

The Integration Experiment:
Black Women at Mount Holyoke College
1964-1974

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Independent Thesis
1 May 2001

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6-14-01

Acknowledgments

My enormous thanks go to Professor Lynda Morgan, my thesis advisor, for her enthusiasm and unwavering confidence in my ability to do good work. And also for being a good teacher—of both history and writing—without whom this would probably be a thesis in English.

I would not have been able to follow through with my interest in this project had it not been for the black women who volunteered to be interviewed or responded to my questionnaire.

Thanks to the faculty and administrators from the Office of the Dean of the College, Office of the Dean of Multicultural Affairs, and the African American Studies Department, who saw value in my research and provided funds to help me pay for summer housing, photocopying, and telephone bills. I would also like to acknowledge Peter Carini and Patricia Albright in the archives for their interest and patience during those hot summer days and my more recent and more rushed fact-checking sessions in the archives.

To all those who asked me, "How's your thesis going?" Instead of, "Do you have a job, yet?"—Thanks for the breath of fresh air.

To my mother, I guess all of that "You can do anything you set your mind to" brainwashing paid off. Thank you, thank you, thank you. Now, if I could only learn how to drive....

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Introduction

“An Educated Nigger is Still a Nigger,” read the signs of picketing black students missing class to support the occupation of seven buildings on the Mount Holyoke College campus, located in the predominately white New England town of South Hadley, Massachusetts. At approximately 12:30 am on the morning of February 27, 1970, while most students at the women’s college were heading to bed, a group of black students were busy seizing the campus switchboard in Skinner Hall, a building that housed both administrative and academic offices. Over the course of the morning, black students from throughout the Five College area—including Smith, Amherst, Mount Holyoke, and the University of Massachusetts—went on to secure and occupy six more of Mount Holyoke’s academic and administrative buildings. For fourteen hours, they refused access to Skinner, Clapp, Cleveland, Carr, Shattuck and Mary Lyon Halls, as well as the Williston library. Mount Holyoke students, faculty, and staff members headed to class and work only to find the doors sealed shut with liquid metal and picketing black students chanting and holding signs that read, “All Power to the Black People.”¹

¹ Tracie Rohzon, “Black Students Seize 7 Mt. Holyoke Buildings,” Holyoke Transcript-Telegram, 27 February 1970.

A decade earlier, news of an uprising of black students on a predominately white, northern campus would have been rare. There were not enough of them on most campuses to have any significant influence on campus policy. Though black college students were very active in the early Civil Rights Movement, most of these students were attending historically black colleges and universities in the South and their protests were focused on the destruction of the legal system of segregation that existed in the surrounding towns and cities.²

In the preceding decade, African Americans had made significant strides in their mission to gain legal and social equality in the United States. During the 1954-1965 era of the Civil Rights Movement, Southern activists were very much focused on bringing about the integration of public spaces through non-violent direct action. They organized sit-ins in segregated lunch counters and other public facilities. They held peaceful marches down southern streets, risking harassment and murder by police officers and racist civilians, as well as the possibility of job loss. Their non-violent tactics, publicized by the national media, proved effective as a dramatic contrast to the violent reaction of southern racists. In 1954, the Supreme Court declared that segregated schools were inherently unequal in the case of Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka.³ The passing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 brought a legal end to de jure segregation in the South. And the Voting Rights Act of 1965 helped to protect the franchise that had

² See, for example, the analysis in William H. Chafe, Civilities and Civil Rights: Greensboro, North Carolina, and the Black Struggle for Freedom (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980).

³ Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, 347 U.S. 483 (1954).

been acquired by the Fifteenth Amendment a century before, but evaded in the South by a combination of racially motivated regulations and harassment for most of the years in between. In light of the extraordinary political advances that had been made, by the mid-sixties, black expectations for future racial equality and progress were high. However, these hopes were frustrated by the realization that the legislative gains of the early Civil Rights Movement would not effectively change the race's poor economic situation or eliminate the influence of de facto and institutionalized racism on their lives.⁴ This realization precipitated a resurgence of old ideals to the popular ideology of black activism and protest.

Well before 1965, such individual black activists as Marcus Garvey, Malcolm X, and Robert Williams, President of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in Monroe, North Carolina, advocated cultural and economic empowerment and black self-defense against racial terrorism. However, mainstream and more conservative Civil Rights organizations like the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and the NAACP, afraid of being accused of perpetuating violence, embracing communist ideals, and losing funding, kept nationalists at arms length. At the 50th anniversary convention in 1959, Thurgood Marshall, Jackie Robinson, and Martin Luther King, Jr., all worked for the suspension of Robert Williams from the NAACP because he advocated self-defense and had allies in the Communist

⁴ National Urban League, Facts on the Many Faces of Poverty (New York: National Urban League, Inc., 1965), pp. 1-4.

Party.⁵ Likewise, co-sponsors of the 1963 March on Washington pushed John Lewis, then chairman of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), to rewrite sections of his speech that they deemed too critical of the federal government's condoning of white police and civilian brutality and economic injustice.⁶

With the dismantling of legal segregation, however, the economic injustice and blatant disregard for human life that contributed to racial oppression in the United States could no longer be ignored. The post-1965 Civil Rights era brought a re-emergent emphasis on the principles of self-defense, social and economic empowerment, and the celebration of the heritage and culture of African Americans as a tool to racial progress. It was in the context of this political mood and focus on "Black Power" that Civil Rights organizations like SNCC and the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) expelled their white members and Black Nationalist organizations like the Black Panther Party were born.⁷ Emphasis fell more completely on economic disparities and poverty. King's 1966 campaign to end slums in Chicago and his plan for a Poor Peoples' March on Washington reflected this necessity for major economic reform in order to attain an equal

⁵ Timothy B. Tyson, "Robert F. Williams, 'Black Power,' and the Roots of the African American Struggle," The Journal of American History 85 (1998): 540-570.

⁶ John Lewis, "March on Washington, 1963," Washington, D.C., 28 August 1963, Reprinted in Black Protest: 350 Years of History, Documents, and Analyses, 2nd ed., Joanne Grant, ed. (New York: Random House, 1996), pp. 353-355.

⁷ Clayborne Carson, In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981); Howell Raines, My Soul is Rested: The Story of the Civil Rights Movement in the Deep South (New York: Penguin Books, 1977), pp. 27-34; Philip S. Foner, ed., The Black Panthers Speak (New York: Da Capo Press, 1995).

society.⁸ The principles behind the term “Black Power” were not new, but before 1965 they had not been in the forefront of mainstream Civil Rights ideology. Thus, to most young black people unfamiliar with Marcus Garvey, Robert Williams, and Malcolm X, “Black Power” was a revolutionary idea.

This change in political focus was a motivating factor behind much of the black student protest that took place during the late ‘sixties. The numbers of black students in college increased significantly between 1964 and 1970, with most of the increase occurring in white colleges and universities.⁹ Thus, black students attending predominately white colleges were relatively quiet until 1968, when the black student populations on many northern campuses reached a critical mass. In this post-Civil Rights Act era of the Movement, black college students aimed their protests at the historically white institutions of higher education. Like activists outside of the university setting, black students campaigned for historically white institutions to re-define their social and academic values and resources to reflect their proclaimed commitment to racial equality.

Black students all over the country, from large public universities to the most prestigious of the Ivy Leagues, became involved in this new student movement dominated by campus strikes and building occupations. The demands of Mount Holyoke students and the Five College Black Community resembled those of

⁸ Michael Eric Dyson, I May Not Get There With You: The True Martin Luther King, Jr. (New York: The Free Press, 2000), pp. 11-120.

⁹ William H. Exum, Paradoxes of Protest: Black Student Activism in a White University, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1985).

black students protesting on other campuses across the country. Student representatives had initially made their grievances known on February 18, after having occupied four buildings on the campus of Amherst College.¹⁰ Some were directed at all member colleges and others were directed at individual institutions. Mount Holyoke black students were challenging the college to become a member of a Five-College Black Studies program, to raise the percentage of incoming black first-years to twenty percent, and to hire black staff in the admissions office.¹¹ They wanted the college to become a member of Afro-Americans for Educational Opportunity, a college recruitment program in which black college students would recruit black high school students from their hometowns. They also requested that the college increase the amount of financial aid available for prospective black students and become a member of a Five-College Bridge program for entering black students.¹² David B. Truman, President of Mount Holyoke College (and recently resigned Vice President of Columbia University after a more serious student uprising) had met with some of the students three days before Mount Holyoke buildings were occupied.¹³ They had not been

¹⁰ David B. Truman, "To Mount Holyoke Alumnae and Friends," March 4, 1970, Afro American Students/Alumnae, General and Historical Material, Student Takeover, etc., Mount Holyoke College Archives, South Hadley, MA.

¹¹ Five College Black Community, "Five College Black Community: A Collectivity," February 27, 1970, Afro American Students/Alumnae General and Historical Material, Student Takeover, etc., Mount Holyoke College Archives, South Hadley, MA.

¹² Clara R. Ludwig, "Report of the Board of Admissions," October 1970, Admissions Office/Board of Admissions, Series C: Annual Reports, 1965/66-1969/70, Folder 6, Mount Holyoke College Archives, South Hadley, MA.

¹³ Julie Van Camp, "Truman at Columbia," Choragos, 20 February 1968.

satisfied with what they viewed as his discouraging response to their demands and decided to take action.¹⁴ In their official statement, the protesters severely criticized the school's response:

Mount Holyoke Black Students have historically had to deal with the insincerity, apathy and inertia of the Administrative structure. . . . and it is in the name of all Black people that we, the Five College Black Community demand the creation of a coherent and educational program at Mount Holyoke College that will speak to the needs of the Black Community as we, Black People, define those needs. [The] Mount Holyoke Black Community have had numerous meetings, consultations, etc. with the Administration about these questions which we feel are crucial. . . . We are no longer talking in terms of submitting lengthy requests. At this time we are moving forward at a level of intensity which precludes going back over dead letters.¹⁵

Mount Holyoke black students were most interested in what they perceived as a lack of real institutional change in the traditional academic value systems of the college—its curriculum. Mount Holyoke was a self-defined liberal institution that proclaimed its dedication to the cause of racial inclusion and equality, but students did not feel as if those values were reflected in the curriculum. Furthermore, the administration was shortsighted when it came to integrating black students into its community. There was no attempt on the part of the administration or faculty to anticipate difficulties that black students may have had living in a predominately white environment in which not everyone had the

¹⁴ David B. Truman, "To Mount Holyoke Alumnae and Friends," March 4, 1970, Afro American Students/Alumnae, General and Historical Materials, Student Takeover, etc., Mount Holyoke College Archives, South Hadley, MA.

¹⁵ Five College Black Community, "Five College Black Community: A Collectivity," February 27, 1970, Afro American Students/Alumnae General and Historical Material, Student Takeover, etc., Mount Holyoke College Archives, South Hadley, MA.

same allegiance to racial inclusion that the relatively distant administration claimed to have. Hence, there were few, if any, resources to deal with those difficulties.

The white administrators were often blinded by their liberalism to Mount Holyoke's shortcomings and depended heavily on their recruitment efforts as proof of their commitment to racial progress. In general, black students applauded the school's efforts to increase their numbers, as well as the officially positive attitude towards their presence on campus; however, there was significant evidence of racism not merely on the part of individual white members, but inherent in the school's inability to recognize the ways in which it participated in a larger social system of institutionalized racism. In spite of its public commitment to racial diversity and inclusion, Mount Holyoke's experiment in integration had weaknesses that contributed to racial tensions that existed on campus.

Methodology

The information for this project was gathered through a combination of archival and newspaper research, questionnaires, and interviews with African American alumnae who attended Mount Holyoke between 1964 and 1974. Oral history is a useful tool for capturing the lives of those who were culturally and economically underrepresented in a community, and those who were less likely to be in prominent positions of influence or leave a public record of their every

meeting and decision. Black women's voices are so absent from Mount Holyoke College's official records and archives of personal papers, that I could not tell the story of African American women at Mount Holyoke without interviewing them.

In the fall of 2000, with the help of the Mount Holyoke Alumnae Association, I sent initial letters of inquiry to each of the 179 African American women who were considered members of the classes of 1965 through 1975, whether they graduated or not. I chose this time period because of my interest in black women's roles and experiences in the Civil Rights Movement. From the original 179 women, ten women volunteered either to complete the questionnaire or complete an interview. None of the women who responded graduated before 1969. Older women, for speculative reasons, expressed no interest in re-living their days at Mount Holyoke. Also absent from the group of interviewees are some of the most politically vocal black women, members of the class of 1970 who the school newspaper often quoted as co-chairs and leaders of the Afro American Society. None of the women in the class of 1970 contacted me for an interview, even after an additional mailing targeting a few of those women specifically, along with a few pre-1969 graduates.

