liberal arts institution and how those idealizations came into fruition at one black liberal arts institution: Fisk University. In *A History of Fisk University, 1865-1946*, Joe M. Richardson outlines the changes that Fisk underwent with subsequent shifts in leadership, the role of students and faculty in Fisk's governance, and Fisk's seemingly constant struggle to keep its doors open and its original mission intact. In looking at the larger intellectual trends around black higher

education and how these trends manifested themselves at Fisk University, I hope to frame the issue of black higher education as one that was intimately connected to the African American race and deserves a place within the larger history of American colleges and universities.

In response to the unique position of black colleges in both black and white America, black students developed a means of organizing their relationship to the larger black population that shifted from occupying the role of moral and intellectual heroes to becoming members of their own, unique subpopulation with social responsibilities to each other. Like many of the historians that have influenced this project, my thesis will examine the rhetoric around the idea of the liberal arts college and then examine the relationship of the rhetoric to the organization of these institutions and the outcomes of their students, using Fisk University as a model.

Many questions arise when trying to understand a university, particularly in relation to its diverse interests and its historical context. I believe this thesis does answer its fair share of questions and provides a richer history of these powerful black institutions. In looking at these institutions, I often asked how did black colleges and their students balance their academic and moral obligations to black Americans? Were there other obligations that began to increase in importance? During the late nineteenth century, higher education in the United States began to shed its colonial college past in favor of research-minded universities; with that in mind, how did the black liberal arts college, created in the image of the colonial colleges, continue its existence? What rituals and performances did these institutions employ to reify their mission? This thesis will examine those questions and seek, ultimately, to answer: did the way in which the black liberal arts institution was envisioned change in order to meet the needs of those intimately connected to it?

Chapter One examines how white society – primarily, the philanthropists who had such a direct impact on the nature of black education – viewed their role in the formation of the black liberal arts college. In this chapter, I outline how, and why, these individuals became concerned with this educational program. This chapter will examine how larger historical trends the development of colleges throughout the South, and the answering of the "Negro Question" influenced the ways in which white individuals became involved in black higher education. Furthermore, I will provide context as to how the personal preferences of philanthropists and administrators left a mark on these liberal arts institutions.

Chapter Two focuses on how the debate around higher education was carried out among blacks themselves. Faculty, students, social critics, and others examined what a liberal arts education meant for black students; however, they also stressed how this education would shape the race as a whole. The dialogue in this chapter mirrors many of the larger societal debates, personified in the now infamous public disagreements between Fisk alum W.E.B. Du Bois and Tuskegee-founder Booker T. Washington over the merits of liberal and industrial education, respectively. Those debates simplified the complicated nature of black higher education, as this chapter hopes to show. This chapter stresses how black individuals sought to define their own education experiences, even if those experiences, within the confines of higher education institutions, were not drastically different than the proposed educational programs expressed by white society.

Finally, in Chapter Three, I will bring in Fisk as a model college to examine how the expressed desires of black and white society helped shape one of the chief black liberal arts colleges in the country. At Fisk, students were expected to live up to a certain ideal of academic and moral excellence, not just for themselves but for the benefit of the entire race. This was of

the utmost importance if Fiskites, the common moniker used for students, faculty and alums of the school, were to be leaders of black America. As Fisk students continued to live out the school's mission, social bonds – not to all African Americans, but to each other – began to play a part in the way the college was envisioned.

This thesis intentionally covers a large period of time, drawing upon trends and shifts within the changing nature of higher education in general. By surveying the time leading up to the turn of the century, as well as the early parts of the twentieth century, this thesis seeks to provide a more nuanced examination of these important black institutions. Black liberal arts colleges wanted to adopt a New England structure of education, but in so transplanting that structure to another place and time – and for another purpose – the result was slightly different than the "pure" liberal arts school of old. The education these young scholars received had explicit implications for all black Americans. This thesis examines the relationship between the black liberal arts institution and the rhetoric espoused by those intimately connected to it, contextualizing the relationship with larger rhetorical discussions of the time. Black colleges, through creating a leadership class, providing a certain curriculum to its students, and encouraging the formation of black American culture, are institutions worthy of a permanent place in the history of American higher education. Hopefully, this project successfully places them within that history.

CHAPTER ONE

"Never did a more appalling task confront Christian intelligence": White responses to higher education for black Americans

The individuals who found institutions are often revered and memorialized in various organizational myths and traditions, giving each institution its own, distinctive personality. This is especially true of colleges and universities; the vision of the individuals, often white, that founded black colleges and universities tell a great deal about how they envisioned education for these newly freed slaves. As one of the founders of Fisk University, Erastus Milo Cravath replicated the curriculum of his Alma matter, Oberlin College, at the newly founded black school. Yale graduates Edmund Asa Ware and Horace Bumstead transported the Blue Dog's classical curriculum directly to Atlanta University. These individuals believed a classical course to be critical for black Americans and founded their respective institutions with that in mind. However, the debates that continued to shape these institutions did not stop with the founders' ideologies. Discussions among white Americans as to the proper course for African Americans continued to mold the way in which these institutions operated and existed within the South.[9] This chapter will examine how those white Americans who were involved in black higher education viewed their relationship to these institutions.

Faced with the task of rebuilding a country fragmented by the Civil War, the United States of the 1870s was in a peculiar position. Having saved the Union and subsequently freed the slaves, the country was still a nation divided. Instead of strictly geographical, philosophical, or ethical divergences, the Mason-Dixon line represented a new national dichotomy. North of this physical boundary lay the "winners", and South, the "losers." This reality would influence

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[9] Horace Mann Bond, "The Influence of Personalities on the Public Education of Negroes in Alabama" in the Journal of Negro Education (Vol. 6, No. 1, January 1937).

the dialogue around a myriad of issues, including education, as the country grappled with the inclusion of slaves into the American citizenry.

The newly freed slaves represented what would commonly be called The Negro Problem" or "The Negro Question." Although many offered different answers in response to the question, whites were fascinated with the idea of black education as a potential solution. To many individuals who were influential in the formation of black collegiate-level education, colleges and universities, taking on a new prominence in the United States, had the potential to transform former slaves into citizens. This ideology was grounded in the idea that while not all black Americans would be educated to such an advanced degree, those that were educated in this manner would be able to serve as models for the rest of the race.

The role blacks were to take as citizens was often a point of debate among white individuals, directly influencing the educational program whites advocated. While some encouraged full-citizenship for African Americans, complete with the political, social, and civil rights implied therein, others were more interested in creating something akin to secondhand citizenship, making blacks subordinate socially and politically. Although subordinate in their rights, black Americans would still form the economic base of the region. The latter potential benefit of higher education would result in blacks who were, in the eyes of many of those in white society, useful contributors to the existing infrastructure of society. Regardless of the stance white individuals took when articulating their relationship to black colleges and universities, one thing was certain: they intended to play a major role in the debate. White society saw itself as an integral – if not the central – actor in the process of creating black colleges, as well as chief crafters of the educational philosophy that would be adhered to within those institutions.

Furthermore, many white individuals looked at the chaos of the Civil War as proof that the region was in dire need of structure, particularly where it concerned freed slaves. Representative of a larger trend to define and maintain order based on an ideal conception of society, many white Americans were eager to see education as a solution to desperately needed southern structure. Because blacks could not establish their institutions without white assistance – either through direct economic support or the tacit approval of the surrounding community – white society *did* become an integral part of the formation of black colleges. Critics of white involvement would even go as far to accuse white administrators of black colleges of pandering their operations towards the conservative interests of the surrounding southern white population. The insistence of white society on remaining a part of the formation of black colleges would prove critical in terms of the types of black individuals these institutions sought to produce.

In this chapter, I will outline how two prominent sectors of white society discussed and debated black higher education and the proper role of white society therein: Educators, including those directly involved in black higher education as well as educators of all-white institutions within the South who commented on the state of black education and Northern philanthropists and the US Government, as both were integral in the continued operation of the black college.

Finally, I will conclude that these discussions around black education pointed to the desire to create a "black citizen" through education that would be almost exclusively the product of white direction. These newly created black citizens would be integrated into the existing societal infrastructure, one that was largely constructed without their consent. Black higher education, while only able to educate a few individuals at a time, was a way in which to integrate an entire race into an established nation. This was the way in which many whites saw their

relationship to black colleges, and it would have real effects on the administration, faculty, and, ultimately, the students of these institutions.

The views of the administrator: White educators and black colleges

Looking at the dismal state of education in the South, criticisms about the course of educational institutions going forward were not limited to colleges for African Americans. From the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth, education in the South was undergoing dramatic change, including the massive undertaking of establishing a true public school system. Black education was by no means the only challenge the region faced. However, the way in which white educators, leaders of black and white institutions alike, viewed the problem they were confronting tells us a great deal about the discussion that existed around black education.

Although the legal restrictions of black education had faded, not all white educators were enthusiastic about the idea of highly educated blacks. While some white leaders embraced the concept, others looked for ways to undermine the legitimacy of the black college. At an education conference in New Orleans in 1903, a South Carolina school superintendent gave the following synopsis of the relationship of whites to black education:

> Let us not be hypocrites about it...we are against the academic education of the Negro. The object of true education is to raise the people to a higher order of civilization...We do not permit the Negro to participate in anything, and what do we make if we educate him? A dissatisfied person. There is but one end of the Negro problem, and that is that the inferior race must give way to the superior race. The only preservation is to keep him in a subordinate position.[10]

Maintenance of social order – a key facet of a more conservative strain of American progressivism at the turn of the century – was at the core of this speech. By stating that there was no place in southern society for an educated black person, this superintendent claimed to be

[10] Raymond B. Fosdick, *Adventure in Giving: The Story of the General Education Board* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 83.

saving the black individual from a "dissatisfied" life. Satisfaction would only come through his taking a "subordinate position" to "the superior race." As the superintendent argues, to preserve the order that full black citizenship threatened, black Americans would either have to not be educated at all or, at the most, educated in away that allowed them to take a subordinate position without recourse.

Although some educators believed that there was no room for black education in any form, the majority differed mainly in the type of education that was most appropriate for blacks. While the idea of industrial education was not thought of in relation to African Americans exclusively – the concept had been gaining ground across the country since the onset of the Industrial Revolution and found new favor with the efficiency-focused management men that gained prominence at the turn of the century – the vigor with which many white educators supported this idea for all black students made it one of the chief educational philosophies supported by white America.

At the aforementioned education conference in New Orleans, another school official claimed "the so-called literary branches, which would create in them [blacks] a tendency to become lawyers, or still worse, politicians or...worse than either, preachers"[11] were to be avoided at all costs. Others supported the idea of industrial education, because of the educational philosophy's obvious practicality. Many white Americans saw this type of education as capitalizing on the scientific and organizational prestige the country was beginning to enjoy at the onset of the twentieth century. In this philosophy, black occupation of certain industrial positions was for the benefit of the entire nation, producing a fully functioning society where black citizens were contributing members of the existing structure. The idea of society as a

[11] Proceedings, Conference of Louisiana County School Superintendents, as quoted in Fosdick, *Adventures in Giving*, 83.

"well-oiled machine" dominated the rhetoric of social order.[12] Charles Eliot, President of Harvard University from 1869-1909, celebrated the work of industrial education for blacks: "Such institutions as Hampton and Tuskegee are showing how to learn by actual seeing, hearing, touching, and doing instead of just by reading and committing to memory."[13] While most of the men at Harvard were still reading and, presumably, committing to memory, many white educators like Eliot rejected this kind of course for black Americans. There seemed to be an attraction to this ideology for its ability to prepare students in ways that were readily transferable to a limited set of occupations.

Indeed, as historian Raymond Fosdick notes, the vitality present in the vast majority of blacks for a liberal education "was quickly dampened by the economic difficulties of their new-found freedom."[14] And while these economic realities were bleak for many blacks, white support of the industrial education program was not purely the result of these observations; there was a real perception of pretension among blacks who detoured from the industrial course. Curriculums modeled on the colonial college that included courses such as Caesar, Psychology, Moral Philosophy, Ethics, German, and Economics only served, as white adversaries claimed, to "produce confusion and frustration in the pupils, at the same time that it increased the hostility of their white neighbors."[15] These attacks seemed to encourage the proliferation of the industrial ideology among many white educators looking to maintain the existing structure of American society.

White educators who were not pleased with the projection of the black liberal arts, like the President of the North Carolina College of Agriculture and Mechanics, often advocated that

[12] Daniel T. Rodgers, "In Search of Progressivism," *Reviews in American History* 10(4).
[13] Charles Eliot as quoted in Fosdick, *Adventures in Giving*, 87.
[14] Fosdick, *Adventures in Giving*, 80.
[15] Fosdick, *Adventures in Giving*, 86.

"their [black] colleges of law, medicine, theology, science, literature, and art should be turned into schools for industrial training."[16] Just because these educators advocated a purely industrial educational program for blacks did not mean they discouraged academic knowledge, albeit knowledge on a rudimentary level. These individuals still wanted "a hand in the field to whom [they could] send a written inquiry or direction as to his work and who can return to [them] in writing an intelligent response,"[17] as noted by the University of Georgia chancellor. In other words, this field hand would be intelligent enough to know he was subordinate to the field owner. This was a far cry from equal educational opportunities.