Between November and December 2000, I interviewed six women. Except for Patricia Smith '73, whom I interviewed in her office in Philadelphia, I interviewed all participants by telephone. Barbara Smith and Linda Whitlock, both members of the class of '69, had interviews that required two separate sessions. Three of the ten women answered my questionnaire through electronic

mail and I received a tape in the mail from Eloise Skelton '73, who had recorded her answers to the questionnaire. In the midst of all the successfully completed interviews and questionnaires there were more than one promised-but-never-seen written responses and one interview that was never finished. I have used none of the information gained from those conversations in this paper.

The women interviewed left Mount Holyoke between thirty and forty years ago. Thus, time played a major role in what was revealed in an interview. It could either weaken or enhance memory, but time always colored the way in which respondents evaluated the past. Ten women represent a relatively small segment of the 179 black women who received letters of inquiry and a questionnaire from me. But due to the fact that all correspondence with prospective interviewees had to go through the Alumnae Association, I had to rely on voluntary responses and was not able to encourage a larger number of participants. Nevertheless, the interviews and questionnaires completed for this project provide an indispensable source of primary information for my work and offer a never-before-seen historical glimpse of Mount Holyoke during the era of the Civil Rights Movement.

The quotes of alumnae that you read in the following pages have either been copied from their written answers to the questionnaires or transcribed from the original tapes on which the interviews were recorded. I have edited out the "ums" and "likes" and "you knows," to make the reading easier, but transcripts with all

of those superfluous additions to the English language will be available in the Mount Holyoke College archives in the near future.

There are sisters here from . . . Chicago, Baltimore, Memphis, Denver, Philly, and others. There are sisters on full scholarships who hold campus jobs to meet the bookstore bills; sisters whose parents are well-known doctors and educators; and sisters from all the economic phases in between. And it is Beautiful Black because . . . there is always respect for the individuality of a sister, a recognition that there are "different strokes for different folks."

-Gloria Maxwell, '72¹

ONE

Variations on the Black Experience at Mount Holyoke

Black students attending Mount Holyoke College during the 'sixties and early 'seventies came of age during one of the most politically volatile eras of the twentieth century. African Americans were at the helm of a nation-wide movement for civil rights and young black people could not help but be influenced by the changes taking place. Barbara Smith '69, raised in Cleveland, Ohio, had a childhood that was marked by major victories and developments of the Civil Rights Movement:

My growing up years absolutely dove-tails with the most significant political organizing and activism of the mid-part of the twentieth century. . . . So all the things that are . . . in documentaries, like the [1957] desegregation of Central High School, the [1956] Montgomery bus boycott, all these things were what was on the news as I was growing up as a little girl.²

¹ Gloria Maxwell, "The Black Experience at Mount Holyoke," Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, MA, 1971.

² Barbara Smith, Interview by Tiffany McClain, 10 November 2000; Melba Pattilo Beals, Warriors Don't Cry: A Searing Memoir of the Battle to Integrate Little Rock's Central High (New York: Washington Square Press, 1994); Howell Raines, My Soul is Rested: The Story of the Civil Rights Movement in the Deep South (New York: Penguin Books, 37-70).

Sometimes, as in the case of Linda Whitlock '69, the national political context required that future Mount Holyoke students make decisions that could affect their entire town at a very young age. The desegregation of public schools in Richmond, Virginia in 1960 was a pivotal moment in Whitlock's young life. The summer before her eighth grade year, she was faced with the choice of desegregating the local white junior high school or continuing in the segregated black schools:

I thought about it and I decided that I didn't want to. And the reason, then, had to do with my being afraid. . . . There had been numerous reports on television and in the newspaper about . . . the treatment by white classmates, white teachers, white neighborhood residents of . . . the brave black kids who had desegregated other schools throughout the South and I didn't want to have to confront that kind of violence or mistreatment. Tacks being put . . . in the chairs of black students, food thrown at them, complete isolation, verbal harassment. I just didn't want that. I had always been used to being a leader in my school. Incredibly strong, capable student chosen for a variety of important roles . . . actively engaged in clubs and activities. I wanted that to continue and so I said, "No."³

Violent white reaction to this period of black activism informed their understanding of racism and the ways in which it inhibited their freedom.

Yvonne Cooper '74 confronted racism in the context of police brutality in Chicago:

I am from Chicago, where they attacked journalists and protesters during the 1968 Democratic Convention. . . . the police used excessive force and killed Black Panther members Mark Clark and Fred Hampton in Chicago. The outside of

³ Linda Whitlock, Interview by Tiffany McClain, 10 December 2000.

their apartment door was riddled with bullet holes. I learned at an early age to keep my distance [from police].⁴

The national fight against racism shaped the lives, decisions, and outlooks of many young people growing up during that period. Black women who matriculated at Mount Holyoke thus arrived with the knowledge and tools to critique racism in its varying manifestations. By virtue of the fact that they grew up when activists were loudly advancing the cause of civil rights for black people and being met with hostility, as well as victory, common threads wove their individual stories together. But the stories themselves did not necessarily begin or end the same way. Two protesters who sat next to each other in the sealed shut Williston Library in February 1970 could have had very different reasons for being present. And some black students chose not to be present at all.

Piecing together the experiences of black women at Mount Holyoke has its challenges. Sole dependence on the documents left by white students and administrators, though useful for understanding their perception of black students and their actions, is not enough to draw an accurate picture of what it was like to be a black student at Mount Holyoke between 1964 and 1974. Articles and reports convey the belief that black women were either thriving without a single complaint or inexplicably angry and dissatisfied with the institution, when the

⁴ Yvonne Cooper, "MHC Survey," 12 November 2000, personal e-mail (12 November 2000); Baxter Smith, "FBI Memos Reveal Repression Schemes," The Black Scholar 5, 7 (1974): 43-48.

reality could usually be found somewhere in the spectrum of experience between the two extremes.

Too often, history is written in binary opposites, as if entire lives are lived in a context of "either-or." That approach fails to capture the complex ambivalence of the human experience. Though there were commonalties among them, the criticism that rose up against Mount Holyoke College as the numbers of black students began to increase was not that of people with identical lives. The black women who attended Mount Holyoke between 1964 and 1974 were a diverse group of individuals with varying experiences. They were individual women with individual lives that shaped their impressions of what it was like to be a black woman on a historically and predominately white campus in the midst of the changes taking place in the Civil Rights Movement.

Mount Holyoke changed a great deal between 1964 and 1970 in terms of the size of the black population and the on-campus resources available for their support. In 1964, roughly between eighteen and twenty black women matriculated at Mount Holyoke.⁵ By 1970, their numbers more than quadrupled to 110. In 1964, no official resources existed to help black students adjust to the predominately white campus.⁶ By 1970, the Afro American Society and Black Cultural Center provided a network of support and cultural enrichment for Mount Holyoke's black students. In light of the rapid changes taking place at Mount

⁵ A total of twenty black women entered Mount Holyoke between the falls of 1960 and 1964, but not all of them completed the four years. One member of the class of '65 and another from the class of '67 withdrew, but I cannot pinpoint whether they withdrew before fall 1964.

Holyoke, the year in which a black woman entered Mount Holyoke had a major influence on her experience on the predominately white campus.

The early years of Mount Holyoke's integration experiment were the most difficult for black women. Eleanor Southall Futrell entered Mount Holyoke as a freshman in 1964 and only stayed for one year. She was one of ten black women in her class. At the time, it was the largest number of black women the institution had ever admitted in one year. This number may have been a sign of progress to Mount Holyoke faculty and administrators who, throughout the 'fifties, had only seen an average of one or two black students per class during any given year. Futrell, however, was born and raised in deeply segregated Norfolk, Virginia and grew up in a neighborhood that was "one-hundred percent black." School integration began in Norfolk while she was in junior high school, but she attended the segregated black high school and rarely saw white people unless she went into downtown Norfolk. Thus for Futrell, who had had very little interaction with white people prior to coming to Mount Holyoke, the relatively small number of black students brought about a profound cultural shock from which she was never fully able to recover: "Never seeing any black people. That was so upsetting to me. There was not even a black maintenance man on Mount Holyoke's campus," Futrell recalled.⁷ She respected the academic life of the college, but the lack of a large and connected black community at Mount Holyoke or in the surrounding

⁶ Eleanor Southall Futrell, Interview with Tiffany McClain, December 1, 2000.

⁷ Futrell, Interview.

towns was a major influence on her decision to leave. She married after her first year and never returned to Mount Holyoke.⁸

Matriculating only one year after Futrell, Barbara Smith's experience is evidence of the difference a few years could make at Mount Holyoke during the early stages of the school's integration experiment. During her sophomore year, students formed the Afro American Society, a cultural and social organization for black students. Her senior year, black students participated in a sit-in in Mary Lyon Hall, the administrative building, which resulted in the establishment of the Black Cultural Center. Smith vividly recalled the changes that occurred in her time:

When I was there, we were considered to be there by absolute mistake. . . . That was made very clear to us. . . . Things really changed my sophomore year with . . . the beginning of . . . the Afro American Society. . . . The enrollment of blacks on campus doubled within one year. From freshman to sophomore year . . . That didn't make us welcome. It just gave us some leverage and clout.⁹

Smith's time at Mount Holyoke resembled neither Futrell's extreme social isolation nor the relatively more secure experiences of black women who would follow in her footsteps. She arrived at Mount Holyoke as one of a group of fifteen black students entering Mount Holyoke in the fall of 1965. Her class added significantly to the increasing numbers of black women on campus.

⁸ Futrell, Interview.

⁹ Barbara Smith, Interview.

Smith hailed from Cleveland, Ohio, the first major city to elect an African American mayor, Carl Stokes, to office in 1967.¹⁰ In spite of the fact that she grew up in a major Mid-western city, Smith's childhood in Cleveland was not a very integrated one. She lived in an all black working and lower-middle class neighborhood. And though she shared classes with white students in her high school, the school itself was predominately black. The majority of Smith's interactions with white people were limited to an academic context, and yet, whereas the lack of black people had been the source of Futrell's disillusionment, the academic environment was most bruising for Smith. She was accustomed to excelling in the classroom and being supported by those who sensed her intellectual curiosity. But in Mount Holyoke's classrooms she did not feel welcome or as competent as she had felt in high school. After her sophomore year, she transferred to the New School for Social Research in New York City:

The junior year at the New School was really very significant for me intellectually and academically because it restored my academic confidence after having really been demoralized by how difficult it was for me to excel, having excelled all my life academically. . . . But of course, many students have that experience, it's just that when you add the racial dynamic to it, it becomes demoralizing . . . and dehumanizing. . . . And it was just great for me to get my academic confidence back.¹¹

The fact that Smith could transfer from Mount Holyoke College to a school in which she had to compete with students who were both white and male and still

¹⁰ Steven F. Lawson, Running for Freedom: Civil Rights and Black Politics in America Since 1941, 2nd ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1997), pp. 169-175.

¹¹ Barbara Smith, Interview.

find more confidence in the co-ed institution indicates that Mount Holyoke's academic atmosphere was oppressive for some black students.

Smith recalled being most hurt by the professors who, before they were familiar with her or her work, concluded that she would fail. Though a case could have been made for some black women having less academic preparation, this was more a symptom of unequal school conditions between predominately white and black schools than any indication of inferior ability. The women from northern cities attended predominately black high schools, but took advanced classes with other white students. All of the interviewees graduated in the top ranks of their high school classes and their teachers and guidance counselors considered them bound for excellence. To go suddenly from such a supportive academic environment into one in which that support was generally lacking—not because she could not achieve, but because it was assumed because of the color of her skin that she could not—was a severe blow to Smith's academic self-esteem. The year spent in the less hostile environment of the New School functioned as a way for Smith to reassure herself of her academic competence, and that in fact, her blackness did not make her academically inferior to her white peers. She brought that renewed confidence back to her with Mount Holyoke and was finally able to thrive. She graduated on time with the class of 1969.

Some of the disparities in black women's experiences at Mount Holyoke during the mid-to-late 'sixties stemmed from their inability to connect fully with other black students on a comfortable level. Black women brought striking

differences of background with them to Mount Holyoke. Differences in social class, regional origins, and political beliefs all had an influence on black women's relationships with each other.

Linda Whitlock's reflections on her time at Mount Holyoke highlighted the ways in which social class could differentiate one black woman's experience from another. Raised in Richmond, Virginia, she was from a rather distinguished family of educators and scholars. Besides being one of the first black marines, the President of the Richmond Urban League, and the first black man on the board of the Boys and Girls Clubs of Richmond, Whitlock's father was an elementary school principal. Her mother was the daughter of a college professor and a teacher in the local schools. But even the most distinguished black families lived segregated lives in Richmond. Whitlock lived in a black middle and upper-class neighborhood, attended segregated public schools, and had very little contact with white people until she enrolled at Mount Holyoke.