While the industrial education philosophy certainly had a receptive audience in white educators, both in the North and South, some educators did see the benefits in providing the same – although segregated – type of education to whites as to blacks. The school superintendent of Lynchburg, Virginia wrote in January 1903 that "God puts certain powers in every man... We do not believe that the white man need be afraid of the educated Negro..."[18] Although his statement does not elaborate on the process of creating an "educated Negro," it is clear that this man's belief was grounded in a belief of human nature that was the result of a Christian moral philosophy.

Most individuals who proposed any sort of black liberal arts education did so as a part of a dual curriculum with some industrial education involved. One such individual was Reverend James G. Merrill, President of Fisk University from 1900-1908. Serving Fisk immediately following the death of influential President Cravath, Merrill was charged with continuing the traditions that Fisk was built upon while recognizing shifts towards more practical applications of education emerging at the turn of the century. Born in Massachusetts and a firm believer in the

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[16] Joe M. Richardson, *A History of Fisk University, 1865-1946* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2002), 57.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Proceedings, Virginia Superintendents' Conference, as quoted in Fosdick, 84.

centrality of the liberal arts education to "[develop] Christian manhood in an education for service,"[19] Merrill also recognized the potential positive effects of industrial education within the program to educate the entire race:

> While the common school education should be afforded to all, manual training and technical, so far as possible, should be given to those who, because of the natural gifts or anticipated opportunities, can make use of them. [Additionally], the higher education should be afforded those who have the mental equipment to acquire it and when educated to use it.[20]

To Merrill, there did not need to be a mutual exclusion of the two educational philosophies. However, Merrill did make it clear that a college-level education should provide the bulk of its students training beyond the vocational. As his focus was to imprint in his black students a need to serve the race as a whole, both programs could accomplish that mission without the exclusion of the other.

Merrill was not alone in his point of view. Reverend Atticus G. Haywood, a native of Georgia and ordained minister of the Methodist Episcopal church, agreed with Merrill on many of his main points. "The Negro in the United States," Haywood asserted, "should be educated...he should have opportunity to learn all that he can learn, because he has the right that God gave him, when he made him, to become as much of a man and as truly a man as his nature allows."[21] Unlike Merrill, however, Haywood presented seemingly conflicting notions as to what a black individual's nature would allow when compared to his circumstances. In a speech presented to the Annual Meeting of the Women's Home Missionary Society in Philadelphia on October 23, 1885, Haywood warned "a danger in education [exists] if education only excites wants without conferring the capacity to supply them. It makes people miserable." Much like

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[19] Richardson, *A History of* Fisk, 63.
[20] Merrill, "An American Education for Americans," January 13, 1905. Retrieved from the General Education Board Archives. Sleepy Hollow, NY.
[21] Atticus G. Haywood, *Pleas for Progress* (Nashville: Publishing House of the M.E. Church, South, 1889), 8.

some of the white educators who advocated for little to no black education, Haywood seemed to believe that little opportunity for advancement made certain types of black education more cumbersome than civilizing.

The rest of the particular speech confirms that sentiment. Haywood goes on to tell the story of a black man, educated at a northern college, who graduated with all the knowledge imparted to a young man at a top Northeastern institution. Haywood portrayed this individual as a man unable to find employment in any of the positions for which his education prepared him; this lack of professional work was a direct result of the man's race. Instead of correcting the mechanisms that allow such discrimination to exist, Haywood suggested a re-education program, saying, "to make him useful now he must be educated over again – to dry out the sap and to balance his brains." While encouraging the women of the missionary society to use their considerable means to supply "the needs of the Negro", Haywood assured these women that "skilled hands must go with educated brains, if we are to preserve the domestic and social balance." Notions of balance and social order were at the forefront of the minds of individuals who had just lived through the domestic turbulence of the Civil War, a fact on which Haywood knowingly capitalized. African Americans had to be integrated into this new society in such a manner that would not disrupt the delicate social balance.

In order to maintain this balance, good, Christian, white society, as Haywood saw it, would have to take the problem of black education upon itself. "Never did a more appalling task confront Christian intelligence," Haywood began, addressing the same group of missionary women, "than the one the Christian white people of this country looked on in 1865. Never was a great and difficult task more magnificently attempted or more nobly carried out." When Haywood did recognize the efforts of black people in securing their own educational future, it

was as a "hopeful sign…not general or very pronounced in most places, but…real with not a few." This concession of black agency was only used as fodder to "encourage well to do white people to redouble their efforts."[22] Whites, for Haywood, formed the core of the educational efforts focused on black Americans; their hopes in supporting these institutions was to create a black citizen ready to be integrated within the existing social structure.

President of his alma mater Emory college, and the general agent of the Slater Fund, Haywood represented the complexities often presented by white educators in their contributions towards black education. While recognizing the humanity of blacks, something that was requisite in a large portion of these educators Christian moral philosophies, disturbing the "social balance," as Haywood described it above, was counterproductive in soliciting funding from donors. In fact, funders' personal ideologies tacitly influenced the way in which the black educational institutions were able to progress. As can be seen from these white educators perspectives, white society viewed its relationship to black education as a central component to the movement's continued existence, both financially and ideologically.

Funding the movement: Northern philanthropists and the Government

While a striking majority of black higher educational institutions were established by various denominational organizations, their continued survival was generally dependent upon their successful solicitation of funds by several Northern philanthropists, including the General Education Board, the Phelps-Stokes Fund, the John F. Slater Fund, and the Julius Rosenwald Fund. This was no less true for the liberal arts colleges that concern our story. Securing funds from these philanthropists was tantamount to survival, for black higher education institutions could not boast the alumni of their white counterparts. Nor could those African-American

[22] Quotes from Haywood, *Pleas for Progress*, 141-145.

alumni, often preoccupied with their own economic survival, donate to these institutions in a way similar to white graduates, who were well enough financially to afford higher education in the first place or were, for the most part, candidates for a wider range of economic pursuits post-graduation. In a similar fashion as the white educators, Northern philanthropists often encompassed varied perspectives on black education, funding both industrial institutions as well as those with a more classical curriculum.

The government worked in tandem with these institutions, providing reports on donations and black student success. The government would also begin to fund land grant institutions for blacks, such as Tennessee State University. Like white land-grant colleges, these schools focused more on practical knowledge than a traditional liberal arts school. These contributions to higher education for African Americans had the power to elicit change in institutions in accordance to their personal ideologies. Funders and the government saw higher education for black Americans as a tool to make these new citizens fit into the existing structure of the country.

Philanthropists by no means represented a united front in their quest to fund black higher education, although the majority did favor a more industrial training program in part due to their vested economic interests in the region. In keeping their individual preferences for black education alive, philanthropists would often donate money to specific programs in an attempt to provide more industrial programs to what was perceived as an overwhelmingly classical curriculum. A proposal to Trustees of the Phelps-Stokes Fund for $250 to "supplement the Baptist Home Missionary Board's appropriation for establishing gardening in Morehouse College, Atlanta," was one such presentation to inject an industrial project in a traditionally liberal arts institution. The recommendation was proposed with "the purpose of influenc[ing] the literary schools to prepare their students more directly for work as teachers and preachers in rural

communities."[23] As ambassadors to the black American population throughout the country, it was necessary to inculcate within black graduates as much hand knowledge as head in order to instill those values in their future students.

The same sort of alteration of a liberal arts curriculum occurred at Fisk University at the request of the General Education Board, which sought to fund an applied sciences building on the campus. To the Board, this "science work is a much needed addition to Fisk's otherwise too exclusively literary course."[24] To some members of the Board, the classical course enjoyed an "unfair distinction"[25] within the Fisk curriculum. The opinions of potential donors were not lost on certain members tied to Fisk, notably the Trustees who were concerned with the financial stability of the institution. In a letter written from those trustees to the trustees of the John F. Slater Fund, the board members agreed the purpose of the applied sciences building was to "prepar[e] our students when they graduate to lead their people to greater industrial and economic efficiency."[26] President Merrill, however, had no intention of making "farmers, carpenters, masons, laundrywomen, [or] dressmakers" of Fisk students with the addition of this building. Rather, he saw the applied sciences department as an opportunity to teach students "the underlying principles of chemistry and physics as applied to modern industry and agriculture."[27] However funders envisioned this specific department, the applied sciences were only available to secondary and normal students at Fisk.

Recognition of the necessity of a particular programmatic shift did not constitute a concession to change the overarching educational philosophy of black liberal arts colleges. Well

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[23] Recommendations to the Trustees of the Phelps Stokes Fund, April 1914. Retrieved from the Phelps-Stokes Fund Archives. New York City, NY.

[24] W.T.B. Williams to Rev. J.G. Merrill, November 7, 1906. Retrieved from the General Education Board Archives. Sleepy Hollow, NY.

[25] Ibid.

[26] The Trustees and Faculty of Fisk University to the Trustees of the John F. Slater Fund, March 9, 1905, 2. Retrieved from the General Education Board Archives. Sleepy Hollow, NY.

[27] J.G. Merrill as quoted in Richardson, *A History of Fisk,* 61.

aware of the broader changes occurring within higher education towards more applied knowledge with the development of the modern university, shrewd administrators of black colleges used the preferences of philanthropists to their institution's advantage. In fact, a campaign executive for Fisk wrote in a letter to Wallace Buttrick, the then president of the General Education Board, "It is thought by a number of prominent men and women among whom are Messrs. William H. Taft, Samuel Sachs, Paul D. Cravath, Robert R. Moton, [and] Dwight D. Morrow, that the twelve million colored people of the country should have at least one first class institution."[28] Fisk, this executive believed, would be such an institution for America's black population. As much as the personal preferences of some philanthropists desired to see industrial education dominate the educational program for blacks, a significant population within those intricately involved in black education believed in a premier black liberal arts institution, even if it should include more practical educational components.

Philanthropists were not the only benefactors of black education with the ability to sway its future course. The federal government, under the auspices of the 1890 Morrill Land Grant Act that expanded federal funds to black institutions, also had a role to play. At times, this included limiting the spread of an overly classical curriculum within an institution. Florida's State Normal College for Colored Students was one such institution that felt the grip of the federal government's desires for black education. Established in 1887, the school operated for three years under Thomas de Saille Tucker. Tucker, an African American, was an advocate for using a strictly liberal arts curriculum as preparation for future teachers, in no small part the result of his classical training at Oberlin. Tucker's educational ideology unsurprisingly clashed with the industrial view that dominated the South, resulting in increased scrutiny of the college's

[28] Kidder to Buttrick, December 3, 1919. Retrieved from the General Education Board Archives. Sleepy Hollow, NY.

activities. The school even received criticism from the state superintendent of public instruction who noted "an obvious inattention to agricultural and industrial training"[29] at the college.

Having tried various strategies to assuage future criticisms, Tucker went so far to change the name of the institution to Florida State Normal *and Industrial* College, later to become Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University. This was, for the most, a cosmetic attempt to ensure government support of the institution. Future president Nathan B. Young, a black man as well who championed a mixed approach of industrial and classical training similar to that of the top white land grant colleges, went on to expand the school's academic program from a two-year program to four. Young, however, understood where the school's funds came from and continued to develop the industrial curriculum to the praise of white government officials. The U.S. Bureau of Education touted that the school, under Young, was en route to becoming "an excellent state college for Negroes."[30]

The Florida case was representative of a national agenda regarding African American education. The ideology expressed by the U.S. Bureau of Education mirrored that of the Executive Office. Although some time after the Bureau praised the Florida school. President Theodore Roosevelt threw his considerable weight in support of the industrial education program for blacks. The President stated in a 1906 session of Congress, "The best type of education for the colored man, taken as a whole, is such education as is conferred in schools like Hampton and Tuskegee; where the boys and girls, the young men and women, are trained industrially as well as in the ordinary public school branches."[31] President Roosevelt was well aware that while an

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[29] Raymond Wolters, *The New Negro on Campus: Black College Rebellions of the 1920s* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), 193.
[30] Wolters, *The New Negro,* 194.
[31] Richardson, *A History of Fisk,* 58.

individual was the direct receptor of this education, that an individual's education had considerable consequence for the whole black population.

A report on Negro Education released by the US Bureau of Education in 1916 recommended that students focus on "adaptation to pupils and community" through courses in the "theory and practice of gardening," an increase in "simple manual training...[for] the economic but also the educational value of hand training," and a decrease in the "domination of foreign languages...[for] the colored schools are adhering to a tradition vast fading elsewhere."[32] Not only did the Bureau view a purely liberal curriculum as irrelevant to the black population, the national push towards applied research and a university system outdated a classical course for national policymakers.[33] Although many black leaders saw the classical course as the type of training all great Western civilizations were built upon, the national agenda supported the industrial model. Federal funds – appropriated through landmark legislation that increased the federal role in higher education – shaped the curriculum at black colleges and universities. As institutions in their infancy, some colleges with purely liberal arts aspirations had to concede to this influence in exchange for keeping their doors open.

The role of Northern philanthropists, as well as the US government, in contributing to the dialogue – and, by the nature of their relationship to them, the institutions themselves – around black education cannot be overstated. The necessity of white interaction with black educational institutions was undeniable. However, the complexity of their relationship to black education was, in part, due to the variance in what the education was meant to accomplish. The new conception of the country that arose from the Civil War demanded a social order to accompany it. For many, this meant providing blacks with an education that would equip them for a certain

[32] US Bureau of Education, *Negro Education Bulletin* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1917), 23.
[33] Urban and Wagoner, *American Education: A History*, 207.

type of second-class citizenship. Many philanthropists bowed down to a sense of practicality in executing their funding schemes. The institutions that had in place the most practical solutions to educating blacks, such as an industrial education program, did receive funding. If those plans were not already in place, philanthropists were willing to provide the funds to "diversify" a curriculum deemed "too literary."

The national agenda around black higher education seemed to support this ideology, especially after the passage of legislation that allowed the federal government to become a powerful financial player in education as a whole. However, Northern philanthropists were able to simultaneously hold onto divergent educational ideologies with respect to black education, supporting industrial training while encouraging the development of at least one "top" black liberal arts institution. The majority of these individuals saw black higher education as having vast implications for the entire race; because of these high stakes, many white donors felt responsible to become integral to the black college movement's progression.

Conclusion

The diverging thoughts, and the resulting tensions, around the issue of black education among white society were palpable. There were those that refused to acknowledge the need for blacks to be educated in any capacity, but most whites conceded that blacks, at the very least, should receive industrial training to increase their economic efficiency. Still others believed in the ability of blacks to excel to a level limited only by their individual – and not collective or racial – abilities. These individuals, motivated by various ethical, moral, or practical influences, were generally advocates of the liberal arts curriculum for blacks. Regardless of the educational program they advocated, however, three threads link these various thoughts together.

First, white society saw its role in black education as an integral component to its success of failure. Black autonomy in procuring their own education factored very little into the early years of black colleges. Secondly, white Americans involved in black education were well aware that higher education would only be possible for a few black Americans. With this in mind, whites understood the implications of the black individual's education on the entire race, which influenced the way in which they viewed various educational programs. Thirdly, white society saw education as a means to achieve a type of citizen. Blacks, through education, could be rolled into a national conception; however, it was up to the white individuals to define what this conception would be and how black citizenship would fit therein. These reactions were, in part, representative of larger trends to order society in such a way to increase the wellbeing of the entire country.

These threads influenced the way in which black individuals would define their relationship to their own educational institutions, in particular the black liberal arts institution. This institution carried immeasurable weight within black America as being something with implications unique to that specific population, although its foundation lay squarely on a largely Western educational philosophy. It was through the defining and discussing of this foundation, and how the liberal arts institution should embody it, by *black Americans themselves* that would be instrumental in how those involved in these institutions (the students in particular) viewed their roles and responsibilities to the black population.

CHAPTER TWO

"If we...would become an intellectual people...prejudice would be destroyed": Black Americans debate the liberal arts college

In 1875, Fisk University, which had been a nominal college struggling to teach the rudimentary foundations of education to former slaves less than a decade before, graduated its first class of college students. It was a small, but dedicated, group of four: James Dallas Burrus, John H. Burrus, Virginia E. Walker, and America W. Robinson. These were, reportedly, the first African American students to receive a Bachelors Degree in the South. While all of these students would go on to have careers, primarily in teaching and missionary work, two, the brothers Burrus, stand out for their continued relationship with the University. In 1915, James donated property valued at approximately $7,000 to Fisk; in 1928, James would give the University everything he owned as a final act of gratitude to the school that shaped him into the success he became.

The Burrus brothers, along with others who attended black liberal arts institutions, placed a high value on a classical training. "Show me a negro who can parse a Greek verb or go beyond the first equation in algebra," these brothers often heard from some white skeptics, "and I'll show you a man."[34] With those words in mind, John decided to study Greek and James, mathematics. As the sons of a slave and her white master, the Burrus brothers believed that education – and, in particular, a liberal arts education – was the key to success; they strove to embody that ideal throughout their lives.[35] This chapter will show how African Americans, like the Burrus brothers, viewed the liberal arts college and its role in uplifting blacks in the United States after the Civil War.

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[34] John C. Calhoun as quoted in Joe M. Richardson, *A History of Fisk University, 1865-1946* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2002), 44

[35] Richardson, *A History of Fisk*, 72.

Although the idea of a liberal arts college was not new to the United States in the period following the Civil War, the idea of the institution as it applied to African Americans – newly recognized as citizens of the United States – was indeed novel.[36] African Americans able to pursue a higher education represented a small cluster of the overall population. This is not to say that blacks had not been educated in institutions of higher education until Emancipation. Oberlin college in Ohio, for example, was open to black (and female) students from its founding in 1833. For emancipated African Americans after the Civil War, however, the idea of a liberal arts education, specifically, creating their own institutions, became an important component in exercising their freedom.

Importantly, African Americans helped to shape the meaning of liberal education for themselves after the Civil War. As black society was effectively separated from white through legal mechanisms,[37] black voices became integral in forming a black population, filled with its own internal triumphs and struggles. On a practical level, segregated black neighborhoods would require their own physicians, lawyers, and businessmen; with this most whites were willing to concede. However, black Americans envisioned liberal education as a tool through which to legitimize black American culture through educated leadership. Black voices were integral in garnering support for this latter effect. These voices set up debates that argued the spectrum of topics from the nature of higher education to the educational philosophy best suited towards rectifying "the Negro problem."[38]

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[36] Dwight Oliver Wendell Holmes, *The Evolution of the Negro College* (New York: Teacher's College Press, 1934), 200.

[37] In 1896, the landmark case of *Plessy v. Ferguson* upheld the constitutionality of the "separate but equal" concept in private and public affairs. This ruling remained the precedent in dealing with issues of race until *Brown v. The Board of Education* in 1954.

[38] Heather Andrea Williams, *Self-Taught: African American Education in Slavery and Freedom* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); Ambrose Caliver, *A personnel study of Negro college students* (New York: Teacher's College Press, 1931).

While the percentage of black individuals who attended higher education institutions was relatively small, the ramifications of college attendance were widely discussed precisely because education at all levels was perceived as having positive implications for *all* black Americans.[39] Analyzing black Americans collectively, however, can be problematic. This group of individuals was not homogenous by any means, varied through class, gender, religious and geographic considerations. As the nature of segregation during this period demanded for a separate *black* society, the racial terms of the black population will be the dominant source of analysis throughout the chapter. Furthermore, as both black and white Americans viewed black education as representative of progress (another problematic term) for the entire race, it is important to analyze the broader perspective of black Americans, as much as it can be analyzed collectively.

This chapter will highlight the competing views among black Americans as to the nature, and utility, of a liberal arts education for black students. This chapter will also analyze the speakers themselves – generally men writing in periodicals and delivering speeches or sermons – and their relationship with the public sphere of black America. Much like white Americans, blacks saw a liberal arts education as having a direct effect on the entire race, even if every one was not individually educated at such an advanced level. While white society desired to use education as a tool through which to create black citizens to be integrated within the existing social structure, African Americans saw higher education as the means to create the ideal black individual who would uplift his race to equality with whites. The black Americans highlighted in this chapter did not desire to merely assimilate into the existing white society. Instead, they saw black individuals – particularly those educated under a classical curriculum – as being a tool to legitimize their own culture within the larger context of the United States. The debate outlined in

[39]Holmes, *The Evolution of the Negro College*,200; "Chapter 2: Color or Race, Nativity, and Parentage," in the *Fifteenth Census of the United States – 1930 – Population*. United States Census Bureau. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC.

this chapter came from *within* black America and, ultimately, helped fortify the idea of collective gain that came to color the debates around black colleges.

Defining a liberal curriculum

Before we can examine the perspectives that influenced the black liberal arts college, we must dissect the term that is so integral to that concept: *the liberal arts*. The liberal arts curriculum has roots in the Renaissance and Reformation periods, placing emphasis on Greek and Latin as the foundations to "explorations [in] logic, rhetoric, ethics, metaphysics, astronomy, physics, and mathematics."[40] Originally adopted from the English college, the American brand of liberal arts had grown into its own during the colonial era, particularly in the New England states. With a strong focus on Christian instruction and discipline, the colonial college that dominated antebellum America sought to educate liberal—or free—men. These men were to become self-possessed leaders in the country's economic, political, and cultural affairs. Adopting this New England model, black liberal arts institutions aimed to institutionalize the same "unbounded faith in man [and] unquestioning belief in progress"[41] that characterized the most prestigious white institutions of the time.

At its core, a liberal education for blacks was grounded in the belief that this type of training was integral to human rights. The liberal arts were the means to create an ideal African-American leader: an individual who embodied the best of the Western educational tradition while simultaneously representing the black population. These institutions grappled with the practical reality of their segregated situation and were concerned with educating individuals that would be pillars of whatever black community they inhabited after graduation. The unique aspect of the black liberal arts institution, however, was that this education was not solely for the benefit

[40] Frederick Rudolph, "Legacy of the Revolution," in *The American College and University: A History* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1962), 25.
[41] Ibid, 67.

of the individual; rather, the entire black population shared the rewards of an individual's educational toil. By creating exceptional young black scholars – who would, in turn, become exceptional black leaders – the black liberal arts institution would be critical in dissuading long-held prejudices, a crucial factor in the larger program of uplift.

This ideal black individual was the result of a classical education, a sentiment echoed by African American educators who were passionate advocates of the liberal curriculum. In an August 2, 1883 edition of *The Christian Recorder,* a publication of the African Methodist Episcopal church,[42] Professor W.S. Scarborough of Wilberforce University wrote an article entitled "The Utility of Studying the Greek." In this article, Professor Scarborough asserted, "The student who fails to get the drill that Greek and Latin afford is rather poorly-equipped for the struggle of life."[43] To Scarborough, the classic languages were not only relevant to the black student prior to the turn of the century, they were requisite to live a well-equipped, free life. Scarborough continued: "Our deep thinkers and profound philosophers, orators and statesmen are - many of them - indebted to classical training for their outfit."[44] If the liberal arts institution was to create an ideal student – well equipped for the "struggles of life" – then the classics had to be a critical component of that curriculum. Of course, Scarborough did not suggest that Latin and Greek were necessary for every former slave to learn. Professor Scarborough, as well as most liberal arts advocates, was not arguing widespread dissemination of the Latin language. Rather, if the black race was to be equipped for the struggles that would come with freedom, they would need deep thinkers and statesmen; those individuals, Scarborough implied, must be the ones to receive the proper training.

[42] This periodical will also be referred to as *The Recorder* throughout this chapter.
[43] W.S. Scarborough, "The Utility of Studying the Greek," *The Christian Recorder,* August 2, 1883.
[44] Ibid.

Another writer highlighted that "the culture demanded in any course of liberal education [calls for] careful consideration of the questions...what is man? and what is the true philosophy of human life?"[45] To this writer, the liberal arts institution was a space in which the mind was exercised to reach its fullest potential. Still, others found in the conception of the liberal arts institution a platform to take hold of what had once been denied them and, ultimately, achieve equality with whites. In another article in *The Recorder*, the writer lamented the lowered expectations he saw at some institutions, seemingly for the "benefit of colored youth," as "a mistaken view and derogatory to his true manhood."[46] It is important to note that this writer, like the writers mentioned previously, viewed education as a sign – or a means to – defining "manhood." This is not an exclusively masculine definition, but rather, a nod to the humanist threads found in the history of the liberal arts institution.[47] Through education, young black men and women would realize their own human potential and thus enhance the entire black community. This potential was grounded in the liberal curriculum.

It was, in fact, that same ideology that another writer called attention to in the article entitled "Our Educational Methods and Success" published in 1887. While education did indeed validate the individual, its truly transformative properties lay in its implications for all black Americans:

> An uneducated person works without the proper place...therefore in the true work of life, education is one of the greatest benefits that can be conferred upon an average, one educated person will benefit a thousand others, and that two enlightened cries will help ten thousand in the duty of serving God and our fellowmen.[48]

The entire race would be the recipient of the liberal arts education, benefitting from the dividends of individual's academic pursuits.

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[45] -----, "University Education as a Foundation for Life's Work," *The Christian Recorder*, December 23, 1875.
[46] Rev. Dr. Tanner, "The Same Standards for White and Colored," *The Christian Recorder*, February 15, 1883.
[47] Rudolph, "Legacy of the Revolution."
[48] -----,"Our Educational Methods and Successes," *The Christian Recorder*, March 3, 1887.

Charles W. Chesnutt, a graduate of Fisk University and a public speaker on a myriad of issues surrounding "the Negro problem," put the same sentiment of the racial benefits of an individual's education in a different framework. In his speech entitled "The Future of the Negro" delivered in 1881, Chesnutt explained, "in every country, the men who have the intelligence, the will, the education, the money – will rule – by fair means or foul. We may talk of our rights, but we can never enjoy them in full, till we are ready to maintain them."[49] The goal of a liberal education, according to Chestnutt, was to be able to secure and maintain rights for the African American population: this would be a collective gain. However, Chesnutt does not say "we" will rule; rather, he changed the wording to "the men," meaning the individuals who will rule *with* the permission of the black population. In either conception, the liberal arts institution was meant to directly educate a few but, ultimately, benefit the entire race.

W.E.B. Du Bois became the popular embodiment of this sentiment in his now famous essay "The Talented Tenth." In this essay, in part a response to Booker T. Washington's economic and educational philosophy outlined in what came to be known as "The Atlanta Compromise of 1895," Du Bois highlighted the need for the race to be "saved by its exceptional men." The exceptional were then to "guide the Mass away from the contamination and death of the Worst, in their own and other races." In a theme that was highlighted by other writers, Du Bois was keen to introduce the concept of manhood as a result of education: "Men we shall have only as we make manhood the object of the work of the schools—intelligence, broad sympathy, knowledge of the world that was and is, and of the relation of men to it—this is the curriculum of that Higher Education which must underlie true life." Du Bois was directly calling for the replication of the liberal arts institution for blacks because of its historic correlation to creating

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[49] Charles W. Chesnutt, "The Future of the Negro," presented in Fayetteville, NC, 1881 in *Charles W. Chestnutt: Essays and Speeches*, ed. by Joseph R. McElrath, Jr. et al. (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1999), 24-33.

free men and, as a result, promoting progress. However, the educational aspirations for black Americans, "must first of all deal with the Talented Tenth; it is the problem of developing the Best of this race."[50] The "best" would become a subset of the overall black community, occupying a quasi-meritocratic leadership therein.[51] These individuals must be tended to first, according to Du Bois, if the race was to finally shed its slave status for one ready for full equality.