She entered Mount Holyoke in 1965, but in contrast to Smith's experience, Whitlock found Mount Holyoke to be a generally supportive place to live and study. She received the expected curious stares and questions from white women about her hair and freckles, but as the years passed, she had a far more difficult time relating to the younger black students, an increasing number of whom were from less economically privileged backgrounds. She was just as much of a curiosity to them as she was to white students. Because of the way she spoke, the

music she listened to, and the people she associated with, they often questioned her “authenticity” as a black person.¹²

Whitlock attributed her inability to relate to some black students to being raised in the Jim Crow system. She believed that her segregated upbringing facilitated her adjustment to Mount Holyoke:

Our doctors were all black . . . our lawyers were all black, we read black newspapers, the owner of the insurance company was black . . . the principals of our schools were all black, we had black social organizations that were strong . . . It was an environment that bred confidence. We knew that if the white world thought we were inferior and incompetent, it was because the white world didn't have a clue, was misguided, or was responding to a legal system that was unfair and unjust. . . . But we knew that black people could do anything because we were doing everything, albeit within the Jim Crow political system. I think for many black students in the North growing up without the role models . . . in systems . . . where blacks . . . were a little bit represented, but clearly had no power, resulted in feelings of inferiority.¹³

In Whitlock's opinion, the level of confidence with which she came armed to Mount Holyoke College distinguished her from many of her black peers from the North who did not necessarily witness the evidence of black achievement on a daily basis. Similarly, Futrell came from a segregated environment and saw distinctions between women from the North and South. But unlike Whitlock, Futrell believed her Jim Crow upbringing to be a disadvantage at Mount Holyoke. The social isolation that Futrell felt from being a minority on campus was compounded by the isolation she felt from black students hailing from cities in the North and Midwest: “They had more exposure to white people prior to

¹² Linda Whitlock, Interview with Tiffany McClain, 10 December 2000.

¹³ Whitlock, Interview.

coming. . . . Their schools were in larger cities and in many cases were integrated.”¹⁴ Regional differences not only kept Futrell from being able to relate fully to other black women, but made it difficult for her to feel comfortable in the predominately white environment. What differentiated Whitlock from Futrell and many of her Northern black peers was social class. Whitlock was from a middle to upper-class, highly educated family, whereas many black students attending Mount Holyoke were from working-class families and often the first generation to attend college. Being surrounded by black role models surely played a role in the development of self-confidence among black youths in the South, but Whitlock’s class privilege was likely just as strong an influence—if not stronger—as any segregated context.

Darion Miller Griffin ‘70 shared Futrell’s and Whitlock’s struggle to find their place among the black students at Mount Holyoke. Griffin’s relative contentment at Mount Holyoke, combined with her difference in political ideals, distinguished her experience from that of many of her black peers. She came to Mount Holyoke from an all black, working-class neighborhood in segregated Washington, D.C., but did not consider herself a southerner at the time. The daughter of a Pullman porter and government worker, she attended public schools that were nearly one hundred percent black, and had no white peers growing up. Still, she had little trouble finding a place for herself at Mount Holyoke: “I felt very connected to the

¹⁴ Futrell, Interview.

place . . . I never felt like I was an outsider there,” she recalled.¹⁵ In contrast to Futrell, Smith, and even Whitlock, who took two-and-half years off to escape the college’s sheltered way of life, Griffin found little reason to be disillusioned with Mount Holyoke. She even liked the food and, coming from D.C., the country setting. Unlike most of the women interviewed, Griffin was actively involved in more mainstream campus activities outside of the Afro American Society. She served as dorm president, sang in a choir, volunteered in Holyoke, and visited high schools in D.C. as an Admissions representative. Griffin’s smooth transition into Mount Holyoke life puzzled many of her classmates. Even her cousin, with whom she had shared a room her freshman year, had an experience so different that it was as if they were attending two different colleges.¹⁶

Griffin was one of the twenty-five women who doubled the number of black students on Mount Holyoke’s campus in the fall of 1966. And women in this class were probably some of the most politicized black women that the school had ever seen. According to Barbara Smith, it was individual women in the class of 1970 who provided the leadership for the establishment of the Afro American Society.¹⁷ And women who were first-years in 1970 remember looking up to some of them as strong, capable organizers during the building occupations.¹⁸ In

¹⁵ Darion Miller Griffin, Interview with Tiffany McClain, 16 November 2000.

¹⁶ Griffin, Interview.

¹⁷ Barbara Smith, Interview.

¹⁸ Patricia Smith, Interview with Tiffany McClain, 24 November 2000; Linda Cooper, Interview with Tiffany McClain, 6 December 2000.

general, Griffin's politics were more moderate. For example, the late 'sixties were a time in which young black people often engaged in arguments about whether black activists should follow the teachings of Malcolm X or King. Griffin sided with King while most of her black classmates, influenced by the rhetoric of black nationalist leaders and organizations that were critical of King, considered Malcolm X their hero: "I was one of those ones in college . . . who thought that Malcolm X was a real radical and I wouldn't have resonated towards him."¹⁹ While she did participate in the various sit-ins and protests that took place during her four years at Mount Holyoke, Griffin did not completely fit in with her black classmates.²⁰

Still, despite such political and economic diversity, black women developed strong relationships based on racial identification. More than an allegiance to the school, class members of 1973, confronted with neither the constant struggle to find their place in a predominately white environment which characterized the mid-sixties, nor the struggle over black identity in the late 'sixties, shared an allegiance to each other. Black women still grappled with these problems, but their relative unity, influenced by and large by their constantly growing numbers, worked to keep black women connected to each other, if not the campus. Black women were finally able to etch a place for themselves that included active membership in the Afro American Society and the option of taking courses

¹⁹ Griffin, Interview; Michael Eric Dyson, I May Not Get There With You: The True Martin Luther King, Jr. (New York: The Free Press, 2000), pp. 101-120; Malcolm X and Alex Haley, The Autobiography of Malcolm X (New York: Ballantine Books, 1964).

through the Black Studies program, officially established for the 1971-1972 school year.

Linda Cooper's connection to Mount Holyoke provided a case in point. Though she did not graduate from Mount Holyoke, she considers it her alma mater. Her feelings towards the institution were ambivalent—she both admired and resented the school's traditionalism—but her feelings towards Mount Holyoke's black community were not ambivalent at all. Like many of the black women who attended public high schools in the North, Cooper already had experience with white people in an academic setting when she came to Mount Holyoke. In her integrated high school in Westbury, Long Island, she was one of only two or three black students in the advanced track. Still, like the women who came before her, getting used to Mount Holyoke was not an altogether easy adjustment:

Although I was accustomed to being . . . a minority in a classroom situation, that's probably the first time that I was a minority in a . . . living situation. . . . That's probably the first time in my life that it was more important to really identify . . . with being an African American.²¹

As was the case with women of the class of '73, the Afro American Society played a significant role in her Mount Holyoke life and the organization was effective in helping Cooper to situate herself.

Similar to Cooper, Deborah Northcross '73 had an experience at Mount Holyoke that demonstrated the paradoxical nature of black women's attitudes

²⁰ Griffin, Interview.

²¹ Linda Cooper, Interview.

towards the college. She found ways to be, at once, complimentary and critical of Mount Holyoke. Northcross applauded the school's efforts to increase the number of black women on campus, but not in such a way that absolved the administration from any further action. According to Northcross, there was one thing upon which most black women agreed: "That the institution could always improve on its receptivity to students of color."²²

Northcross was a high school student in Memphis in April 1968, when King was assassinated as he stood on the balcony of the Lorraine Motel while in town to support a strike of black sanitation workers.²³ She was the daughter of a dentist and mother who stayed at home. She grew up in an African American neighborhood, but attended a predominately white high school in another community. Her southern, middle-class upbringing resulted in an experience that resembled neither Futrell's nor Whitock's. Her relationships with other black women functioned as an important connection to Mount Holyoke. She was a member of the Afro American Society and appreciated "the sense of community that pervaded the organization."²⁴ This was a period in which the word "sister" was used often to describe the relationships between black women, and Northcross valued the sense of sisterhood that she felt from and for other black women at Mount Holyoke.

²² Deborah Northcross, "Thesis Response," 9 November 2000, personal e-mail (9 November 2000).

²³ Raines, My Soul is Rested, pp. 463-472.

²⁴ Northcross, "Thesis Response."

During the early 'seventies, black students faced some of the same challenges that black women did in the 'mid-sixties, but they were more easily overcome than they had once been. Eloise Skelton '73, a Chicago native, came to Mount Holyoke armed with a sense of purpose and academic confidence: "I'm a little myopic in my view of the world sometimes and when I start on a path it really sort of takes a bulldozer to take me off of it."²⁵ She came to Mount Holyoke already knowing that she was going to be a physician, but she did not want to be a physician who could only talk about medicine. Thus, she chose Black Studies as a double major with Biology so that she would be more well-rounded or, as she put it, "walk and chew gum" at the same time.²⁶ But Skelton's social confidence was initially not as strong as her academic confidence. She was not used to being around well-to-do black people and like Futrell, had little experience living with white people. Still she eventually found her place at Mount Holyoke among both black and white students and thrived both academically and socially. The nature of her career aspirations required that she do so. There were very few black students studying the sciences, so she had no choice but to engage with white students on some level: "You chose your friends by your commonalties. When I needed someone to study with for chemistry, my best buddy was a white girl. When I needed someone to play Bid Whist my best buddy was a Sister."²⁷

²⁵ Eloise Skelton, Recorded Responses to Questionnaire, November 2000.

²⁶ Skelton, Recorded Responses.

²⁷ Skelton, Recorded Responses.

Skelton learned to shape her experience at Mount Holyoke to suit her individual needs.

Patricia Smith '73, from Philadelphia, had an experience that contrasted with Skelton's in that the academics—not the social scene—initially threw her off-balance. Her academic experiences, both before and during her early years at Mount Holyoke, much resembled Barbara Smith's. But Smith '73 was able to trace her troubles to clear differences in the curriculum of her predominately black high school and that of her white peers at Mount Holyoke. They both had attended and excelled at predominately black, urban high schools that were well-known for their academic rigor. But in spite of the fact that Patricia Smith graduated salutatorian of her high school class, she had trouble adjusting academically to Mount Holyoke:

I clearly did not have the same level of academic preparation. . . . I think then they made you take a vocabulary test at the very beginning. And [I] remember just doing horribly on this vocabulary test. And just being very disappointed by that. I also took Calculus my first semester, which I dropped. . . . The memory of that I have is their saying, "We're going to review" and they were starting out with stuff I had never even seen before.²⁸

Her disillusionment never reached the point of Barbara Smith's, though. She eventually found her academic footing as a History and Political Science major, formed good relationships with professors (though mostly off-campus) and went on to do an independent study in her major.

²⁸ Patricia Smith, Interview.

Yvonne Cooper from Chicago, Illinois and Beverly Scipio from Cleveland, Ohio, were both members of the class of 1974. They benefited from student organization of the Afro American Society, the fall 1968 sit-in that black students staged to gain a Black Cultural Center, and the February 1970 building occupations that resulted in a Black Studies program. Consequently, their experiences were generally less difficult and are evidence of how the activism of black women, themselves, shaped the lives of future black students.

Cooper and Scipio entered Mount Holyoke the fall following the building occupations as members of one of the largest classes of black women ever to enter Mount Holyoke. They represented a clean slate both for the college and for black women. Their combined experiences stood in stark contrast to Futrell's, who entered Mount Holyoke ten years before their graduation. Though according to Scipio, there were still black women who found it difficult to integrate into the Mount Holyoke community, student-initiated resources, like the Afro American Society, helped some black students to deal with frustrations when they arose. Scipio, an active member of the Afro American Society, had few difficulties adjusting to the predominately white environment even though she came from a predominately black neighborhood and high school.²⁹ During the 1964-65 school year, Futrell never really got to know most of the other black women on a personal level. Yvonne Cooper, on the other hand, knew just about everyone, though the population was four times as large when she entered in 1970.³⁰ Had

²⁹ Beverly Scipio, "Interview Questions," 3 January 2000, personal e-mail (3 January 2000).

Cooper and Scipio entered Mount Holyoke five years earlier, their experiences may have been very different. They were the beneficiaries of the social and political struggles of black women who had gone before them.

Though academics were important, activism played an important role in the lives of many black women attending Mount Holyoke between 1964 and 1974. Activism was not a new concept to them, not only because the Civil Rights Movement had practically shaped their coming-of-age years, but because they had often been involved in it themselves. Even when it was not formal activism or affiliated with a particular organization, many of them were involved in political activity against racism before they entered Mount Holyoke. In 1963, for example, Futrell was active in campaigning for school improvements in Norfolk. She was one of the spokespeople for the cause in front of the local school board.³¹ During her college application process, a Wellesley graduate interviewed Barbara Smith. When asked about her position on the Civil Rights struggle, Smith was very explicit about what she was willing to do for the cause of racial equality in the United States:

This was the height of . . . Civil Rights activity. Who knows what atrocity had just happened in the nation around racial struggle that prompted her to ask this question, but I'm sure it was something violent and it had happened quite recently. She asked me what I would do if I was in that situation with the dogs and the police or whatever, like what would I do? Would I protest? Would I lie down? Would I boycott? Would I do whatever. . . . I said, "Oh, yes." I said, "I would have to. . . ." She asked me basically, "Would you be a passive handkerchief head Uncle Tom or would you actually be a part

³⁰ Yvonne Cooper, "MHC Survey."