With these realities of the liberal arts colleges in mind, we can move forward and see, specifically, how this particular black institution was discussed among blacks. Two primary outlets serve as the platforms for debate: the black press and speeches given by black individuals. The black press in particular was influential in giving public space for black intellectuals and laborers alike to discuss issues regarding the advancement of the race. Higher education for blacks was a constant point of contention and debate, due in as much part to the fact that newspapers were frequently operated under or in conjunction with black education tycoons as the close relationship education and progress had in the minds of many African Americans. Booker T. Washington, industrial-education advocate, owned several newspapers, including the *New York Age*; furthermore, he found support in some of the more conservatively minded newspapers throughout the country. Du Bois also had allies in the press, including Boston's *The Guardian,* edited by William Monroe Trotter, as well as his own *Crisis*. Regardless of the agenda of a particular newspaper, the black press saw itself as "a means of unifying and leading African

[50] W.E.B. Du Bois, "The Talented Tenth," in *The Negro Problem* (University Park, Penn.: The Pennsylvania State University, 2007), 13 accessed from http://www.hn.psu.edu/faculty/jmanis/webDu Bois/TheNegroProblem.pdf.
[51] William Gatewood Jr., "The Education of the Elite," in *Aristocrats of Color: The Black Elite, 1880-1920.* (Fayetteville, Arkansas: University of Arkansas Press, 1990).

Americans toward the goals of self-determinism and social justice,"[52] making its inclusion critical in the following discussion about black Americans' views on the liberal arts institution.

Looking primarily at black newspapers and speeches given by black individuals, individuals spoke of providing leaders for three crucial spheres of black life: the moral, the professional, and the spiritual. These three spheres were the areas in which individuals saw the liberal arts college as being able to achieve certain community goals. Each of the aforementioned relationships will be examined in the following analysis.

Changing perceptions of blacks through the liberal arts

Building upon the historical function of the liberal arts institution, the black American adaptation was concerned with creating men and women of character. These young men and women would then serve as representations of black achievement to white society, with the ultimate goal of dispelling misconceptions about black inferiority. In an article from June 21, 1867 published in the San Francisco based African-American periodical *The Elevator*, one writer commented, "All agree if we, as a people, could or would become an intellectual people that prejudice would be destroyed."[53] Prejudice, seen as the result of ignorance, could effectively be eradicated through intellectual cultivation. "Prejudice remains the barrier to political and social progress," the author continued. "We propose to undermine the tower of ignorance by establishing an institution for...education."[54] The author was not speaking about educating those with prejudices; rather, he suggested that blacks could "undermine" prejudice by educating themselves, effectively changing the perceptions of those who discriminated against them.

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[52] Clint Wilson, *The Black Press* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: ProQuest Information and Learning, 2006).
[53] ----, *The Elevator*, June 21, 1867 in *The Black Press, 1827-1890: The Quest for National Identity*, by Martin E. Dann (New York, Capricorn Books, 1972, 345.
[54] Ibid.

Other liberal arts advocates of course, echoed this strategy. Du Bois saw the black liberal arts institution as a tool to train those individuals most suited to advance the race. "Can the masses of the Negro people," Du Bois mused, "be in any possible way more quickly raised than by the effort and example of this aristocracy of talent and character?"[55] Du Bois answered his own question with an emphatic no, leaving only "the Talented Tenth [to rise] and [pull] all that are worth the saving up to their vantage ground. This is the history of human progress."[56] Both Du Bois and the writer in *The Elevator* article pointed to the same process: bright, black youth achieving racial equality through education, not just as exceptions but representations of the entire race. Furthermore, both men placed the brunt of the burden on black Americans to lift themselves up. Those unwilling to do so were, as implied by Du Bois and the *Elevator* writer, doing themselves and the race a disservice. The acquisition of this character would erode prejudice and the race would be "saved" by these select members of the black population.

Some individuals thought that the moral development component of the liberal arts institution had been achieved. "Has the negro advanced any since he has been free, or in other words, is his condition any better now than when a slave?" one writer asked in an article of *The Christian Recorder* in 1883. "We don't need glasses to see the absurdity of this question."[57] The individual black man had made great strides towards "progress," a term that the writer does not go on to define in concrete terms. It can be reasonably assumed, though, that progress was a desirable, albeit nebulous, goal. Another writer claimed in 1885, "we, as a race, have shown to the world...that we are fully capable of advancing from the rear to the foremost lines of

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[55] Du Bois, "The Talented Tenth," accessed from http://www.hn.psu.edu/faculty/jmanis/webDu Bois/TheNegroProblem.pdf.
[56] Ibid.
[57] ------, "Men and Things," *The Christian Recorder*, July 5, 1883.

educational development."[58] Blacks were not only recognizing their own advancement, but white society soon took notice: "No Negroes have won more approval from the best Southern whites than those trained for years in such schools and churches. Their industry, intelligence, thrift, good sense and high principle are as a rule conceded."[59] To these individuals, the ideals of the educational institution had been or were, at the very least, in the process of being achieved. The black liberal arts institution had the possibility of transforming the political realm through creating black men and women of character. Thus educated, these individuals would then be instrumental in changing the negative perceptions of blacks among white members of society.

The liberal arts education could – and would – be used to acculturate those lucky enough to attend a premiere black liberal arts institution. While it was important for the continued presence of these institutions for black Americans to see the institution as integral in achieving progress, it was even more critical for these institutions to prove their legitimacy in upholding the values black America believed the college's cultivated. The primary way in which these institutions could affect how the nation, both black and white, saw their progress was through the use of ceremony that publicized these individual achievements.

Ceremonies, particularly graduation exercises or recitations performed by black students at liberal arts institutions, left an impression on the black and white individuals in attendance. A reporter for *The Recorder* noticed the impressions of whites at a Fisk graduation ceremony in 1886: "The graduates did themselves and the race (and the school) credit…Those institutions in and about Nashville have created quite a thirst for learning among the inhabitants and the good effects can be seen in the daily life and general bearing of the people."[60] Furthermore, the praise of a white observer visiting a black liberal arts institution in the South went far in advancing the

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[58] ------, "Educational Development as Seen by the Negro Race," *The Christian Recorder,* November 5, 1885.
[59] ----, "Discussions at Northhampton," *The Christian Recorder,* November 27, 1890.
[60] -----, "A Flying Trip to Nashville and Two Items of Interest," *The Christian Recorder,* June 17, 1886.

goals of the black liberal arts college. After a trip to Nashville in the Spring of 1894, one such observer noted:

> Those not friendly to this work confessed that Mons. Capel told them he had never seen such work in Greek and Latin, at Harvard, Yale or elsewhere in America, as he saw when the Greek and Latin classes of Fisk University recited to him. He as a distinguished teacher of these branches to the nobility of Europe, having naturally been invited to hear these classes when visiting Fisk.[61]

These ceremonies – college graduation or examinations observed during a class visit – allowed black students to be on display to their white patronage, as well as black observers, with the goal of showing the great progress of the race. Progress was shown through mastery of a classical education, which, in turn, provided legitimacy to the institutions that provided that education.

Liberal arts and the Professions

If there was ever any consensus as to the effects of a liberal arts education, it existed around the program's ability to develop character in young scholars. But the debate diverged when it came to the role of liberal arts and the professional world. This divergence was in no small part due to the economic implications of being a "professional." Some individuals believed that a liberal arts training was requisite to create the best black professional. Others believed that for all the proposed benefits of the liberal arts education, it only served to ignite hopes that the economic realities for black could not match; therefore, it was better to abandon the liberal arts curriculum for one that more adequately prepared blacks for their immediate needs. Although professional training became increasingly ingrained into the world of academia into the twentieth century, at the time of Fisk's formative years, professional training still occurred primarily through apprenticeships, not formal education. These debates around professional education

[61] -----, "A Rising Race," *The Christian Recorder,* August 2, 1894.

occurred within this history of informal professional education when it was possible to become a professional without a degree declaring one to be so.[62]

The relationship between the professions and the college course was so important that it was widely debated in American society at the turn of the century. Abraham Flexner, author of the influential 1910 report on the state of medical schools in the U.S., reasoned that even though "the relation of college education to specific professional or vocational competency is still under dispute," medical schools should require, at a minimum, two years of college training "in which the sciences are 'featured'."[63] Flexner's report had a monumental impact on the future of medical schools for all Americans, black students included. It was in this report that Flexner sealed Meharry Medical College in Nashville, along with Howard University Medical School in Washington DC, as the preeminent schools of medical training for African Americans. "The upbuilding of Howard and Meharry will profit the nation much more than the inadequate maintenance of a larger number of schools,"[64] Flexner foretold. Flexner's emphasis that individuals must be adequately prepared prior to entering medical school would reverberate throughout the professional world. African Americans in favor of the liberal arts saw these institutions as well positioned to provide the training men like Flexner suggested. Black liberal arts colleges were attune to these debates and often incorporated a sizable professional training program into their program offerings, such as teacher training at Fisk and pre-medicine preparation at Lincoln University in Pennsylvania.

One article representing the pro-liberal arts position appeared in *The Elevator* and advocated that blacks "creat[e] among ourselves a great moral, intellectual, and commercial

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[62] Michael Burrage and Torstendahl, Rolf, *Professions in Theory and History: Rethinking the study of the Professions* (London: Sage Publications, 1990).
[63] Abraham Flexner, *Medical Education in the United States and Canada: A Report to the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching* (New York: The Carnegie Foundation, 1910), 23, 26.
[64] Flexner, *Medical Education in the United States and Canada*, 181.

center that will conduce to independence, wealth, happiness, and respectability."[65] The ability of a classical course to create moral and intellectual centers was entrenched within the traditional pro-liberal arts rhetoric. However, the commercial center concept this journalist mentioned flirted with the ideas espoused by Booker T. Washington, the public antithesis to the black liberal arts ideology. This journalist's sentiments demonstrated that these ideologies did not need to conflict for some. To these individuals, the only way to create a sturdy economic foundation was to create a liberally educated professional.

John D. Lewis, the first practicing African American lawyer in Philadelphia, was the embodiment of the powerful convergence of liberal training, professional practice, community support, and economic advancement. Lewis was trained at Boston Law School, a predominantly white institution. Although not educated at a black institution, the importance of Lewis's case was indicative of what could and *should* be taught at a black institution of similar structure. In fact, Lewis's example points out the perceived benefits to the race – such as black professionals providing economic solvency to a local African American community – if such an institutional model were adapted for, operated by, and accessible to other black individuals.

"We find," began an article written about Lewis, "that the assistance given in Mr. Lewis's behalf is not the first act in which he has thrown the whole weight of his influence for the advancement of the colored race…"[66] The interaction between Lewis and the local black population in Philadelphia was reciprocal, for as much as Lewis represented the potential of the black race – as "[t]hese individual successes are important and go far to make up our national progress"[67] – the community also had the responsibility of giving Lewis "an unselfish welcome

[65] J.J. Moore, "-----," *The Elevator*, May 5, 1865 in *The Black Press, 1827-1890.*
[66] -----, "Our Colored Lawyer," *The Christian Recorder,* March 30, 1876.
[67] Ibid.

among our people."[68] This relationship was representative of what another writer in *The Recorder* envisioned when writing in 1885, "our choice of what is to be taught should originate from our knowledge of what is and will be most useful to the instructed and the good effect it will have upon the surrounding community."[69] The liberal arts, combined with professional training, as Mr. Lewis' example shows, were useful for the surrounding community. The liberal arts could create other successful professionals, as it had done for Lewis. As summarized by a writer in *The Gazette*, "[t]o make a professional man, it is absolutely necessary that the person have the best collegiate education possible … which does not mean simply finishing the High School."[70] John Lewis was a testament to that ideal "professional man."

However, other members of black America were not as convinced of the benefits of using a liberal arts education to achieve professional success. A writer for *The Peoples Advocate* reasoned that, "while the whites may be in a condition to foster academical [sic] training and to require those mental luxuries it will not be doubted that the colored people as a class are not quite ready for it."[71] In the same article, the writer went on to question the immediate necessity of black liberal arts institutions: "When the masses become intelligent through the medium of Normal and Industrial Schools there will be a sufficient number whose natural bent will incline them to the higher grades of intellectual culture to fill all the colleges of the South, white or black or both."[72] To this writer, it was industrial, overtly professional training first, with the eventual formation of a liberal or "higher" education college.

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[68] Ibid.
[69] -----, "Education, Educators, and the Educated", *The Christian Recorder*, September 10, 1885.
[70] -----, *The Gazette,* Cleveland, September 1, 1883 in *The Black Press.*
[71] -----, *The People's Advocate*, Washington DC, February 18, 1882 in *The Black Press.*
[72] Ibid.

Another writer of *The Arkansas Freeman* agreed with the sentiment, stating in 1869 that a "plow made by a black man, tells us more than a hundred first-class speeches."[73] This writer was pointing out the seeming vanity of educating individuals in a liberal arts background: prepared to give "first-class speeches," but unable to tow a plow. These individuals saw the liberal arts institution as necessary *only after* adequate gains had been made in the agricultural and industrial education of African Americans. These attitudes were represented in the simple creed: professions now, classics later.