³¹ Futrell, Interview.

of the community and act as a part of the community that you come from." She didn't put it that way, but when I told her that, "Yes indeed, I would be out there protesting with the rest of my people." Do you think we got into Wellesley?³²

The first protests in which Smith participated were in high school. She attended youth rallies to support the eradication of de facto segregation in Cleveland public schools. She was also a CORE volunteer. Linda Cooper participated in a rally protesting the Biafran War in Nigeria, marched in the Poor Peoples' March in 1968, and was suspended her senior year for participating in a sit-in in her high school lobby after a white teacher allegedly hit a black student.³³

Not everyone's activism took the form of non-violent group protests. Whitlock integrated the modeling line-up at the local department store in Richmond when she became their first black teen model.³⁴ Too bogged down by academic work and other extra-curricular activities, Patricia Smith did not belong to her high school's Black Student Union. However, the speech she gave as Salutatorian of her graduating high school class reflected her political consciousness: "I questioned the Vietnam War. I talked about the growing divide between the rich and poor in the city and in the country and the responsibility of us as students going . . . out into the world to change things. . . . It was an argument for equity and social justice and economic justice."³⁵ In high school,

³² Barbara Smith, Interview.

³³ Linda Cooper, Interview; Dyson, I May Not Get There With You, pp. 85-87.

³⁴ Whitlock, Interview.

³⁵ Patricia Smith, Interview.

Yvonne Cooper began to form a critique of sexism and wrote an editorial in her school paper calling for more opportunities for female athletes.³⁶

Some Mount Holyoke administrators pointed to African American students' collective histories of political activism during their high school years as a primary factor influencing black women's critiques of Mount Holyoke. While there is truth to this claim, their prior activism alone cannot fully explain black women's participation in protests against the college. It is evident when examining black women's relationships at Mount Holyoke that they were not all of one mind when it came to the expectations they had of each other politically or socially. Their early activism developed from a common belief among black people that racism must be eradicated from society wherever it existed. Beyond that, however, black women's motivations for uniting in protest against Mount Holyoke could not be solely ascribed to a single political ideology because their varying beliefs were a principle source of friction among them.

As the 'sixties progressed, prevalent attitudes about the necessity of unity and what it meant changed for young black people. In earlier years, students placed less emphasis on the importance of black unity. Futrell's interaction with other black women was limited to attending the occasional off-campus mixer. On campus, she was warned by some upper-class black women not to be seen together too often:

It was a point made that we should not hang around each other too much. That's what some of them thought themselves. . . .

³⁶ Yvonne Cooper, "MHC Survey."

Blackness was not popular in the sixties in integrated settings. So the goal was . . . that you wanted to blend in and pretend that you were not different.³⁷

During the late 'sixties, as black protest thought changed, "blackness" became "beautiful," and became something that could be proudly displayed.³⁸ But according to Yvonne Cooper, this new change had its drawbacks:

I felt the late 'sixties and 'seventies brought a stronger awareness of blackness which was a positive change from the prior trend which was to strive towards emulating the values of white society. But sometimes it was carried too far when people held high standards for what constituted blackness and put down those who fell out of their definition, for example, if they were too moderate and not militant enough.³⁹

The black population at Mount Holyoke was not immune from the positive or negative influences of this change in values. While on the one hand black women were inspired to strengthen themselves and become more knowledgeable about black history and culture, loosely knit factions also appeared on the campus scene. Griffin recalled: "It didn't feel to me as though there was a lot of room for being a moderate back then. Either you were black or you were a Tom. Either you were a militant or you were a Tom."⁴⁰ Whitlock was resistant to the notion that there was only one way to be black and did not allow the beliefs of some of her black peers to legislate her actions. The warring ideals were powerful enough to cause a rift between some black women. On the day that King was assassinated,

³⁷ Futrell, Interview.

³⁸ John Runcie, "The Black Culture Movement and the Black Community," Journal of American Studies 10, no. 2 (1976): 185-214.

³⁹ Yvonne Cooper, "MHC Survey."

⁴⁰ Griffin, Interview.

one angry young woman questioned Whitlock's sadness, as if because she did not fit the popular definition of "black," she could not be moved by the assassination of a prominent leader like King.⁴¹

While black women came to Mount Holyoke with varying levels of protest experience in common, it is important to note that they could not be characterized as hyper-active college students waiting for any opportunity to picket or take over a building. In fact, outside of the protests specifically targeting issues that concerned their lives as black students at Mount Holyoke, black women were not very active politically while on campus. Out of the ten women interviewed and surveyed, only two—Whitlock and Barbara Smith—significantly engaged in political activity outside of a Mount Holyoke context while in college. During her early years at Mount Holyoke, Smith was a member of the campus Civil Actions Group, a political organization originally dedicated to Civil Rights which organized protests against the Vietnam War.⁴² Smith participated in anti-war protests, including a three-day public fast her first year and a spring 1967 demonstration in Washington, D.C. at which King spoke out against the war. She also attended the demonstrations at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago in 1968.⁴³ Whitlock also participated in demonstrations against the war

⁴¹ Whitlock, Interview.

⁴² King, Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., Excerpts from "Beyond Vietnam," Riverside Church Meeting, New York, 4 April 1967, 2nd ed. Joanne Grant (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1996), pp. 394-401.

⁴³ Barbara Smith, Interview; Barbara Smith, "Chicago First-hand: A Distortion of Reality," Choragos, 26 September 1968.

during her time at Mount Holyoke and, during her sabbatical from Mount Holyoke life, raised bail money for the Black Panthers on the streets of Greenwich Village.⁴⁴ Still, out of the six who were on campus—Barbara Smith, Griffin, Northcross, Linda Cooper, Skelton, and Patricia Smith—all participated in either the sit-in for a Black Cultural Center in 1968, the building occupations in 1970, or both.

Generalizing about the experiences of black women at Mount Holyoke College is difficult. It was as much in spite of their differences in socio-economic background, political beliefs, and regions of birth as it was because of their relatively segregated lives prior to Mount Holyoke, that a significant number of black women supported or participated in protests against the college. Their early experiences with activism, and their ability to identify and critique racism wherever they saw it also strongly influenced the actions they took to improve Mount Holyoke College. The fact that so many came together in protest in spite of their differences in backgrounds, opinions and varying levels of political involvement, makes their individuality even more notable. This level of participation implies that in spite of their differing levels of political engagement, a relatively strong consensus existed among a significant number of black women that Mount Holyoke's administration needed to re-evaluate the way it judged racial progress and to improve the support resources available for black students.

⁴⁴ Whitlock, Interview.

It was pretty much the egalitarian place that I thought it was going in . . . You didn't feel like a fish out of water and I liked that aspect of it . . . And I think that never really changed . . . even if you weren't always happy with what was going on, overall. . . . There was . . . a certain parochialism. . . . As you . . . got older and you kind of saw the world in a little more broader sweep and you wanted change. I mean, you're young and you think that . . . you can change everything and you want it to happen. And . . . you're dealing, at times, with an administration that is steeped in a lot of tradition that's not necessarily your tradition and so there is some resistance to change in that regard. So I think in some ways, some of the very things that may have drawn me to the school as I went from year to year could be the same things that make you wonder, you know, "Why am I here?"

-Linda Cooper, '73¹

TWO

Shortcomings on the Integration Front

In all but the most conservative arenas, there is a working assumption that social inclusion is generally a positive goal to aim for. Even those who do not necessarily care whether or not minority populations have equal access to institutions and positions of influence at least understand the importance of having an image that appears to care. One need only think back to the 2000 Republican National Convention, where Presidential nominee George W. Bush, Jr. shared a stage with black R&B singers like Chaka Khan and lip synched to Latin pop sensation Ricki Martin. Those who were less cynical were impressed by this new effort on the part of the Republican Party to demonstrate its commitment to diversity. The Republican political agenda remained unchanged, an agenda which has not been easy on minorities or other under-represented people. But some citizens, judging by their television screens, argued that based

¹ Linda Cooper, Interview with Tiffany McClain, 6 December 2000.

on the representations of women and people of color on stage that evening, the Republican Party was somehow transforming its political position.

Often, a commitment to diversity is evaluated solely by what is visible on the surface: the increasing number of non-white and female faces on a Republican stage, for example. Demonstrated success at recruiting black students to a historically white college bears a number of parallels. With an administration publicly committed to increases in African American students, and the growing numbers of black students that were a testament to their efforts, superficially Mount Holyoke College's campaign to integrate its student body was entirely successful. But in an editorial that appeared in the student newspaper, Choragos, in December 1968, Barbara Smith criticized the administration for not dedicating the same amount of effort to providing resources to address the unique needs of matriculating black students as they had for recruitment: "The numbers of black students here has increased and with the increase in students there has also been a heightened awareness of the ways in which Mount Holyoke fails to provide the type of educational experience that black students want and need."²

Merely increasing the number of the underrepresented was not enough to declare an integration victory. Institutions involved in major integration campaigns must be conscientious not only of the rise and fall in numbers of the integrating population, but the ways in which the institution has prepared itself to deal with those growing numbers. Inattentiveness can lead to a very public crisis,

² Barbara Smith, "Blacks," Choragos, 12 December 1968.

like that of the building occupations that took place at Mount Holyoke, and may become ammunition for those who question the value of integration initiatives. Discontent in their ranks did not mean that Mount Holyoke had no attractive qualities in the eyes of black students. A claim of that nature would be ignoring the very distinct reasons for which some black students chose to attend Mount Holyoke. But although the school's efforts to recruit more black students were successful, Mount Holyoke's administration failed to prepare itself for a smooth integration of black students into its community.

Mount Holyoke's efforts to increase the number of black students on campus were successful, but not unique. They were part of a larger movement of northern colleges to do away with the de facto segregation that existed on their campuses. Inspired by the early Civil Rights Movement, and based on the argument that diversity was necessary for a well-rounded academic experience and that black students would have much to teach their white counterparts, private white institutions in the North began to actively recruit black students to their campuses. Between 1954 and 1968, the number of black students attending northern colleges more than doubled from 45,000 to 95,000.³ This rise was partially the result of the advent of scholarship programs for high-achieving black students. In 1948, The National Scholarship Service and Fund for Negro Students (NSSFNS) was

³ Elizabeth Duffy and Idana Goldberg, Crafting a Class: College Admissions and Financial Aid, 1955-1994 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), p. 138.

established to help ambitious black students enroll in colleges that were predominately white. The National Merit Scholarship Program established the National Achievement Program to benefit 200 black students with scholarships based on records and test scores. Before the mid-to-late 1960s, however, when the major push on the part of northern colleges to enroll them began in earnest, the population increase of black students on white campuses moved slowly. According to a study of select, predominately white liberal arts colleges, as late as 1965, black students made up no more than three percent of the populations of these schools and usually less. By 1970, that percentage had jumped to an average of seven percent.⁴

Through the 1950s, Mount Holyoke received an average of eight applications from black students each year. One or two at most would enter in the fall, and sometimes, none at all.⁵ But this pattern changed during the early 'sixties, when administrators working with Mount Holyoke admissions began to contemplate ways to attract more black students. Although many new recruitment tactics were put into place, one of the earliest and most successful programs used by the admissions office was the Cooperative Program for Educational Opportunity. Launched in 1964, this student referral program was an alliance of colleges and Association of College Admissions Counselors with the purpose of attracting black students to the Ivy League and Seven Sister schools. Almost immediately,

⁴ Duffy and Goldberg, Crafting a Class, p. 138.

Mount Holyoke's admissions office saw an increase in the number of black applicants. In 1964, sixteen black women applied to Mount Holyoke and ten matriculated. In 1965, fifty-four applied and fifteen registered as students in the fall.⁶ The following year, Mount Holyoke single-handedly doubled the number of black women on campus when twenty-five black freshmen matriculated.⁷

Competition was keen among the elite colleges to enroll the most qualified black students. In order to identify the most talented as early as possible and prepare them to be successful college students, several educational institutions created enrichment programs specifically for poor and minority students.⁸ Mount Holyoke became the sponsor of two campus visiting and academic enrichment programs targeted at economically disadvantaged girls and girls of color from inner-city high schools. A single, two-day visit in 1964 of the New York City Higher Horizons program to Mount Holyoke's campus gave birth to an annual tradition that would last for over two decades. The purpose of the weekend was to introduce tenth graders who might not otherwise get the opportunity to explore the liberal arts as an educational option. The organizing committee explicitly stated that the program was not meant to recruit for Mount Holyoke, but it surely did not hurt their efforts and over the years, a few participating students did

⁵ Clara R. Ludwig, "The Goal of Equal Opportunities: Mount Holyoke's Response," Pre-printed from Mount Holyoke Alumnae Quarterly, (Summer 1968), p. 2.

⁶ Clara R. Ludwig, "Report of the Board of Admissions," July 1965, Admissions Office/Board of Admissions, Series C: Annual Reports, Box 2, 1956/57-1964/65, Mount Holyoke College Archives, South Hadley, MA.

⁸ Duffy and Goldberg, Crafting a Class, p. 139.

eventually become Mount Holyoke students.⁹ Mount Holyoke also started a chapter of the A Better Chance (ABC) program. One of ABC's projects was a summer academic enrichment program for economically and socially disadvantaged girls deemed to have academic potential. They were invited to Mount Holyoke in an effort to prepare them for acceptance into elite private high schools and in hopes that they would consider Mount Holyoke when it came time for them to choose a college.¹⁰

The most progressive efforts to recruit black students took place towards the end of the decade. In the aftermath of urban riots and the 1968 conclusion of the Kerner Commission that the United States was drifting towards two separate and unequal societies—white and black—colleges began to use less restricted strategies to increase the numbers of poor and working class black students on their campuses.¹¹ Bringing Mount Holyoke to the attention of black students from inner-city neighborhoods and poor and working class families initiated more change in Mount Holyoke admission and financial aid policies and procedures. For example, it did not take the college long to recognize that the Standardized

⁹ Mary Tuttle, "Memo to Higher Horizons Committee and Attachment," April 15, 1964, Special Programs for Non-MHC Students, Higher Horizons Program: Folder 3, Mount Holyoke College Archives, South Hadley, MA.

¹⁰ Mount Holyoke News Bureau, Press Release, December 12, 1964, ABC Program Series A: General Material, 1964-1966, Folder 1.

¹¹ Duffy and Goldberg, Crafting a Class, pp. 140-142; United States Kerner Commission, The Kerner Report: 1968 Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders (Pantheon: New York, 1988).

Admissions Test (SAT) was not as effective an interpreter of the academic potential of black students as for others. Clara Ludwig, then Director of Admissions, was adamant that the test was biased against students who were not white, middle-class, or native English-speakers.¹² Subsequently, standardized test scores were not emphasized as much when black women were considered for admission. Furthermore, many of the black students could not afford to attend Mount Holyoke without a significant amount of financial aid. For example, of the fifteen incoming black freshmen in 1965, twelve of them received financial aid. Thus, financial aid and admissions administrators cooperated to re-evaluate policies so that all admitted black students who needed financial aid in order to attend Mount Holyoke would receive it.¹³

By the fall of 1974, Mount Holyoke's black population reached its peak with 110 matriculating students out of 1794 (six percent of the total population). The efforts of the Mount Holyoke admissions office had been modestly successful. But the demonstrated commitment to recruiting black students did not distinguish Mount Holyoke from its competitors. It was not the first or the most successful institution to actively pursue African American students. However, the school's

¹² Clara R. Ludwig, "Letter to Mrs. Luther Bewley," December 16, 1969, Secretary of the College Records, Series D: Box 3, Black Students and Alumnae, 1965-1976, Mount Holyoke College Archives, South Hadley, MA.

¹³ Clara R. Ludwig, "Report of the Board of Admissions," July 1965, Admissions Office/Board of Admissions, Series C: Annual Reports, Box 2, 1956/57-1964/65, Mount Holyoke College Archives, South Hadley, MA.

relative lack of pomp and circumstance and its tradition of egalitarianism held a special attraction for some black women who chose to enroll.

Although it was a member of an elite group of liberal arts colleges attended by some of the wealthiest young women in the country, Mount Holyoke had a history that distinguished it from its educational peers. Founded in 1837 by Mary Lyon, one of the original missions of the Mount Holyoke Female Seminary was to make it possible for young women of the middle-classes—not only the elite—to get a comprehensive education. Over a century later, Mount Holyoke recruited from the same pool of elite students as its competitors, but traces of the original mission of the institution were still evident in the culture of the institution in the 1960s and 1970s.¹⁴

According to Yvonne Cooper, there was an “average” Mount Holyoke student called a “Mount Holyoke Type” or “MHT.” Cooper remembers this stereotypical student as being casually dressed, down to earth, and non-elitist.¹⁵ The identifying marks of the MHT reflected the general character of Mount Holyoke College, a character that was particularly attractive to prospective black students seeking the best education possible in a minimally hostile environment. In spite of her frustrations with Mount Holyoke’s geographic isolation, Whitlock would choose Mount Holyoke again if given the same opportunity because of her

¹⁴ Arthur C. Cole, A Hundred Years of Mount Holyoke College: The Evolution of an Educational Ideal (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1940); Anne Carey Edmonds, A Memory Book: Mount Holyoke College 1837-1987 (South Hadley, MA: Mount Holyoke College, 1988).

¹⁵ Yvonne Cooper, “MHC Survey,” 12 November 2000, personal e-mail (12 November 2000).

appreciation for its reputation in comparison to similar colleges: "Holyoke always had a reputation of having lots of wealthy women. But wealth . . . wasn't . . . as large a factor in the admission policies . . . or in the social environment of the college . . . as was the case, by reputation, at a Smith, at a Vassar, at a Wellesley, at a Bryn Mawr."¹⁶ Barbara Smith perceived these same differences between Mount Holyoke and its sister schools during her college search. She had to attend information sessions in wealthy white suburbs far from her neighborhood in order to sit through uncomfortable conversations with alumnae who did not necessarily have the same interest in educating black students as their alma mater's administration. Mount Holyoke did not differ radically from the efforts of other elite colleges. The school held its share of teas in large homes at the end of the mass transit line. However, Mount Holyoke managed to stand out because their representatives made prospective black students feel more welcome:

What people did during those years is that they had alumnae teas or other kinds of meetings. . . . Generally, these incredible high teas at these mansions in . . . those suburbs like Shaker Heights and Pepper Pike and Chagrin Falls, all these places that we never had been and would not have even been allowed to go except if we had a mop and a pail in our hand. So here we were then . . . juniors in high school . . . and a few of us . . . would make the pilgrimage out to these mansions. . . . The Pembroke tea, the Radcliffe tea, the Wellesley tea. And there was a Mount Holyoke tea. . . . I don't know what I thought about Mount Holyoke before I went to the tea, but one of the things about the Mount Holyoke tea, quite different from the other ones, is that the people actually treated us nicely. . . . Because this was a time . . . when black and white people never socialized with each other in any context. So for us to be little black girls . . . in somebody's house, as equals . . .

¹⁶ Linda Whitlock, Interview with Tiffany McClain, 10 December 2000.

drinking tea. . . . That was unprecedented. . . . I mean it would never have happened in . . . any other place in their lives would they ever have had black people in their house unless it was to clean something. So it was a really incredible dynamic and often when we would go to these teas, not only would we be . . . just so miserable to . . . see the incredible wealth that they had in comparison with what we had, we also were not treated well. And when I went to the Mount Holyoke . . . tea, they actually treated us decently. And that really was a factor.¹⁷

In spite of the school's obvious wealth, black women were attracted to what they perceived as Mount Holyoke's lack of pretension. Linda Cooper was among the first class of women accepted to Yale University, but after visiting the campus, she reasoned that if she had to decide between two elite institutions, Mount Holyoke was where she would feel most comfortable spending her college years:

It wasn't a very formal school and . . . my parents and I . . . liked what appeared to be kind of an egalitarian feel about the school . . . I think they were comfortable that it was some place that I could go and feel a part . . . not feel as you would at a lot of schools that you had to dress a certain way to be accepted . . . that you had to have x amount of dollars or a certain background to be accepted. . . . It looked like it was some place that I could feel comfortable being myself.¹⁸

These remembrances were not only a compliment to Mount Holyoke's egalitarian bent, but were evidence that black students were not unaware or unappreciative of the school's attempt to expand its tradition of inclusion to making college more accessible to women of color, specifically African American students. In fact, this demonstrated commitment was a significant factor in their choice to attend Mount Holyoke.

¹⁷ Barbara Smith, Interview with Tiffany McClain, 10 November 2000.

¹⁸ Linda Cooper, Interview.

Still, Mount Holyoke was no racial utopia. Not all black students were critical of Mount Holyoke, and not all for the same reasons or to the same degree. But those who were critical generally expressed dissatisfaction with the Mount Holyoke College with which they became familiar once they had enrolled. Mount Holyoke had a strong record of commitment to racial equality of opportunity when it came to recruitment, but that record weakened with black women's arrival at the college gates. Futrell critiqued Mount Holyoke's early attempts at integration:

They were trying, but they were clueless. . . . I can't remember that there was a black instructor. . . . There was no one . . . no adult for you to relate to on campus or for them to talk to as they came out to recruit young women to come there or to deal with you once you were there. . . . "You're here, you're thrown into the mass. And hopefully, you'll do okay. . . ." Their efforts at that time were to recruit women of color and get them there. Not to help them through the experience.¹⁹

Mount Holyoke invited black students to apply based on the assumption that they would blend easily into the historically white and traditionally Eurocentric college without necessitating major structural changes on the part of the institution. The goal of black student activism at Mount Holyoke College was to push the school to recognize its weaknesses and that real integration required adaptation on the part of both black students and the rest of the white student body, faculty, and administration.

¹⁹ Eleanor Southall Futrell, Interview with Tiffany McClain, 1 December 2000.

Black students' extra-curricular activity was often geared towards creating for themselves the resources and cultural outlets that Mount Holyoke College had failed to anticipate they would need in order to adjust to living and studying in a predominately white environment. The school used every opportunity it could to highlight the resources available for black students and events geared towards the black experience. However, black students—not the administration—initiated many of those resources.

As in the case of Futrell, some black students were discouraged and isolated by black invisibility on Mount Holyoke's campus. In "The Black Experience at Mount Holyoke College," a recruitment brochure written by Gloria Maxwell '72, Maxwell addressed the experience of being an outsider at Mount Holyoke:

Every sister was aware by the time she returned her card in the spring accepting her place in the next fall's freshman class, that Mount Holyoke is an all women's, white, Ivy League school. . . . The significance and reality of these two facts came at different times for different sisters. Maybe it came on Orientation Sunday when a sister walked into her room and suddenly realized she would be living closely with . . . a white woman. Maybe it came with a wrenching jolt when she set out . . . to go to her first mixer, giggling with the excited nervous apprehension of any freshman, and discovering—after a shattering four hours of Ellison's Invisible Man, and having her roommate come over to tell her that "that guy over there wants to dance with you" because he wants to dance with a "black chick" but is scared to come over and ask himself—that she is not any other Mount Holyoke freshman, but a black Mount Holyoke freshman; and that, when the freshman handbook describes a mixer as the place to meet the man of your dreams, it doesn't mean you.²⁰

²⁰ Gloria Maxwell, "The Black Experience at Mount Holyoke College," Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, MA, 1971.

The Afro American Society could not protect black students from such experiences, but the organization could help lessen the shock. Started by black students in 1967, the Afro American Society functioned as a loose network for black students who wanted or needed to occasionally interact with people who shared similar experiences. Maxwell explained the Afro American Society as being "a support structure, a link 'back home,' a line of communication to each other, and to our people in the neighboring cities."²¹ The organization functioned as a social network in which Mount Holyoke students could connect with other black students at surrounding colleges and beyond. The Afro American Society also served as an educational resource for the entire campus. The organization sponsored dialogues and speaking events, which helped to alleviate the absence of black representation in the school's curriculum. Linda Cooper discussed the educational purpose of the organization:

Bringing speakers to campus such as Nikki Giovanni, Shirley Chisholm came, Sonia Sanchez. . . . We would have a weekend in the fall where we would invite other schools and . . . have a soul food dinner and try to bring in different speakers . . . At the time that I went we still had a pretty small number of black students on campus. So you had a lot of white students who had very little exposure . . . to people who were different from them. And so it was pretty important not only . . . to sustain us, but I think also to give those who were interested an opportunity to at least experience something different, something of our culture.²²

The Black Cultural Center was established in 1969 out of a similar sentiment. Members of the Afro American Society wanted a social space in which those who

²¹ Maxwell, "The Black Experience at Mount Holyoke College."

²² Linda Cooper, Interview.

needed to temporarily remove themselves from minority status could do so and where black culture and politics would be of principle concern. The newspaper headline in the December 17, 1968 issue of Choragos read "Trustees establish Black Center." But black students were the ones who actually took the first steps to establish a Black Center on campus. Forty black students staged a day long sit-in of the administrative building to make their message clear when negotiations with the school were not progressing as desired.²³ They wanted to discuss their proposal with the trustees and did not want a white administrator to represent their concerns. "That's what's been happening to black people for 300 years," Beverly Butler '70 was quoted as stating. "I say you [then acting President, Meribeth Cameron] can't represent what we feel."²⁴ It may have been difficult for a white administration, unused to being a racial minority in any situation, to anticipate a desire on the part of black students for their own space. But research or consultation with someone experienced in such matters should have indicated the need on the part of the institution to establish a resource—whether it be cultural space or a counselor—that black women could take an advantage of as an outlet for their concerns and frustrations. During the late 'sixties black students fulfilled a social and educational need that the Mount Holyoke administration did not offer. Their actions were a clue that for many black students, Mount Holyoke was

²³ Barbara Smith, Interview.