A writer for *The Globe* expressed similar concern that questioned the utility of the liberal arts institution:

> The flowery education, the education which develops the mental but neglects the physical man, is not what we need most at this time. Colleges for higher education are good things and necessary, but they presuppose by their existence conditions auxiliary and consonant, conditions of the highest civilization which give encouragement and support to the polished man. College preparation presupposes conditions such as do not obtain among us; hence the large number of educated failures among us...[74]

This writer in particular highlighted a critical distinction when discussing the professions: the difference between a "polished" professional and a professional laborer. Individuals within black America who saw the immediate reality of blacks as that of a professional laborer often advocated for the industrial training that would be most useful and accessible to the vast majority of blacks. However, both types of professionals had economic implications for the race and both were discussed in relationship to the liberal arts institution.

Educating the clergy

Not limited only to the aforementioned spheres of black life, the classical college was also linked to another pillar of black America: the church. To many, the question of whether or not the clergy should be educated was moot; as leaders of local black communities, individuals

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[73] -----, *The Arkansas Freeman*, Little Rock, October 5, 1869 in *The Black Press*.
[74] *The Globe*, New York, December 15, 1883

expected those in the church to be among the highly educated. By 1916, 441 blacks students were enrolled in special ministerial programs offered by 14 colleges, as compared to the 792 black students enrolled in medicine (including dentistry and pharmaceutical studies) and the 106 in law school.[75] Second in conferring degrees only to those in the medical field, the liberal arts institution was the means to create that educated spiritual leader. Given the roots of the liberal curriculum, expectations of spiritual guidance were not far off the mark. These demands for an educated clergy were most often made by the denominational organizations that founded the institutions. The significance of the church – and the call for widespread education – made the intersection of the church and the college all the more interesting.[76]

The work of Carter G. Woodson in *The Mis-Education of the Negro* (1938) provides a framework to view how black individuals at this time saw the relationship between the church and education. Woodson attested that the "Negro church is the only institution that the race controls."[77] The fact that the "'highly educated' Negroes have turned away from the people in the churches" was, to Woodson, only indicative of "[o]ne of the most striking evidences of the failure of higher education among Negroes…[they are] estrange[d] from the masses." Looking at the discussions of the liberal arts and religion, it is important to keep this critique in mind: black colleges and universities separated, instead of unified, the highly educated from the masses. Or, as Woodson expressed it, "the gap between the masses and the 'talented tenth' is rapidly widening."[78]The precursor to Woodson's claims of separation are found in the writings of those involved in the church, specifically the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) that supported Wilberforce University and published in *The Christian Recorder*.

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[75] US Bureau of Education, *Negro Education Bulletin* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1917), 17.
[76] Urban and Wagoner, "Class, Caste, and Education in the South: 1800-1900," in *American Education*, 141-184.
[77] Carter G. Woodson, "The Educated Negro" in *The Mis-Education of the Negro* (Washington DC: Associated Publishers, Inc.,1933), 57.
[78] Quotes from Woodson, "The Educated Negro," in *Mis-Education of the Negro*, 52-53.

In an article entitled "An Educated Ministry" published in 1883, the writer stated, "The fact is already established beyond the shadow of doubt that an educated ministry is a necessity, aye, imperatively demanded among us as a people."[79] Theology was seen as of equal importance to the other traditional subjects that comprised the liberal curriculum, as the following article confirmed:

> In poetry we may take Homer, Virgil, Dante, Shakespeare and Milton. In philosophy - Plato, Aristotle, Lord Bacon, Locke and Hamilton In theology - Baxter, Welsey, Clark and Watson, or any other good theological work, but above all, we are to understand our own considered in its relation to our faith and doctrine. The pulpit must keep ahead of the pew. Our students are expected to take the Bible with the master commentators of exegesis and study it with such helps in the sciences as will enable them to cope with the best pulpits in the land.[80]

The clergy – or whoever would be delivering a sermon come Sunday morning – should be the brightest individual in the room, able to converse on any subject with any member of the laity; or, in the writer's own words, "keep ahead of the pew." In keeping ahead of the pew, the aforementioned writers must have assumed, or seen from their own experience, that the pew was becoming more educated. "The people composing our churches and congregations are rapidly advancing in knowledge," one writer stated in 1877. "They ask reasonably enough that they who are sent to them as ministers should be respectably qualified for the work."[81] These writings hint to what Woodson would declare some sixty years in the future: the highly educated wanted highly educated leaders. If the congregation could not find ministers who were "respectably qualified," their relationship to the church would change; and, as Woodson accused, not necessarily for the better.

Perhaps out of a desire towards institutional preservation on the part of church, or a desire to create a more educated population through the positive effects of uplift, the relationship

[79] -----,"An Educated Ministry," *The Christian Recorder,* August 16, 1883.
[80] -----, "Our Colleges," *The Christian Recorder,* June 22, 1893.
[81] -----, "The cause of Education among us," *The Christian Recorder,* January 11, 1877.

between the pulpit and the liberal arts lectern was one that was very much on the minds of the denominational groups that helped develop black colleges and universities. African Americans desired to control their own institutions, as these institutions were crucial in the development of a local black community. The preacher, by nature of his leadership position among African Americans, wielded a great degree of power; it was in the interest of blacks throughout the country that he be college-bred.

Conclusion

The image of the black liberal arts college was grounded in an ideal. The discussions around that ideal are representative of the competing ways black America viewed the institutions that would produce future black leaders. The debates around the idea of higher education for the race reinforced black Americans as a distinct, if not entirely unified, group within America. In the writings highlighted here, the discussion no longer was one centered on outside forces fixing race problems, but rather, an internal push to define the terms of the problems themselves. In some ways, this act of creating the discussion was as important as the ideas being shared.

The black press, when speaking of black educational institutions fostered unity by creating recognizable themes and heroes that pointed to a larger black ideology, irrespective of economic class, religious sect, or geographical boundary. An article published in *The Kansas Herald* complained that, "[t]he colored people will never amount to anything so long as they refuse to combine"[82]: this was particularly true in supporting higher education institutions.

Even though race was used as a means of discrimination in the United States, it was also the thread that allowed individuals within black America to celebrate progress: "the progress which the Negro has made in spite of these almost insurmountable obstacles is something

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[82] "-----," *The Kansas Herald,* Topeka, Kansas, February 20, 1880 in *The Black Press.*

wonderful," wrote a writer for the *Sentinel.* "...No black man can look upon it without pride and confidence in the ultimate future of his race. The Negro is advancing. Although not yet up to the world's standard of civilization and enlightenment, he is advancing toward it with giant strides."[83] In sharing these perceptions of progress, writers were able to simultaneously convince black America of the progress already made while encouraging them to continue on in their efforts. A liberal education was seen as a chief component of progress. These black periodicals served to show African Americans that, although the educational debate raged on around them, they, as a people, were better for it. The debate was worthwhile if only for that simple fact.

The nature of the debates around the black education helped bolster the ideological frameworks that provided legitimacy to these institutions. There were varied perspectives on the effectiveness of the liberal arts curriculum in supporting progress, but the tone of most of the periodicals during this period was one of hope – or at least a sense of possibility at the progress already made on behalf of blacks seeking quality education. "There is nothing seen nor heard at the present time that promises more in the immediate future, than the mighty roar of intellectual waters,"[84] one writer boasted in 1885. And as Du Bois aptly noted, "the college-bred Negro...is, as he ought to be, the group leader, the man who sets the ideals of the community where he lives, directs its thoughts and heads its social movements."[85] Transcending economic, denominational, and geographic boundaries, the liberal arts institution was expected to create black leaders to advance the entire race. How these leaders were created, how they envisioned their relationship to black America, and the change from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century in both of these processes will be described in the next chapter.

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[83] "-----," *The Sentinel*, Trenton, New Jersey, June 26, 1880 in *The Black Press*.
[84] -----, "Education, Educators, and the Educated," *The Christian Recorder,* September 10, 1885.
[85] Du Bois, "The Talented Tenth," accessed from http://www.hn.psu.edu/faculty/jmanis/webDu Bois/TheNegroProblem.pdf.

CHAPTER THREE

"We must cultivate an original style": Examining late 19th and early 20th century Fisk students

So far, this thesis has examined how white and black individuals discussed black liberal arts colleges on a national scale. This broad perspective is necessary to understand how these institutions operated within their historical contexts, but it is equally important to view the processes at specific institutions. Looking specifically at Fisk University in Nashville, TN (from the perspectives of its administration, students, and alumni), this chapter will examine how this particular university balanced the aforementioned forces to create their own identity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. While all of these various actors had a role in the formation of norms and traditions at the University, the Fisk students in particular are of interest, both in their on- and off-campus ties. Although these students have always been critical to Fisk's success, their relationship to the institution has shifted from grassroots groups of African-American professionals to an organized group of comrades, known as "Fiskites." By examining how the ideological currents of the time manifested themselves within the University, this chapter highlights the formation, and continued adaptation, of the influential, although increasingly isolated, population of students at Fisk.

With two powerful forces laying ideological claim on the product of the black liberal arts institution – philanthropists desiring to, at most, create a black individual that could be successfully integrated within the existing social structure of the United States and, at the very least, placate white Southern interests, while black intellectuals saw an opportunity to define, and create, an identity – the reality for black students lay somewhere in between these conceptions. As the first two chapters demonstrate, a large portion of the debate around higher education for black Americans was concerned with how the individuals who received the education would fit within the country; the debate focused on the "products" – the students – of these colleges and

universities. Whether influenced by Northern philanthropists or black intellectuals (or the various other players whose educational philosophy as a mix of these two), black colleges were expected to produce one thing: black leaders for black America. These men and women were to form the pillars of black America's economic, political, and spiritual organization. In order to accomplish this, those involved with Fisk would have to successfully emulate the roles they were expected to perform off campus. As the black leadership class these individuals were expected to embody had no tradition on which to stand upon in the United States, they would have to construct methods of communication and interaction on campus that had not previously existed.

As more young scholars graduated from Fisk, however, their relationship to the larger black population in America began to shift subtly. Although the focus was still on maintaining leadership for the betterment of the entire race, liberally-educated Fiskites began to organize themselves in ways that stressed their connections to each other based on their shared experiences, both inside and out of Fisk. The leadership roles grew to include social components between members of Fisk themselves. Historian Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz rightly surmised that young men and women, faced with the liberating and daunting campus scene, have asked themselves: "Where do I fit?"[86] Fisk students have always asked themselves this question as well, generally with respect to their place in the larger black population. A new question of where Fiskites fit on-campus with each other began to pop up, not to supplant the original question but to supplement it. This social dimension – with its emphasis on friendships developed during the undergraduate career and the traditions unique to Fisk – would be critiqued by some and embraced by others of this insular group.[87]

[86] Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, *Campus Life* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), 17.
[87] The goal of this chapter is not to provide a history of Fisk University; several works much larger than this do a thorough job of outlining the work of Fisk from its commencement to the present. Rather, this chapter aims to look

Forming Fisk: Efforts to instill a service-ethos among students through leadership

Starting any organization for the advancement of black Americans was no easy task in the aftermath of the Civil War. Racial caste systems and de facto segregation (later to become law) colored the atmosphere in Nashville when Fisk opened its doors. With the election of President Rutherford B. Hayes in 1876, and the national Compromise of 1877, the federal government effectively washed its hands of the South, leaving many ex-Confederates, and those sympathetic to their position on racial segregation, in charge of the region. This, of course, had negative consequences for blacks fighting for full recognition of citizenship. The outlook for any organization supporting advancement for blacks in the South was bleak.

In spite of these ominous obstacles, three leaders of the American Missionary Association (AMA), supported by the United Church of Christ, established Fisk in 1866. This formal establishment was the continuation of years of work on the part of both African Americans and whites in Nashville, a city that was making a name for itself within the South as a mecca for education.[88] In 1873, Fisk University moved to its present location in north Nashville. The University experienced a period of impressive expansion, aided, in part, by the efforts of the now famous Fisk Jubilee Singers. The Singers toured domestically and abroad, performing Negro spirituals that brought them, and their University, acclaim.

Several influential leaders and ideas, along with the growing importance of the Jubilee Singers, shaped these formative years at Fisk University. Erastus Milo Cravath, a white abolitionist and one of the AMA members who had founded the school, would serve as Fisk's President from 1875 until his death in 1900. During this time, Fisk became the embodiment of

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at how the black individuals who had some connection to Fisk situated themselves within the aforementioned differing views on the role of the black liberal arts institution.

[88] Crystal DeGregory, *Raising a Nonviolent Army: Four Nashville Black Colleges and the Century-Long Struggle for Civil Rights, 1830s to 1930s*, PhD diss., Vanderbilt University, 2011.

what it meant to be a black liberal arts college, due in no small part to the "strong-willed and authoritarian"[89] nature of President Cravath. Under Cravath's leadership, Fisk experienced a period of growth, both academically and physically: the institution began to build impressive halls and dormitories fitting of a real college. It was also in 1875 that Fisk graduated its first college class of students. Although only a class of four, this initial accomplishment was critical in Fisk's history of success. Table 1 shows the number of Bachelors Degrees conferred by Fisk University from 1875 to 1911, in relation to the number of Bachelors Degrees earned by black students throughout the country. In spite of the racial discrimination students at Fisk received in a region hostile to their very presence, Fisk students were achieving what had previously been deemed impossible.