²⁴ "40 Black Students in Quiet Demonstration for Their Plan for Campus Black Center," Choragos, December 13, 1968.

lacking something vital. The protests for a Black Studies program in 1970 was a result of the administration not taking the hint.

The implementation of a Black Studies program at a predominately white institution was demonstrative of more than just a commitment to integration. It showed that the administration recognized and valued the intellectual and cultural contributions of Africans and African Americans to the nation and the world. It symbolized a weakening of the Eurocentric cornerstone of tradition that had remained standing in spite of the rising number of non-white students. A major failure on the part of the institution in their relationship with black students was the inability to admit the racism inherent in the traditional liberal arts curriculum and reluctance to place value on the study of non-Eurocentric culture and history. In 1968, Barbara Smith wrote the following editorial in Choragos denouncing the school's Eurocentric curriculum:

Mount Holyoke has made notable and successful efforts to diversify its student body during recent years, but the mere addition of black students to the enrollment is not sufficient in itself to create an ethnically pluralistic learning situation. Establishing social contacts . . . is not the central activity involved in a college education. For better or for worse the central activity is that which centers around the classroom and . . . When the focus in these classrooms is almost exclusively Western and white, seldom Eastern and Oriental, and almost never black, dissatisfaction among those students with historical and cultural roots which are not white and European is inevitable.²⁵

Smith's warning foreshadowed the events that would take place the year after she graduated.

²⁵ Barbara Smith, "Commentary: Black Studies—the things we need to know," Choragos, November 14, 1968.

The main goal of the black students who participated in the building occupations in February 1970 was for the administration to agree to establish a Black Studies program. Like their peers all over the country, many black students at Mount Holyoke yearned to see themselves and their history reflected in the school's curriculum. It often influenced which classes and majors they chose, as well as which professors they formed relationships with. "The only place that you could study anything black was in Sociology," Barbara Smith recounted, who double-majored in English and Sociology. "A lot of black students in my generation . . . gravitated to Sociology because you could study black people."²⁶ Of the women interviewed, Griffin majored in Sociology, as well. Patricia Smith majored in Political Science and History, and often wrote papers dealing specifically with African Americans.²⁷ Once Mount Holyoke established a Black Studies program, Linda Cooper majored in African Studies, Skelton double-majored in Biology and Black Studies, and Scipio majored in Urban Studies. Yvonne Cooper majored in Studio Art and Design, but had a concentration in African Art and took several courses in Black Studies at the University of Massachusetts and Amherst College.²⁸

Most of the women interviewed did not remember many—if any—Mount Holyoke courses directly dealing with the black experience, but there were a few.

²⁶ Barbara Smith, Interview.

²⁷ Patricia Smith, Interview with Tiffany McClain, 24 November 2000.

²⁸ Yvonne Cooper, "MHC Survey."

During the 1969-1970 school year Mount Holyoke listed twenty-one courses as being related to Black Studies. On the surface, that number is quite extensive. But a closer look reveals that only four of those courses actually have "black," "African," or "minority" in the title or as principle subject matter: "Some Black American Writers," an English department seminar, "Black Experience in White Society," a History course, "Patterns of Minority Politics," in the Political Science department, and an interdepartmental course entitled "The Urbanization of the American Negro." One other course, "Social and Intellectual History of the United States, 1737-1860," specifically mentioned an emphasis on slavery, and a Latin American Studies seminar was included, as well. The other fifteen courses were obvious stretches of the definition of "Black" on the part of the institution. Broadly defined courses such as "Economic Decisions in the Public and Nonprofit Sectors," "Dance History," "Ethics, Religion, and Society," and "Principles and Problems of Education" were included, as well as every course with "urban" in the title.²⁹ This list of courses reveals that Mount Holyoke was conscious of many black students' desire to take courses dealing specifically with the study of black people. But instead of adding courses to satisfy those academic cravings, the administration stretched the definitions of the courses it already offered, insulting black students' intelligence in the process.

²⁹ Academic Policy Committee, "Collation of Amherst, Smith and Mount Holyoke Course Offerings for 1969-1970: Courses Relevant to Black Studies," Academic Policy Committee Records Box 1, Folder 1, Mount Holyoke College Archives, South Hadley, MA.

After the building occupations in February 1970, the faculty finally passed the proposal to join the Five College Black Studies Committee, which required that the school develop its own Black Studies department. The college hired Walter Stewart, a black professor of Politics, to chair the program. While the school bulletin addressed the option of concentrating in Black Studies in earlier course catalogues, the program did not have its own section, complete with course and faculty listings, until the fall of 1971. The major program focused on historical, political, and cultural experiences throughout the African Diaspora, including the United States, African, the Caribbean, and Latin America. Stewart taught most of the regularly offered classes, including "Black Protest and the Political System," "Minorities and the Law," "African Political Systems," "Caribbean Political Systems," and "International Relations of the Third World." Related courses were cross-listed with the French, History, Sociology, Religion, and Politics departments and they were generally more relevant to the field of Black Studies than earlier "related" courses had been.

In essence, however, Walter Stewart was the only professor who had the phrase "Black Studies" in his title. The bulk of responsibility for the growth of the program fell on his shoulders. When the program failed to grow, partly because of personality and ideological differences, Stewart shouldered the bulk of the blame coming from both Mount Holyoke black students and colleagues in the Five College Black Studies Executive Committee. In an untitled and undated

report, the committee seriously questioned the credibility of Mount Holyoke's Black Studies Department:

The Department of Black Studies at Mount Holyoke College lacks academic integrity due to the fact that its existence is predicated upon one person. . . . Listing courses of different Mount Holyoke College faculty as Black Studies courses when these faculty have no official affiliation with the Department of Black Studies at Mount Holyoke College can be termed nothing more than "illusionary padding," and this procedure is juxtaposed to the establishment of credible Black Studies offerings.³⁰

As late as 1973, Stewart was still the only Professor of Black Studies at Mount Holyoke. According to the report, Mount Holyoke was the only institution that had not increased the number of faculty, courses, or resources available to its Black Studies Department.

In all fairness, however, Stewart did not have much support from the administration in putting Mount Holyoke's Black Studies program together. Before the department was three years old, it was subjected to budget cuts. In 1973, Mount Holyoke's Black Studies department had the lowest budget of the five colleges. There was no money for books and photo-copying, let alone new faculty. Stewart warned President Truman that "the point will shortly be reached when because of a paucity of resources the Department will be unable to operate as a department."³¹ At the time, Black Studies as an academic discipline was still an idea in development. It was necessary for any director or chairperson of such a

³⁰ Untitled Document, Circa 1973-1974, Truman, David B. Records, Series C: Black Studies Department, Mount Holyoke College Archives, South Hadley, MA.

³¹ Walter Stewart, "Letter to David B. Truman," March 6, 1973, Truman, David B. Records, Series C: Black Studies Department, Mount Holyoke College Archives, South Hadley, MA.

program to be aware of current debates and discussions in terms of curriculum development and accreditation policies on a national level. Stewart had to pay his own travel fees to attend relevant conferences and meetings.³²

Thus, in the early years of the department, Mount Holyoke's administration failed to give Black Studies the resources it needed to become a department that students wanted to be affiliated with. The department's inception was merely a symbolic gesture on the part of Mount Holyoke College. It was one more "resource" to which the administration could point as proof of its progressive ideals on race while failing to show that they valued black culture in the most fundamental of ways and while a single black professor shouldered the blame.

Because of Mount Holyoke's difficulties, Black students interested in studying African or African American history and culture were forced to find off-campus alternatives to satisfy their academic and intellectual needs. "The courses that I took at UMASS and Amherst were more relevant to my major and were not available at MHC," Yvonne Cooper wrote.³³ Though Skelton aspired to be a physician, some of her most positive intellectual growth took place among African American Studies faculty at UMASS and Amherst College: "I had a . . . clear understanding of what it took to be an academic and to be black in the world and they expected only excellence of me."³⁴ The Black Studies department at UMASS, with distinguished jazz artist and lecturer of music Max Roach, Civil

³² Stewart, "Letter to David. B. Truman."

³³ Yvonne Cooper, "MHC Survey."

Rights Movement veteran Ivanhoe Donaldson, renowned Nigerian author Chinua Achebe, and up-and-coming black anthropologist Johnetta B. Cole among the faculty, was extremely popular. Patricia Smith went to great lengths to make sure she was present at a UMASS class: "I'm not a morning person and I think Achebe's course was nine o'clock in the morning, which meant I had to make that eight o'clock bus over to UMASS. And I did not miss . . . one of his classes. And they were just wonderful."³⁵

The relationships that black students formed with off-campus faculty members revealed Mount Holyoke's shortcomings when it came to diversifying its curriculum. There were a few professors on campus who shared an interest in African and African American Studies. William S. McFeely, Professor of History, was admired by black students for his racially inclusive approach to Civil War history, as well as his support of their activism: "Bill McFeely with his focus on the . . . Civil War looked at it in ways that I think were somewhat uncommon . . . for that time," Linda Cooper recalled. "Not just from the perspective of the whites but really putting some emphasis onto what the war and those experiences meant for blacks."³⁶ Similarly, Yvonne Cooper appreciated her Art History advisor, Martha Lee Hadzi, Associate Professor of Art, for supporting her interest in Africa's influence in ancient civilization.³⁷ In general, however,

³⁴ Eloise Skelton, Recorded Responses to Questionnaire, November 2000.

³⁵ Patricia Smith, Interview.

³⁶ Linda Cooper, Interview.

³⁷ Yvonne Cooper, "MHC Survey."

Mount Holyoke provided black women interested in studying African American culture and history with little opportunity to form significant relationships with professors.

The Five-College consortium offered black women opportunities to pursue their academic passions with off-campus professors. As an African Studies major, Linda Cooper's closest advisor was Asa Davis, the head of the Black Studies department at Amherst College.³⁸ Though she did not sing in a choir at Mount Holyoke, Skelton sang jazz with Max Roach and jazz saxophonist, Archie Shepp, who were teaching at UMASS in the early 'seventies.³⁹ And the Afro-American Literature class she took at Amherst College with celebrated poet, Sonia Sanchez, especially influenced Yvonne Cooper's academic growth.⁴⁰

Black women's choice of majors, attraction to and frequent registration in off-campus courses, as well as their affinity towards off-campus professors, was evidence of their genuine desire to learn about black history and culture and the absence of that opportunity on the Mount Holyoke campus. By continuing to increase the number of black students on campus without significantly redefining the academic priorities of the liberal arts curriculum, Mount Holyoke was, in effect, telling black students that neither their experiences nor their academic interests were truly valued.

³⁸ Linda Cooper, Interview.

³⁹ Eloise Skelton, Recorded Responses.

⁴⁰ Yvonne Cooper, "MHC Survey."

For black students, Mount Holyoke's commitment to their education was not solely defined by their increase in numbers, but also by the ways in which the school was willing to transform itself to be better suited to educate students of all ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Mount Holyoke's administration functioned out of an ignorance of the need to change the academic and social structures of the institution in order to better suit the diversity of its student body. The leaders of the institution expected black women to adjust to an often new and different environment, but did not expect the same process of adjustment from the institution.

Black students were not unaware of the administration's commitment to and success in increasing their numbers on campus. However, they could not applaud the school when faced with their virtual invisibility from the curriculum or the lack of academic and social support available to black students for whom a predominately white environment was often something new, stressful, and sometimes frightening. While black students were focused on making Mount Holyoke a place where they could survive happily, the administration continued to pat itself on the back. Forcing the institution to face its problems was a difficult challenge that politically active black students met head on.

White America still does not understand. It continues to urge patience, not realizing that the black man's patience has been tried beyond limits. It urges rationality for a people for whom rationality has failed. Violence, says white America, is wrong and must be stopped. . . . Yet it is the inevitable result of the indifference of white America to its black citizens. And it will only be stopped when white America ceases urging rationality and acts rationally itself.

-Sheryl McCarthy, '69.¹

THREE

Race and Racism at Mount Holyoke College

Although a minority of white supporters existed, the most vocal criticized the actions of black students who participated in the building occupations that took place in February 1970. The general sentiment was that they had acted irrationally. According to their critics, black students' actions were unwarranted and out of the bounds in which disagreements were supposed to be settled in an academic environment. "I very much deplored the use of forceful tactics to deal with matters that it seems to me should be dealt with by reason, by discussion, and by understanding in this kind of community," President Truman stated at the press conference he held the day of the building takeovers.² While faculty and administrators said they recognized the validity of the black students' claims, they condemned the mode in which they brought public attention to the claims. One

¹ Sheryl McCarthy, "A Rational Whiteness," Choragos, April 19, 1968, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, MA.

² "Truman Meets the Press," Choragos, February 28, 1970, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, MA.

white student, Pat Garrison, a self-proclaimed liberal, wrote in the editorial section of Choragos that she was “infuriated, saddened, and perplexed” by the situation. Pointing out that she would have a substantial amount of loans to repay when she graduated, Garrison felt that black students’ request for more scholarship money was “utterly selfish and irrational.” She also believed that Mount Holyoke was undeserving of black student discontent, stating that their actions were “grossly out of proportion with the actual situation.”³ Many white members of the Mount Holyoke community felt that they were somehow wronged and that black students’ charges of racism were mistaken. Few publicly agreed that Mount Holyoke was a flawed institution when it came to the issue of race.

With the growing numbers of matriculating black students and generally low occurrence rate of overtly racist incidents, some white members of the Mount Holyoke community envisioned the institution as a place apart from the racial tensions of the rest of American society. Unlike black students who examined and understood that racism existed in some level wherever they were, when white students discussed the problem of race, the habit was to look away from Mount Holyoke and towards the South and the inner city. White students and administrators thought of Mount Holyoke as a bubble in which the rules of racism did not apply, in which frustrations, though present, were not too strongly felt and

³ Pat Garrison '71, “Human,” Choragos, February 28, 1970.

the gains of the Civil Rights Movement were being enjoyed by all. However, relative “harmony” did not absolve any community or institution from addressing its own weaknesses. Where black students had no problem connecting Mount Holyoke’s flaws to its functioning in a fundamentally racist society, many white members of the Mount Holyoke community had significant difficulty accepting that concept. If a liberal, inclusive white institution cannot recognize the ways in which its attitudes and practices are a reflection of the larger racist society in which it exists, it can never truly cultivate a mutually respectful and progressive relationship with its minority population. Relative to more hostile environments, Mount Holyoke may have appeared to be a community without racism. But a closer examination reveals that race played similar roles at Mount Holyoke as it did in the rest of the country and that the school’s image of itself as a polite and welcoming institution for black students actually hindered racial progress.

Examining the trends of white student activism is one entry point into dissecting the complex structure of student race relations on the Mount Holyoke campus during the ‘sixties and ‘seventies. A number of white students were active—or at least interested—as long as the focus of the Movement was directed towards breaking down racial barriers in the South and aiding the black poor. However, white student commitment to racial justice was conditional upon their not having to examine the ways in which their actions and beliefs, and that of their communities, perpetuated a system of racism.

In 1964, white students from northern colleges flocked to the South to teach in Freedom Schools, help black citizens register to vote, and participate in demonstrations to dismantle legal segregation.⁴ Mount Holyoke white students were most active in the Movement during the 1963-64 and 1964-65 school years, while the country's gaze was still directed towards the non-violent protests in southern states. At Mount Holyoke, students raised funds to bail activists out of southern jails. They participated in a "Fast for Freedom" sponsored by the National Student Association to raise money for poor black families in Mississippi.⁵ The Civil Actions Group formed at Mount Holyoke in February 1964, led by a small group of white students advocating for civil rights. White students Barbara Neumann '64, Penny Watson '66, Anne Hazzard '65, and Carol Swenson '65 spent Spring Break of 1964 registering voters in Greensboro, North Carolina and participating in Civil Rights demonstrations in St. Augustine, Florida.⁶ In October 1963, Martin Luther King, Jr. delivered a sermon at Sunday chapel entitled "The Three Dimensions of a Complete Life" (inward concern for individual welfare, outward concern for the welfare of others, upward reaching for God). And in February 1965, Mount Holyoke students helped to organize a

⁴ Clayborne Carson, In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), pp. 111-123.

⁵ Mount Holyoke News Bureau, Press Release, November 19, 1964, Civil Rights: Mount Holyoke College Student Life—General, Mount Holyoke College Archives, South Hadley, MA.

⁶ "Four to Register, March in South," Mount Holyoke News, March 20, 1964.

Four College Conference entitled, "The Civil Rights Movement: Reform or Revolution."

The record of civil rights activities at Mount Holyoke ended abruptly with the 1965-66 school year, the same year that Black Nationalism re-emerged as popular political ideology and black members of SNCC advocated an exodus of its white members from the organization.⁷ SNCC's official position was that the white presence undermined attempts on the part of black organizers to increase self-empowerment in the black community. They encouraged white activists who truly sought the eradication of racism from society to work to eliminate racism in their own communities:

It must be offered that white people who desire change in this country should go where that problem (of racism) is most manifest. That problem is not in the Black community. The white people should go into white communities where the whites have created power for the express purpose of denying Blacks human dignity and self-determination. Whites who come into the Black community with ideas of change seem to want to absolve the power structure of its responsibility of what it is doing, and saying that change can only come through Black unity which is only the worst kind of paternalism.⁸

Many white liberals were repelled by the changing nature of black protest ideology. Some black people who advocated a temporary withdrawal from interracial alliances argued that the existence of choice made the difference between separatism and segregation. Many whites did not perceive any

⁷ Carson, *In Struggle*, pp. 191-211.

⁸ Atlanta Project of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, "A Position Paper on Race," 1966, Reprinted in *Black Protest: 350 Years of History, Documents, and Analyses*, 2nd ed., Joanne Grant, ed. (New York: Random House, 1996), pp. 428-432.

difference. They accused Black Nationalist organizations of perpetuating the very system that early movement activists had been fighting against prior to 1965. In the third edition of his 1955 classic study of segregation's history, The Strange Career of Jim Crow, historian C. Vann Woodward presented the new trend of separation as a disease that "infected" Civil Rights organizations. He did not discuss or argue the validity of the rationalizations behind the movement towards a separatist ideology. Instead, Woodward described the term "Black Power" as a "license to hate" and viciously demonized Black Nationalist organizations and their leaders.⁹ Regardless of whether advocating an end to interracial alliances was ultimately helpful or harmful to the progress of the Civil Rights Movement, hidden behind white accusations of hypocrisy was a rejection of the notion that the problem of racism existed and could be fought within the white community. On the whole, white students did not pour their efforts into promoting anti-racism in their own communities as they had going into black communities in the South.

During these debates, a contingent of Politics and Economics professors at Mount Holyoke supported black students politically. Gerhard Loewenberg, Associate Professor of Politics, worked as a liaison between black students and the administration during their fight for a Black Cultural Center.¹⁰ A few days before the building occupations of 1970, Larry Flood and Sally Montgomery, Professors of Politics and Economics respectively, wrote a memo to President

⁹ C. Vann Woodward, The Strange Career of Jim Crow, 1955, 3rd reprinted ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), pp. 195-208.

Truman urging that he take seriously black students demands.¹¹ And during the building takeovers, Associate Professor of Politics Jean Grossholtz allowed black students in the library to use her office as needed.

Thus, politically active black students did have white allies at Mount Holyoke. But as they reached a critical mass on the Mount Holyoke campus, vocal black women were increasingly isolated in their politics from the white student body. Public objection to their beliefs from their white peers rarely surfaced, but the level of support was minor. The Civil Actions Group virtually disappeared from the campus scene shortly after the establishment of the Afro American Society. A small group of students at Mount Holyoke did form an organization, Students for One Society (S.O.S), for white women interested in educating themselves and other white people about the ways in which racism worked in society. But its presence on campus was even shorter lived than the Civil Actions Group's. The Protestant Group co-sponsored events with the Afro American Society, including a dialogue entitled "Causes of Unrest in the Inner-City." But once again, the forum focused on the problems of the black community rather than the racist practices that caused those problems.¹² Attendees discussed solutions to urban unrest in the context of what could be immediately given to appease black people

¹⁰ Barbara Smith, Interview with Tiffany McClain, 10 November 2000; "Trustees Establish Black Center," *Choragos*, 17 December 1968.

¹¹ Larry Flood and Sally Montgomery, "Memo to President David B. Truman," February 23, 1970, Truman, David B. Records, Series C: Folder 1: Sit-in By Black Students.

¹² Renate B. Wilkins, "A Brief Outline of Activities at Mount Holyoke College in Relation to the Negro-White Problem," May 13, 1968, Truman, David B. Records, Series C: Box 9: Black Students and Alumnae, 1968-1977, Mount Holyoke College Archives, South Hadley, MA.

rather than how to change the system so that racial oppression would no longer be a problem.

Although some of the events that these two groups organized were well-attended, reports of the school paper inferred that membership was small. After King's assassination in 1968, Choragos reported that actively concerned whites were "still an unfortunately small minority" in spite of the large turnout at two memorial services.¹³ A white student, Judith Rosen '69, wrote an editorial criticizing the Choragos editor for concluding that student turnout at the memorial services was a sign of fundamental commitment to the Civil Rights Movement and social change. According to Rosen, Mount Holyoke students were generally apathetic when it came to race issues and a tearful reaction to King's death did not symbolize any true change of that tendency:

True unity does not emerge in the shedding of silent tears. Rather, it will be created only as a result of active and manifest commitment on the part of individual members of the white community—a commitment to changing the fundamental societal structure that gave rise to the event for which those tears were shed. It is any active commitment to such fundamental structural change in American society that I saw manifestly lacking in the general reactions to Dr. King's death. . . . I see little evidence for describing Mount Holyoke's white community as having been "abruptly awakened." I suggest that it has only tossed and turned a bit in its bed and has now resumed its troubled sleep.¹⁴

Shedding tears for King was not equivalent to making a commitment to rid society of racist practices.

¹³ Julie Van Camp, Choragos, April 12, 1968.

¹⁴ Judith Rosen, Letter to the Editor, Choragos, April 19, 1968.

Only a few Mount Holyoke students seriously took the challenge of late 'sixties black activists to destroy the roots of racism in their own communities. In the years following 1965, as was the case in the United States generally, white Mount Holyoke students were far more preoccupied with pushing for student rights and agitating against the Vietnam War. They organized moratoriums against the war and fought for and gained the right to drink alcohol in their rooms, to entertain male guests overnight, and to have self-scheduled exams. There is no doubt that these gains were victories for all Mount Holyoke students. However, racism still existed on the Mount Holyoke campus and there were no college-wide attempts to do away with it, or even to recognize its presence.

Racism was present on Mount Holyoke's campus and it was not always subtle. White people from all segments of the school community revealed prejudices that could rival those of any supporter of Jim Crow. In the spring of 1969, Ursula Kilner '46 wrote to Alumnae Secretary, Priscilla Wilson, of her disgust with Mount Holyoke's efforts to recruit more black students. She saw the school's efforts as "reverse discrimination," a favoring of the minority of "less, or even completely unqualified, blacks" over a majority of "eminently qualified" white students:

If I want to give any funds to negro education I'll give it to Howard U. . . . Every minority group in this country has had to make it on their own. I see no reason for this abject fawning on the negro. I feel no sorrow or guilt at their "plight"—my great grandfathers were fighting on the Union side in the Civil War. . . . I, for one, with much thought and self examination, plan to give not one more dollar to MHC and have cut MHC out of my will. As long as the discrimination against whites

continues I shall remain adamant and will do my best to persuade other alumnae to follow my lead.¹⁵

In Kilner's opinion, black students' growing access to white institutions of higher education was a form of special treatment on the part of the college. Kilner's point of view reflected an allegiance to a "separate but equal" attitude towards black education. She would rather have given black students money to study as far away as possible from her alma mater than to give them money to infiltrate its white ranks.

Kilner typified many white people who might have, earlier, sympathized with black people fighting the violent face of racism in the South, but had grown resentful of the new changes taking place in the Movement, which often directed its criticism at northern racism. Black people were no longer fighting legal segregation. They were protesting racism that was intricately woven into the fabric of American society—de facto segregation and racism, which were just as deeply entrenched in the North as in the South.¹⁶ Many white northerners grew defensive at suddenly having black protest targeted at their own racism.

Kilner's point of view was not, then, unique—not even within the Mount Holyoke community. As outwardly committed to increasing the number of black students on campus as they were, the recruiting efforts of administrators could not

¹⁵ Ursula Kilner'46, letter to Mrs. Priscilla Wilson, May 22, 1969, Secretary of the College Records, Series D, Box 3, Black Students and Alumnae, 1965-1976, Mount Holyoke College Archives, South Hadley, MA.

¹⁶ Douglas Massey & Nancy Denton, American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).

hide the fact that there were white students, faculty, and alumnae who did not believe that black students deserved to be at Mount Holyoke. Another alumnus, Phyllis Chestnut, upset that some of her white recruits did not receive enough financial aid to attend Mount Holyoke, accused black students of discouraging well-off black women from attending the school:

We are . . . concerned whether concentration on the plight of disadvantaged black girls may be obscuring some opportunities for recruiting black girls fully able to pay their own way. Are you aware of any explicit policy of the Afro-Am Society or other organized black student groups that might result in a failure to encourage financially self-sufficient black girls to matriculate at MHC?¹⁷

Chestnutt and Kilner shared the same generally suspicious and distrustful attitude toward black people merely trying to claim the same opportunities that white alumnae had been offered, often without struggle.