Table 1. Number of Bachelors Degrees Conferred

Period	Fisk University	Other Black Colleges	Other Colleges
Before 1875	0	68	186
1875-1879	12	102	190
1880-1884	25	211	282
1885-1889	45	328	456
1890-1894	53	354	534
1895-1899	62	449	595
1900-1904	76	599	652
1905-1909	116	733	961
1910-1911	53		

Data comes from College-Bred Negro American, pg. 45;50-51 by W.E.B. Du Bois and Black Higher Education and the American Labor Market: A Century at Fisk University, pg. 23-24 by Madhavi Venkatesan

Faced with the challenge of organizing those of African heritage into a collective entity that the entire institution of slavery sought to break down, the advocates of the liberal arts institution saw a classical education as the means to create and legitimize a culture for themselves.[90] The relationship between a classical education and a particular idea of cultivation or class did not originate with the black liberal arts institution: this ideology was adopted from

[89] Joe M. Richardson, *A History of Fisk University, 1865-1946* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2002).
[90] John Earnest, "Cities on the Hill: Organizing Communities" in *A Nation within a Nation: Organizing African American Communities Before the Civil War* (Lanham, Maryland: Ivan R. Dee Publishers), 3-28.

the New England college model. This deliberate relationship between the colonial college and the black liberal arts institution was not lost on the students at Fisk; rather, it was accepted and celebrated as the students continued their studies.

One writer for the earlier editions of *The Fisk Herald*, the monthly periodical published by literary societies at the institution, wrote about the responsibility of the Fisk students with respect to their education and their race. This responsibility was grounded in the idea of the New England College:

> [We must] secure intelligence and annihilate that ignorance to which is now threatening the very foundations of our institutions...Let us follow in the walks of New England and cap every hilltop with the school-house, the citadel of America's liberty.[91]

Like their early Northern counterparts, students at Fisk saw themselves as a beacon to other African Americans, charged with bettering those who were not afforded the same opportunities. Because Fisk students were expected to lead the taxing task of "uplift," the very best the race had to offer needed to make up their ranks. This mentality was mirrored in the Fisk University mission, expressed as "an attempt to give to a carefully selected student body an education essential in quantity and equal in quality to that provided by the best university colleges of the country."[92] These ideals were articulated by University administration and embodied by Fisk students and faculty.

It was critical for the individuals connected to Fisk to accomplish this process of uplift through taking on roles of leadership and cultivation *within* the Nashville black community while on campus. Because students were encouraged to take on these roles while at Fisk, they developed similar notions of leadership and service that would influence them far beyond the

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[91] J. Levy, "The Spirit that Shuold [sic] Accompany our Institutions", July 1891, The Fisk Herald
[92] Thomas E. Jones, "Aims of the University," in *Progress of Fisk University: A Summary of Recent Years* (Nashville: Fisk University, 1930).

campus quad. These students were actively engaged in constructing and organizing black individuals with the focus of creating a community identity that had not previously existed, using the New England college as a model. The Early Fiskites were concerned, in an academic and moral sense, with this type of community organization.

One of the chief ways in which Fisk students sought to engage – and, in so engaging, practice the leadership roles they were expected to inhabit – the surrounding community was through creating literary societies. Literary societies were familiar features in the majority of colleges that existed in antebellum and postbellum America. These societies produced a large number of the most influential men of America's early years. Generally, these societies engaged in debates, collected libraries, and read and wrote literature and literary journals. The young men that were members of these societies often debated each other and were judged based on eloquence, logic, and passion embodied in their individual speeches.[93] In addition to these campus-based societies, African Americans had developed their own distinctive literary societies in free-black communities throughout the North and South.[94] In keeping with the emphasis of fashioning a black college based on early American college traditions (and the presence of literary societies among the free black elite), Fisk developed its own literary societies, whose main responsibility was to publish the *Fisk Herald* monthly.

Unlike the traditional societies found at predominantly white institutions, Fisk's societies saw themselves as integral in creating a sense of identity among blacks in Nashville. As writer Margaret M. Jackson of the *Herald* stated, these societies were there to help blacks "cultivate an

[93] Thomas S. Harding, "College Literary Societies: Their Contribution to the Development of Academic Libraries, 1815-76," in *The Library Quarterly* 29 (1959), 94-112.
[94] Elizabeth McHenry, Forgotten Readers: Recovering the Lost History of African American Literary Societies, Duke University Press, Durham, 2002.

original style, copy[ing] the good English of the Anglo-Saxon but not his style."[95] The students at Fisk adamantly maintained that their paper should represent more than a mere retelling of events. Deemed to be much more than a "news sheet," the *Herald* writers, and the literary societies that saw the paper to fruition each month, believed they had "a higher mission than to chronicle a few daring thefts, atrocious murders, unpalatable scandals, and the like." The *Herald* encouraged its readers to follow suit and "set their ideal higher."[96] These literary societies, and their combined creation of a literary journal in the form of the *Herald*, further expressed their belief in the "need [for] eloquent orators to tell our needs and depict our wrongs."[97]

Although the societies' main responsibility was to print the *Herald* monthly, they also carried out other activities. They held debates on wide-ranging, and often political, topics, created libraries for public consumption, and encouraged moral piety within the student body.[98] By taking on roles that promoted community-building activities of moral and academic emphasis, literary societies in the early years of Fisk were an important feature of the Fisk mission acted out.

As membership within the literary societies was voluntary, not every student chose to participate. However, all students, regardless of their direct involvement within these literary societies, were expected to act in a manner that promoted the goals of the Fisk mission. William R. Morris, deemed a "typical Fiskite" by the *Herald* due in as much part to his professional heterogeneity as lawyer, orator, and teacher in Minneapolis as his success in all three, wrote about his impression of a Fisk student in his correspondence with the *Herald*:

> The students are cognizant of the fact that their efforts are being watched with interest by the thinking people of this country, and that upon them largely

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[95] Margaret M. Jackson, "Why we have no literature", *The Fisk Herald,* Nashville, Tennessee, Sept. 1890.
[96] -----, "Higher Ideal," *The Fisk Herald,* Sept. 1890.
[97] Jackson, "Why we have no literature."
[98] Richardson, *A History of Fisk University,* 153-154.

depends the shaping of the history of their people on this continent.[99]

All Fisk students, regardless of their standing with any number of organizations offered at Fisk during this time, were aware of their greatest responsibility while enrolled: embodying, for the entire country as well as for themselves, the role of black intellectual to the benefit of the entire black population. In their 1910 publication on college-educated black Americans, W.E.B. Du Bois and Augustis Dill concluded, "these five thousand Negro college graduates...have been of great service in lifting the moral, social, and the economic tone of the American people."[100] Fisk students were, no doubt, aware of these expectations and behaved accordingly. Much like the students who attended the New England college they emulated, the tone of the students at Fisk during the early years was one of somber acceptance of a divine calling. The task of uplifting an entire race upon their shoulders, these men and women lived under strict surveillance. Their fate was indicative to that of the race, and it was a fate they took seriously.

Many Fisk graduates were encouraged to take on these same roles of moral and intellectual exemplars after they left the institution. They believed that only through intimate interaction with those commonly called the "better class of the colored people"[101] could the entire race be elevated. The Fiskites, and other college-educated blacks, represented this better class, and their numbers were steadily increasing. By 1900, over 400 students had graduated from the college, theology, normal, and music departments at Fisk; an additional 700 attended the school but never graduated and primarily worked as teachers. Teacher training was a primary goal of the institution, and the majority of Fisk graduates were employed as teachers in the late nineteenth century. But Fisk did not only create teachers. In questionnaire that surveyed Fisk alumni in the

[99] William R. Morris, Correspondence, *The Fisk Herald*, Feb. 1891.
[100] W.E.B. Du Bois and Augustus Granville Dill. *The College-Bred Negro American*. Atlanta: Atlanta University Press, 1910.
[101] Morris, *The Fisk Herald*.

years of 1915, 1925, and 1929, there were, in total, 273 physicians, dentists, and pharmacists, 206 individuals involved in business, 145 ministers and social workers, 57 lawyers, and 173 graduate student who called themselves Fiskites. While Fisk itself was only conferring graduate degrees to a few students who worked specifically with department heads, the alumni of the college were going on to become leaders in their respective fields. [102] Fisk graduates were black professionals at a time when few existed, and they accounted for a considerable portion of that small professional class.[103]

Not only were Fisk alums forming the ranks of this black intellectual class, they were also demanding more educated community members as a result of their training. The changing role of the church and the ministers that led therein is just one example of this. One *Herald* writer noted that, "From our schools and colleges have gone out a troop of educated men and women who demand a higher style of preaching from year to year."[104] By receiving a certain type of education, Fiskites began to demand those with similar backgrounds in all of their institutions after they left Fisk, forming a circuitous "uplift" effect on the communities those Fiskites inhabited.

As the nature of students' relationship to other African Americans in Nashville demonstrated, an elite portion of the black population inhabited the communities of Fisk alums. Blacks in Nashville were proud of the nationally recognized institution that served others of their race. However, as historian Bobby Lovett argues, both Fisk's geographic isolation in north Nashville from the main pockets of black residential areas and the social isolation students faced from blacks in Nashville due, in part, to their divergent upbringings (see Tables 2, 3, and 4 for Fisk student demographics) were factors in Fisk's growing reputation among black Nashvillians

[102] Jones, *Progress at the University,* 19.
[103] Richardson, *A History of Fisk University,* 53.
[104] H.S.B. "The Ministry Demanded by the Colored People," Oct. 1891, The Fisk Herald

as an institution that did not necessarily belong to *all* blacks. In an effort to combat that image of alienation, early twentieth-century Fisk, led by John Burrus, proposed scholarships for local Nashville students to attend the University's high school department.

While it is difficult to ascertain the success of this specific scholarship program from the literature, it can be reasonably surmised that a scholarship program, if it ever existed, was short-lived. In 1914, the elementary and high school departments enrolled 69% of the students at Fisk. By 1924, that number dropped dramatically to a mere 37%. The elementary school was closed the next year, with the high school following suit shortly thereafter.[105] In 1930, President Thomas E. Jones (Fisk President from 1926 to 1946) reasoned these changes were the results of "selecting first rate students from good grade high schools." This "higher grade of work for more mature people"[106] left little room for the outreach Burrus suggested with his scholarship.

Although Fisk eventually shut down its own high school department, students in the teaching program often taught at all black schools in Nashville. Fisk developed an interesting relationship with one in particular: Pearl High School. Pearl, named after former Nashville superintendent Joshua Fenton Pearl, was constructed in 1883. Even though the school opened with an all-white faculty, Pearl had a black principal by 1889 and Fisk students were increasingly present in the school as observers and substitute teachers. Originally constructed on South Summer Street (now 5th Avenue South) and Demonbreun, prominent businessman Richard Henry Boyd and other members of the Negro Board of Trust in Nashville persuaded the school board to move Pearl from that location to Grant Street. Unsurprisingly, this new location was right next to Fisk. This move transplanted Pearl from the predominantly lower-class African

[105] Jones, *Progress at Fisk*, 24.
[106] Jones, *Progress at Fisk*, 26.

American neighborhood referred to as "Trimble Bottom" or "Black Bottom" to the more professional community surrounding Fisk and Meharry Medical College.

The move was the topic of controversy within the elite black Nashville community, for more reasons than the significance of its new neighborhood. The new high school was appallingly small, causing one writer in *The Globe* to remark, "when we are finally given a building it turns out to be a shabby commonplace ordinary building that could have been put up at most for $50,000."[107] Regardless, Fisk had a continued relationship with the school, but tensions between Fisk students and black residents of Nashville were ever present. There were multiple occurrences of Fisk students being bullied and taunted by African American youth on their walks throughout the city. It was clear, to black Nashvillians and Fiskites alike, that the students were different. Even though Fisk students continued in their educational struggle, it was not always with black Nashville's full support.[108]

Table 2. Percent of Fisk Students Whose Parents Belong to the Different Occupational Groups, Arranged According to Year of Entrance

Year	Total No.	Professional %	Business %	Clerical %	Skilled %	Personal Domestic Service %	Unskilled %	Farming %
1926	140	18	19	11	13	6	14	19
1927	103	34	19	10	16	3	7	11
1928	89	29	28	5	11	7	7	12
Total	332	25	21	9	14	10	15	5

Data from A Personnel Study of Negro College Students by Ambrose Caliver (Teachers College Press, New York, New York, 1931), pg. 17.

[107] Bobby Lovett, *The African American History of Nashville, Tennessee, 1780-1930: Elites and Dilemmas*, (Fayetteville: The University of Arkansas Press, 1999), 140.
[108] Lovett, *The African American History of Nashville, Tennessee, 1780-1930*; James Emerick Nagy, *A Collection of Materials Related to Superintendent Joshua F. Pearl, Vol. 1* (PhD Dissertation, George Peabody College for Teachers, 1961); Jones, *Progress at Fisk* University; James Summerville, "City and the Slums: Black Bottom in the Development of South Nashville," in Tennessee History Quarterly, 1981, 182-192; Tommie Morton Young, "Education," in *Black America Series: Nashville, TN* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2000), 45-66.

Table 3. Percent of Students Whose Fathers (F) and Mothers (M) Attained A Given Educational Level, Grouped According to Paternal Occupation

Educational Level Obtained	Professional %		Clerical %		Business %		Skilled %		Farming %		Personal and Domestic Service %		Unskilled %		Combined Groups	
	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
Elementary	2	4	3	....	26	12	35	28	67	46	65	32	80	51	40	25
High School	5	22	32	29	38	64	51	48	33	54	30	56	19	31	30	43
College	36	69	65	59	36	23	13	24	...	.7	5	12	...	17	2	31
Professional or graduate work	56	4	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	8	.5
Mean years of education	19	14	14	14	11	11	10	10.6	8.1	11.6	8.3	10.6	7.7	8.6	...	...

Note: Read table thus: The fathers of 2 percent of the children who belonged to the professional group obtained some form of elementary schooling only; and the mothers of 4 percent of the group attained the same level. Of the children o the skilled group, the fathers of 35 percent of the children obtained some form of elementary schooling only, while the mothers of 28 percent attained this level; etc.

Data from A Personnel Study of Negro College Students, by Ambrose Caliver (Teachers College Press, New York, New York, 1931), pg. 30.

Table 4. Percent of Students Who Come from Different Kinds of High Schools, Grouped According to Occupation of the Father

Occupational Group	Large City High Schools				Small City High Schools			Public High Schools	Private High Schools
	No. of Cases	South	North	% of Total	South	North	% of Total		
Professional	92	60	19	79	19	2	21	64	35
Business	72	59	13	72	28	...	28	75	25
Skilled	38	58	13	72	19	9	28	87	13
Clerical	31	51	29	80	16	3	19	77	23
Personal and domestic service	34	59	15	74	26	...	26	88	12
Unskilled	47	59	13	72	28	9	28	87	13
Farming	17	71	5	76	24	...	24	59	41
Totals	331	60	15	75	21	4	25	77	23

Note: Read table thus: Of the 92 students who belong to the professional group, 79 percent come from large cities; 60 percent from the South and 19 percent from the North; 21 percent come from small cities and towns; 19 percent from the South and 2 percent from the North; 64 percent come from public high schools while 35 percent come from private high schools.

Data from A Personnel Study of Negro College Students by Ambrose Caliver (Teachers College Press, New York, New York, 1931), pg. 30.

Regardless of these perceptions, administrators and alums, faculty members and students were aware of the responsibilities with which they had been charged as a part of their consumption of this particular education. Within the university, students participated in various organizations, such as the literary societies, that allowed students to take on certain roles with the

goal of morally and intellectually educating the blacks around them. Upon leaving the hallowed halls of Fisk, students were expected to continue their embodiment of these roles, taking their knowledge and disseminating it among the black population at-large. Their focus was one primarily of academic and moral uplift, which frequently resulted in demands that their fellow African Americans adopt some of their "higher ideals."

At times, these moral and intellectual demands conjoined, as is the case in the demands for a better-educated ministry. As more Fiskites graduated, they began to expect that individuals in all of their institutions be well educated, raising the demand for black higher education throughout the country. This was, of course, to be expected. The individuals highlighted in the prior two chapters knew that regardless of the education program they prescribed for African Americans, those who would received the education would be leaders for the race. In so leading, they would motivate those around them to better themselves. These patterns of leadership and uplift continued into the next century, subtly shifting students' focus from the race-wide goals espoused by those who discussed black higher education.

Changing the curriculum to modernize the university

The liberal arts curriculum that President Cravath (1875-1900) advocated during his tenure came under attack at the turn of the century. Industrial education was gaining favor, not only for African American students, but also for their white counterparts. However, the particular fervor with which society at large latched on to the industrial education model for black students in particular was of concern for the proponents of a classical curriculum. Schools like Fisk that were at the mercy of others generosity to remain financial solvent found themselves making concessions in favor of a more industrial program. However, as the previous section showed, Fisk never employed a "pure" liberal arts curriculum; in large part a result of Fisk's commitment

to service of the larger black population, the school always had some focus on professional, practical education, albeit directed more towards what could reasonably be referred to as more intellectual work than day labor. Regardless of the curriculum shifts that occurred in early twentieth century Fisk, its mission, as well as its desire to uplift, would continue.

Curriculum changes were the most obvious shifts at turn of the century Fisk; these changes were easily documented in University catalogues and also elicited passionate responses from Fiskites. When speaking about the development of a new Mechanical Laboratory, the "large number of advanced students in the department" encouraged one Fisk student. This individual thought that the increased quantity of students desiring a more industrial training "ma[de] clear that there is as much need of an education hand as of an educated head."[109] This was by no means indicative of the entire student body perspective, however. Some individuals, aware of the strong tradition of liberal education at Fisk (albeit somewhat fictional, as seen through Fisk's professional training that was coupled with its classical focus), criticized the philanthropists that sought to sway curriculum decisions. "The Negro race rejoices," one student sarcastically began,

> In the fact that while Mr. John S. Kennedy, a millionaire banker of New York, was considering the various religious and educational institutions to which he might give a helpful sum of money for the purpose of extending their fields of labor he greatly assisted the race in his liberal donations to Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institution and Hampton Institute.[110]

Upset, doubly as a Fiskite at the loss of valuable dollars and as an advocate of the liberal curriculum, this student closed by continuing his satirical tirade, "Tuskegee and Hampton are the

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[109] -----, Editorial, Nov. 1889, The Fisk Herald.

[110] J.E. Stamps, "University Support," Nov. 1909, The Fisk Herald; Mr. Kennedy was a wealthy New York businessman and, like many of the wealthy Northerners highlighted in Chapter One, gave away a sizable portion of his wealth to such institutions like Columbia University, the New York Public Library, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Unlike other philanthropists, however, Mr. Kennedy was active in the administration of the institutions to which he donated (Engelbourg, Saul, *The man who found the money: John Stewart Kennedy and the financing of the the western railroads,* East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 199).

best representations of the Negro...and to no other such schools could the gifts have been more beneficial."[111] Students saw that money mattered for a university; those with money were making strong statements as to what programs they supported by donating to these institutions.

Furthermore, Fisk was developing a reputation, at least among some of the industrial education advocates to the North, as producing the wrong sort of student (a distinction that no fledgling institution could afford to keep). President of Sears, Roebuck, & Co., and eventual founder of the Rosenwald Fund, Julius Rosenwald wrote about what he perceived the effects of a liberal arts education to be. His perceptions are skeptical of the liberal arts institution and leave little question as to why his Fund would go on to develop a close partnership with the Tuskegee Institution in a variety of education initiatives:

> I am much interested in what you say about Fisk because I had rather mixed feelings as to its future. When I was there at the installation of Dr. McKenzie [President of Fisk from 1915 to 1925], I felt that the spirit of the students was not what it should be. There seemed to be an air of superiority among them and desire to take in the spirit of the white university rather than the spirit which has impressed me so at Tuskegee.[112]

An obvious preference for one particular educational philosophy over another, of the type that Rosenwald's letter demonstrates, could be damaging to the future of an institution, particularly if that institution implied the creation of a less desirable "type" of black graduate

However, the pressures for an industrial curriculum, and Fisk's slight concessions to those pressures, were by no means representative of a cataclysmic change in the liberal ideology Fisk was founded upon. Rather, Fisk continued to maintain a high standard of instruction, recruiting more professors with advanced degrees and dismissing students who failed to meet the mark during the college's "period of increasing standards."[113] Individuals involved in the Fisk

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[111] Ibid.

[112] Rosenwald to Abraham Flexner, January 16, 1917. Retrieved from the General Education Board Archives. Sleepy Hollow, NY.

[113] Jones, *Progress at Fisk*, 24-25.

mission held tight to the belief that "the training of a *few* individuals who may desire the personal development that comes from the relatively free and intimate contact that exists between faculty and students on campus"[114] was its primary purpose. Even though the University did include classes with an industrial focus into its academic portfolio, the curriculum as of 1929 was organized in the followed six categories:

1. *Science* and *Mathematics*, which includes Chemistry, Physics, Biology, and Mathematics.
2. *History* and *Social Sciences*, which includes History, Political Science, Economics, Sociology, Social Psychology, and Anthropology.
3. *Psychology* and *Education*, which includes Psychology, Vocational Guidance, and Education.
4. *English Literature* and *Language*, which includes English Literature, Modern and Ancient Languages, Journalism, and Public Speaking.
5. *Philosophy* and *Religion*, which includes Philosophy, Old and New Testament History, Religious Education, and Ethics.
6. *Art* and *Music*, which includes Drawing and Painting and Instrumental, Vocal, and Choral Music.[115]

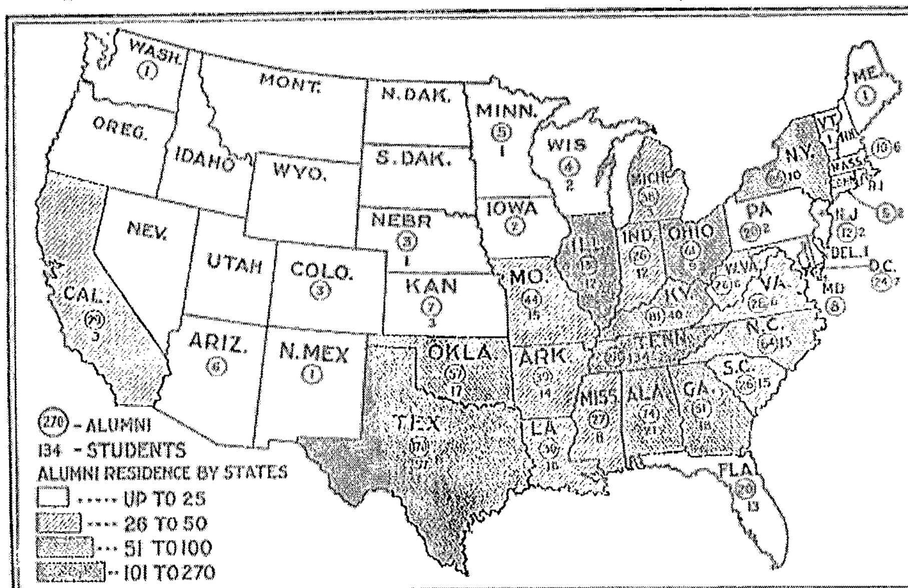
Even though the curriculum maintained its focus on a traditional body of knowledge, the last two years of study did try to ameliorate concerns about an archaic or abstract undergraduate course. Beginning in their junior year, students moved their focus of study from the theoretical to the "library, laboratory, seminar, and field work"[116] as a means of making their knowledge have more practical application. This may have been as much a continuation of Fisk's focus on uplift and desire to build institutions among black Americans as it was a concession to industrial and vocational advocates. The trend among all American universities at this time, however, was to

[114] Jones, *Progress at Fisk,* 20 [emphasis added].
[115] Jones, *Progress at Fisk,* 37-38.
[116] Ibid.

put an increased focus on practicality of study and the professions, making the changes at Fisk more in line with the changes of the time than an anomaly within the liberal arts tradition.[117]

More an attempt to modernize the existing curriculum structure rather than abolish it, Fisk continued its trajectory of liberally training students in order to make a "better class" of people. And, in continuing with that tradition of leading the African American community, Fiskites at the turn of the century occupied similar leadership roles; however, instead of focusing strictly on academic and moral roles, Fisk students and alumni also began to be concerned with social development, something not yet mentioned by most involved with the institution. As the social components of a liberal education became a larger concern, Fiskites would begin to split their focus between a type of community building that was based in large part upon shared backgrounds and their larger, race-based obligation to lead.

Figure 1. Alumni Residence and Distribution of Students by State, 1928-1929.



Map from Progress at Fisk University: A Summary of Recent Years by Thomas E. Jones (President), 1930.

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[117] John R. Thelin, "Taking Stock: Characteristics of the Great Modern American University," in *A History of American Higher Education, 2nd ed.* (Johns Hopkins University Press: Baltimore, 2011), 129-130.

Socializing at Fisk: the rise of the alumni

Alumni organizations are a hallmark of most American universities, serving as a way to connect former students to the institutions that housed these former young men and women during their most formative years. Fisk University is, of course, no different; with the motto of "her sons and daughters are forever on the altar," Fisk graduates always had a distinctive history with which to unite them. Fisk University Clubs, however, began independently of the University as literary societies, in no doubt continuations of the organizations that had been established on Fisk's campus. Wherever Fisk graduates were gathered, generally in cities with a sizable proportion of alums, clubs began to spring up as ways for individuals to connect and support each other and the University. Figure 1 shows the distribution of Fisk graduates throughout the country in 1928-1929. While the first club was established in Washington DC in 1889, another prominent club was the Chicago Fisk Club established on October 6 (Jubilee Day), 1898 in the home of a Fisk alum. It was not until years after these clubs had been established that the University erected its own Alumni Association to coordinate the activities of these individual, independent clubs. As former Association director Joan Balmer (Class of 1964) stated, "Alumni have been an invaluable constituency to this university from day one."[118]

As the rise of the alumni shows, the social aspect became a critical component in the daily concerns of early twentieth century Fisk students. Where literary societies and other groups were, in general, outward focused, aiming to engage the surrounding black population through debates and discussions of the black condition both domestically and abroad, Fisk students began to seek social opportunities as a means of identifying a space separate of black America. Starting around 1890, Fisk students petitioned for more organizations that were socially oriented. By

[118] Interview with Adrienne Latham and Joan Balmer conducted by Allena G. Berry at Fisk University, February 15, 2012.

1926, after a long refusal on the part of President Fayette McKenzie was lifted due to his resignation, fraternities and sororities were allowed on the campus. Indeed, many historians believe that the student protests that motivated President McKenzie's resignation (occurring in the 1924-1925 school year) were the result of students' frustration at not being allowed to engage socially like white underclassmen. His administration, ruled dictatorial by students and alumni alike, was responsible for ceasing the school's magazine and newspaper, along with most extracurricular activities. As a result of these brash actions, prominent alumni W.E.B. Du Bois, proclaimed: "Men and women of Black America: let no decent Negro send his child to Fisk until Fayette McKenzie goes."[119] By the mid-twenties, McKenzie was gone and social organizations flourished on campus. However, these social goals of Fisk education were felt prior to their formal inclusion in the university.[120]

In 1909, one young writer in the *Herald* noted the strong bonds that seem to develop over the course of a college education, citing that these friendships are the reasons that "men are often overcome with emotion and all wont to exclaim, 'Yes, my dear old college days were the happiest moments of my life.'"[121] Another writer argued that it was these friendships, formed "in the midst of hardships which beset us in the struggle for education," that make the toil worthwhile. Indeed, this writer continued, "we owe it to ourselves to make the efforts expended to help us worthwhile"; the social components of that education were a means to weathering "the clouds of disappointment, [and] the thunder of trouble"[122] that surrounded black students seeking a higher education.

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[119] W.E.B. Du Bois, "Opinion: Fisk," *Crisis,* April 1925, 250-251.
[120] Richardson, *A History of Fisk,* 155.
[121] L. O'Hara, "College Life," *The Fisk Herald,* Dec. 1909.
[122] C.A.G. "Is it worthwhile?" *The Fisk Herald,* Jan 1911.

Whereas earlier Fisk students took up their responsibilities of moral and intellectual uplift with dutiful acceptance, later Fiskites began to view a stoic adherence to only the academic components of education as a grave mistake. "Any student thus holding himself aloof from his social environment," one writer began, "and denying himself the privileges of social contract will doubtless find himself at a great loss when he enters the larger social realm into which he shall go to labor."[123] Academic and moral training were no longer the only concerns of an aspiring undergraduate; in order to take full advantage of the Fisk education, this writer argued, one must marry himself to his fellow students, seeking the comfort and protection of a "social contract" with those in his similar situation.

This social contract was forged and executed among these undergraduates and continued on in their professional lives. Fiskites began to see community along social terms that were much more immediate than, and separate from, the abstract black America of years prior. This was not an abandonment of the race, but rather, the formation of a system of support that developed among individuals who were in unique situations. Nor was this social focus an abandonment of the liberal arts tradition that had guided so much of Fisk's decisions. The goal of a classical curriculum was to develop liberal men and women, able to lead institutions and empires; in many ways, social organizations and responsibilities allowed students another venue to cultivate that leadership. As a result, Fisk students engaged and encouraged each other to act on those social bonds.

These social interactions were not only to be enacted on campus. A critical aspect of this new definition of community that emerged from social, and not just academic or moral, obligations were the ability of students to continue these roles as alums. As social organizations

[123] C.W. Kelly, "Aside from the curriculum," *The Fisk Herald*, April 1911.

were becoming important on campus, they were also becoming increasingly important with alumni. In fact, the first alumni association was formed on October 8, 1889 in Washington, DC as a way of continuing support for the University off-campus; this first club supported black students from the DC area in pursuing a Fisk education.[124] Fiskites recognized their social responsibility to each other in a world often hostile to their success, and often called on each other to perform their duties in this social contract. For example, when one writer sought donations in order to keep the *Herald* afloat, he admiringly wrote,

> [Fisk has] the steadfast and unswerving loyalty of its alumni. In some measure we suppose this is true of all colleges, but somehow, there seems to be an extra amount of that spirit among the splendid body of men and women familiarly known as Fiskites.[125]

Although one can surmise that the degree of flattery with which the writer bestowed upon the alumni of Fisk is representative of his desire to secure donations for the *Herald,* his article goes on to make an important observation about the relationship of Fisk alumni to the institution itself. "What could be more stimulating in the midst of difficulties incident to the struggle for an education," the writer began, expanding on the sentiment that acquiring higher education was one filled with trials and tribulations, "than the hope that soon, if we but persevere, we shall join this body of stalwart men and noble women."[126] Fiskites had not completely lost sight of the larger black population they were intending to serve – the large number of individuals devoted to service professions, such as teaching, is a testament to that; however, Fiskites were growing increasingly concerned with the formation of social groups based on the positive kinship they had formed while struggling to acquire this Fisk education.

Not all alumni were pleased at what they perceived to be an increase in the frivolity of Fisk students emphasis on social relations. Alum G.W. Jackson wrote about the old and the new

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[124] Editorial, *The Fisk Heard*, November 1889.
[125] A.B. Lovette "Shall the Herald Live?" *The Fisk Herald*, Nov. 1910.
[126] Ibid.

Fisk in 1910, stating, "twenty-five years ago the scholarship of Fisk was first-rate... What the students did twenty-five years ago is considered to-day out of style-fogy."[127] However, Jackson believed that the ways that were now considered out-of-date needed to be resurrected at Fisk. Jackson challenged the students at Fisk to ask themselves the following question:

> Is it possible that the boys and girls of the present day have expanded their brains and minds to that extent that they can spend all their idle time at Foot ball, Base ball, Basket ball, Lawn Tennis, and all other modern games and develop the scholarship that the students of the old school developed?[128]

To Jackson, the answer to this question could only have been no. Social pleasures were counter to the mission of what Jackson called the 'first-rate' Fisk. However, the stance the alumni took on the increased social outlets or extracurricular activities of the young men and women is not as important as the fact that there existed an unspoken agreement between the individuals on the campus and those that formed the virtual community of Fisk in the form of alumni. On- and off-campus, Fiskites represented a unique conglomeration of the black population. As a result, former and current Fisk students had a responsibility to each other and their institution to critique, encourage, and inspire.

While the social aspects of community grew in importance, if not favor, to Fiskites both on and off campus, the idea that the progress – at least in a moral and intellectual sense – of the entire race rested upon their shoulders did not subside. In a report presented at the 15th Annual Conference for the Study of Negro Problems, held at Atlanta University in 1910, the following assertion was made about college – and specifically, liberally – educated men and women:

> It can be truly said that the progress of the American Negro during the forty-seven years since emancipation has been due largely to the wholesome and helpful influence of these Negro college graduates who have labored as teachers of their people.[129]

[127] G.W. Jackson, "The Old and the New Fisk" *The Fisk Herald*, March 1910.
[128] Ibid.
[129] W.E.B. Du Bois and Augustus Granville Dill. *The College-Bred Negro American*. Atlanta: Atlanta University Press, 1910, 67.

As teachers, both in the literal sense in front of a classroom and as moral and intellectual exemplars for all African Americans to see, college-educated black individuals began to develop that "city upon a hill" mentality that formed the foundation of their respective institutions. Fiskites were said to take this sentiment to heart; by 1915, it was estimated that Fisk alums taught approximately 75,000 children throughout the South.[130] However, as social interaction increased in importance, the community with which they most frequently engaged would become more and more homogenous with respect to the education they had received at a black college.

Conclusion

The aims of Fisk remained strikingly similar from its commencement through the early twentieth century; the best and brightest the black population had were invited to cultivate their minds on its campus in order to uplift the race. However, at the turn of the century, social components of education became increasingly important to undergraduates and alumni alike. With the increase in social aspects of education, including extracurricular clubs and alumni organizations, Fiskites began to integrate another concept of community organization –rooted in the social class they now inhabited as the receivers of a liberal education – into their academic and moral obligations of uplift.

Fiskites were continually expected to serve their black brothers and sisters in certain forms of uplift, but there was a change in the degree to which they were to identify *socially* with those they aided. The institutions and leadership roles they established were no longer strictly outward focusing, as organizations, on- and off-campus, emphasized their shared experiences. Indeed, as black intellectuals spoke about the perceived effects of a liberal education for the

[130] Richardson, *A History of Fisk,* 160.

black population at large, the reality of those effects, as seen through Fiskites, was slightly different than the one imagined. This group desired to create their own spaces, for support and other social needs, outside of the larger African American population. For Fiskites in particular, the liberal arts education had become an education all their own.

CONCLUSION

The history of American higher education is as expansive as it is complex; however, an understanding of that history is critical to understanding some of the major social, political, and economic changes of twentieth century America. In these bastions of knowledge cultivation, ideas are discussed, research is conducted, and millions of post-adolescent Americans live out their formative years. These reasons and more give ample justification for the historical study of these living institutions. Too often, however, the complexities of black higher education institutions are distilled to a disastrous dichotomy, personified by the public images of W.E.B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington. While these two men were extremely influential in the ways in which they discussed black higher education, they were two voices among many black and white Americans who spoke about these colleges as important American institutions.

It is important to understand black higher education institutions – in particular, the liberal arts institutions outlined in this thesis – as American institutions, as they operated within a specific American context. That context included a convergence of a post-Civil War society; an industrial-boom economy of the Gilded Age, and the wealthy tycoons eager to fund societal change; the expansion of the American university system with increased access for new populations; and reform-minded progressives seeking to improve the country at the turn of the century. These forces, along with black American calls for an educated leadership, had a profound impact on how black colleges and universities were governed and perceived within this country. Additionally, black liberal arts colleges were designed with the purpose in mind of emulating the New England College, but had to navigate the aforementioned contexts in order to survive.

The black liberal arts institution was not some abstract organization that fell on one side of an education spectrum. These institutions were the frontlines for creating some of the most influential black American leaders the world has known. That leadership was envisioned as a part of a program of uplift; these liberally educated young men and women were to lead the race in achieving social, political and economic equality. "The Negro must become a part of all the life about him," reported one college educated African American. "College-bred Negroes should live these ideas among the masses and teach them."[131] And teach they did.

Fisk University, one of the premiere black liberal arts colleges in post-Civil War America, trained teachers that not only worked in primary and secondary schools throughout the country, but who also held faculty positions at the so-called industrial schools of Hampton and Tuskegee.[132] This role of teacher-leader was a continuation of the Fisk motto crafted in 1878 by Reverend A.P. Miller: "her sons and daughters are forever on the altar."[133]

But that altar came with costs. Early Fisk students in particular had to navigate foreign terrain at the University. From Fisk's earliest days, students were embedded with a service-ethos that was for the benefit of all African Americans; they were expected to, and often did, become the cultural leaders of African-American communities after they left the institution. However, Fisk's predominately white leadership – and the removal of later Fiskites from the lifestyles of working-class African Americans – isolated the students from other African Americans who would have otherwise served as vital support.

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[131] Du Bois and Dill, 99.
[132] Crystal DeGregory, "It seems to me…I don't agree: The Dialectical Relationship of Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois" in *Raising a Nonviolent Army: Four Nashville Black Colleges and the Century-long Struggle for Civil Rights, 1830s to 1930s.*
[133] Fisk Memorial Chapel Welcome, accessed on March 27, 2012 from http://www.fiskmemorialchapel.com/Welcome/.

Thus, the students created their own support networks with each other, just as Fisk (the institution) created its own brand of the liberal arts, taking on an increasingly practical approach to best meet the needs of the race it was designed to serve. Like all change, the perceived changes among students and the institution of Fisk were not well received by all alumnae. In a commencement address delivered at Howard University in 1930, W.E.B. Du Bois lamented on the state of black colleges and universities: "we have in our colleges a growing mass of stupidity and indifference."[134] Whether such a harsh denunciation was warranted can be left for other education historians to debate. However, it can be said that the Fisk of 1930 was different from the Fisk of 1870, even if those differences were the result of the navigation of the institution, and its students, to maintain a relevant curriculum and produce the leaders that black America needed. In many ways, this adaptation was a continuation of the liberal arts tradition and shows the pliability and sustainability of this educational philosophy. The broad implications of a black individual's education were at the forefront of these shifts.

I am reminded of my own educational experiences as a continuation of the themes outlined in this thesis. In September of 2007 – the beginning of my senior year of high school – my guidance counselor called me into her office to talk. "I have something I would like to speak with you about," she began. I assumed the subject would be my application for early graduation. I had recently requested to graduate in December of that same year (six months prior to the formal graduation date) and take classes at the local community college, eager to leave behind the high school culture. My guidance counselor had other plans for this meeting, however. "There is a very good chance that you will be valedictorian. If you are, you will be the first African-American valedictorian in the city." I was floored. The designation of valedictorian had

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[134] W.E.B. Du Bois, as quoted in John R. Thelin, "Taking Stock: Characteristics of the Great Modern American University," in *A History of American Higher Education, 2nd ed.* (Johns Hopkins University Press: Baltimore, 2011), 187.

never meant much to me; but to be the first of something took on implications I had never known. This would mean retracting my application for early graduation, but for some reason, I felt that this important first for the city of Racine, Wisconsin was bigger than a few months of waking up at 6:00 am to make it to homeroom before the first bell.

The black liberal arts college, its students, and the individuals that shaped them, knew of firsts. In fact, they made it their business to produce firsts in every field in order to have equality achieved for African Americans within the United States. "The future of the Negro in this country will depend on the kind of training given to the Negro youth," one college educated African American predicted. "The same kind of training which has made other races great is also necessary to make the Negro race great."[135] This individual was correct, but only in part; for the education these Fiskites received was one they had a hand in crafting themselves, the unique result of various influences converging in a particular time and place. The black liberal arts college is, indeed, an American institution, created and continued in order to serve.

[135] Du Bois and Dill, *College-bred Negro*, 99.

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