It may be argued that black students never had to deal with the racism of alumnae like Kilner and Chestnutt, or that such distant members of the Mount Holyoke community had little influence. But as potential donors to the school endowment, alumnae opinion certainly held weight. Moreover, some of the most tense interactions between black students and white alumnae took place during reunion in 1972, after which a rash of letters to President Truman accused some black students of being noisy, conspiring to steal, and being generally disrespectful to alumnae staying in Abbey Hall. One alumna, L.B. Cundiff '22,

¹⁷ Phyllis L. Chestnutt, "Letter to Clara Ludwig," August 6, 1970, Truman, David B. Records, Series C: Box 9, Black Students and Alumnae, 1968-1977, Mount Holyoke College Archives, South Hadley, MA.

considered black students to be socially inept and unworthy of association with white people:

If these blacks, seemingly so avid to enter our culture, insist on living in their barbaric style, I would advocate separate living quarters until they learn a few rudiments of mature behavior. Just a minimum of consideration for other people would be, for them, a big step in the right direction. . . . I have great sympathy for what the white students must endure, and for those in authority whose hands are tied.¹⁸

Cundiff's letter indicated a belief that black students were ignorant, ill-mannered, sub-humans who somehow held power over "those in authority." Cundiff suggested that black students bullied their way into Mount Holyoke. At least Kilner had recognized that administrators played some part in the recruitment of black students.

Though members of the class of '22 launched a fairly well organized letter campaign to the administration after reunion, many of which carried obviously racist overtones, there were some dissenting voices. Marjorie Hood Garfield '22 viewed the events that took place at Abbey with a more critical eye towards the racist attitudes of her fellow alumnae:

As I had feared, the real complaint had been men in the dormitory—black men. Though our contact with a few black students had been pleasant, my roommate had shown a surprising fear of going to the bathroom alone after she reported seeing a black man standing in the telephone booth near our room. . . . I do not think much can be done at this late date to change the habits of thought and emotion of women of 70 plus who don't seem to recognize their own racism.¹⁹

¹⁸ L.B. Cundiff, "Letter to Ruth E. Warfel," Dean of Students, June 8, 1972, Truman, David B. Records, Series C: Box 9, Black Students and Alumnae, 1968-1977, Mount Holyoke College Archives, South Hadley, MA.

¹⁹ Marjorie Hood Garfield, "Letter to President Truman," June 14, 1972, Truman, David B. Records, Series C: Box 9, Black Students and Alumnae, 1968-1977, Mount Holyoke College Archives, South Hadley, MA.

Black students had their own take of the weekend. In response to the alumnae's accusations, Sybil Hammond '72 declared the noise complaints to be either exaggerated or misunderstood. She attributed most of the weekend's noise to the sounds of students packing and argued that the one night in which alumnae may have been justified in complaining about noise was because students did not know that they would still be in the dorm. Hammond described her own frustration with the racism she had encountered over that weekend:

We were constantly reminded that we were able to attend MH largely because of the "charity" of that class. I held a door open for one lady and she told me that because I knew how to behave (i.e. "my place") she would continue to give scholarship money ("You are on scholarship, are you not?") to the school. I was told that we all should behave well and make ourselves useful so that their generosity could continue . . . One lady pretended that she thought I was the maid (hand maid, at that) and was quite irate when I didn't perform her requested duties. One lady verbally abused (in plain language—she cursed) my twelve-year old sister for wandering around the hall "idle." Two ladies were quite drunk by twelve one afternoon and continued to burst into my room without knocking four different times . . . The fifth time she knocked . . . she mumbled about the "uppity little nigger/negro (I can't swear which term she used) in the room who won't open the door." I'm willing to bet that that's the lady who complained about the noise at the end of the hall one night.²⁰

Hammond stressed that black students typically gave older alumnae a wider berth than the resident community:

Black students have been, traditionally, more lenient with older alums than with people at the college with whom there is daily contact. Whereas Housemothers, faculty, and administration members wouldn't have gotten away unscathed

²⁰ Sybil Hammond, "Letter to President Truman," July 13, 1972, Truman, David B. Records, Series C: Box 9, Black Students and Alumnae, 1968-1977, Mount Holyoke College Archives, South Hadley, MA.

with some stunts that alums pulled, alums usually are not confronted.²¹

Alumnae were not the only members of the Mount Holyoke community who revealed their racism. Black students regularly confronted the racism of faculty and students. Enclosed with Hammond's response to accusations made by members of the class of 1922 was a short note of incidents of racism that had taken place at Mount Holyoke and within the surrounding community. She described Jessie G. Lie, Associate Professor of Physical Education, as being a "perfect Southern Belle." The English department was notorious for its racism. Hammond referred to two English professors as "King and Queen Bigot" and castigated English Professor James Ellis, who "failed a Pakistani student because her papers came in on the 15th as opposed to before the 15th."²² Darion Griffin had problems with Ellis, as well. As her freshman English professor, he suggested that she return to D.C. and marry because she was not college material.²³ Barbara Smith cited the lack of academic support and the prejudices of some faculty members as one of her reasons for wanting to transfer:

There were too many professors that I met who did not think we should be there. . . . They didn't think that any black students should be at Mount Holyoke because they assumed that we were all unqualified. And some of them didn't have any problems saying it. . . . It was just a violation to the human spirit. . . . I was so used to getting affirmation from anyone in an educational context . . . who was in the role of teacher. That was my experience of being in a classroom. People

²¹ Hammond, "Letter to David B. Truman."

²² Sybil Hammond, "Something For Your 'Racist Incidents File,'" July 19, 1972, Truman, David B. Records, Series C: Box 9, Black Students and Alumnae, 1968-1977, Mount Holyoke College Archives, South Hadley, MA.

²³ Darion Miller Griffin, Interview with Tiffany McClain, 16 November 2000.

being delighted with my degree of interest in what we were doing, my degree of ability, my willingness to do hard work and to succeed. And to get positive feedback for that. I had never been in a situation where somebody had looked at me and had determined and decided that I was not capable.²⁴

Black students had to deal with the racism of individual white students, as well. During her first year at Mount Holyoke, Futrell had a white roommate and they became close friends. But she had another white dorm mate who could not stand to see them together and confronted Futrell's roommate, telling her that just because she had to room with Futrell did not mean that she had to be friends with her. As part of her financial aid package, Futrell was required to serve food to students during meal times. Though there was an attempt on the part of a few students to intervene in her behalf, some white students in her dorm made serving extremely difficult for her:

There were girls in my dorm who had never seen a black person . . . So there were lots of questions . . . not very pleasant questions . . . and sometimes rather rude . . . There were girls who felt that that was my place. To serve them food in a dining room. And they made sure that I knew that.²⁵

Likewise, Barbara Smith recalled greeting white students in her dorm and never getting a response, as if she were invisible.²⁶ Overt bigotry may not have defined the daily lives of every black woman who attended Mount Holyoke during the 'sixties and 'seventies, but its occasional presence cannot be ignored. Blinded by their liberalism, it was even more difficult for white members of the Mount

²⁴ Barbara Smith, Interview.

²⁵ Eleanor Southall Futrell, Interview with Tiffany McClain, 1 December 2000.

²⁶ Barbara Smith, Interview.

Holyoke community to see or admit the ways in which the college implicitly perpetuated assumptions that were inherently racist.

There is no easy way to define a “liberal,” no standard set of beliefs that necessarily tie them together. But during the ‘sixties, when their alliance with the Civil Rights Movement was at its breaking point, white liberals were most often defined by the criticism they received from frustrated black activists.²⁷ They were characterized as being overly hesitant when it came to taking their proclaimed beliefs in racial justice to the streets and weakened by their desire to please all sides instead of taking a firm stand one way or the other.²⁸ Critics like writer James Baldwin and Loren Miller accused white liberals of claiming support for black people in their struggle against racism while urging patience, as if centuries were not long enough to wait.

Beginning in November 1968 and lasting well into the new year, San Francisco State College (SFSC) students, led by their Black Student Union (BSU), struck for a Black Studies program with full academic recognition and a curriculum that satisfied the black population of SFSC. In “Observations on Race and Class at San Francisco State” (1969), Robert Chrisman, professor of English and founding editor of The Black Scholar and the Journal of Black Studies, analyzed the lukewarm liberal white reaction to black student protest:

²⁷ Charles E. Silberman, Excerpts from Crisis in Black and White in Black Protest: 350 Years of History, Documents, and Analyses, 2nd ed. Joanne Grant (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1996), pp. 414-418.

²⁸ Loren Miller, “Farewell to Liberals: A Negro View,” *The Nation*, 195, (October 20, 1962), pp. 235-38.

Though no one avowed he was a racist, most did not like BSU's strike. Though everyone agreed with BSU's fight against racism, very few moved for immediate implementation of the ten BSU demands. Though no one hated Negroes, very few enjoyed or liked a group of angry black faces and words, and all faculty mutually agreed they were not racist. Hovering in the background as a ransom against racism was a check to CORE or having given a black student a good break or having felt grief for Martin Luther King, or having a personal friendship with a black. All served as shields for the naked confrontation of white racism within one's self and one's institutions.²⁹

Chrisman criticized white liberals for their paralysis when faced with the possibility of their own racism. They were quick to deny their racism, quick to point the finger at the black students' strike as the problem rather than looking to its causes, and quick to point to what they had done in the past to support black students. The same atmosphere pervaded at Mount Holyoke College. Their "ransom note" came in the form of an ever-increasing number of black students on campus, the black cultural center and the Afro American Society. These were the initiatives that the school habitually pointed to when questioned about racial progress. These largely symbolic efforts—which black students led—combined with recruiting efforts, became proof of the absence of racism from the Mount Holyoke campus and led white members of the community to point the finger at black students as the cause of any racial problems. Though efforts to increase the black presence on Mount Holyoke's campus were seen as proof of the liberalism

²⁹ Robert Chrisman, "Observations on Race and Class at San Francisco State," Black Power and Student Rebellion, James McEvoy and Abraham Miller, eds. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, Inc., 1969).

and open-mindedness of Mount Holyoke and its culture, white liberalism was limited by self-righteous, self-centered, and short-sighted tendencies.

At a press conference held the same day as the building occupations, Truman stressed how much he, and by extension, Mount Holyoke College, had done for black students:

I think one could easily conclude from these [demands] that Mount Holyoke had done little or nothing for the Black students. In fact, I think there is more Mount Holyoke College should do, but this college was early and active in this area, and has probably done more than a great many other institutions have done.³⁰

Truman briefly conceded that there was more Mount Holyoke could do to make Mount Holyoke a more affable college for black students. However, his principle message was that he felt Mount Holyoke ill-deserved the disruption that was taking place. His subtle encouragement to look to other campuses implied that as long as there were institutions that were worse than Mount Holyoke, black students had no reasonable grounds on which to protest. At ensuing faculty meetings, Truman was able to articulate the demands of black students and justify them. When Professor Ellis questioned the appropriateness of establishing a Black Studies program, Truman evidently defended its value: "Mr. Truman pointed out that . . . over the years, African history has been taught from the perspective of whites who went to African shores. The Blacks are asking that we look at the same phenomenon from the other side too and not just take a single

³⁰ "Truman Meets the Press," Choragos, February 28, 1970.

interpretation.”³¹ This evidence may throw into the question any assertion that his attitude towards black critics of Mount Holyoke was in any way flawed. Truman might well have identified with Loren Miller’s summary of the white liberal’s rationalization for caution:

The liberal is restrained by his historical choice of seeing “both sides” of the issue. He understands the justice of the Negro’s claim, but he argues that as a responsible administrator, he must reckon with deep seated resistance to quick change and with the breakdown that might follow precipitate disruption of institutionalized practices . . . he is not, he says, as free as the Negro thinks; he must gauge the situation and settle for progress in the face of Negro clamor for immediate action.³²

Truman’s shuffling opinion was an example of what many black activists began to resent about white liberals during the ‘sixties. They wanted white support to go farther than agreed ideology behind closed doors. The fact remains that when black students protested against Mount Holyoke College, Truman was not openly supportive of their actions.

Out of the public eye, Truman could be defensively abrasive. His reaction to complaints about black student behavior in Abbey Hall during the 1972 reunion fit that pattern. Without asking their side of the story first, Truman wrote to each student reported present to express his disappointment:

If . . . the reports are essentially correct, I can only say that I feel you have let me down. . . . Without being pious about it, I can also say that I have gone to bat, in and outside on the

³¹ Florence S. Kimball, “Faculty Meeting Minutes,” March 16, 1970, MHC Faculty and Staff Sub-Group 3: Faculty Minutes, 1965/66-1972/73.

³² Miller, “Farewell to Liberals,” pp. 235-38.

College, for the black students—when they needed help with the Afro-Am budget, when they asked for an adequate meeting facility, when I have had reports of racist behavior by white students or faculty. . . . I don't ask "credit" for these things, but I think I do have a right to expect that my efforts to see that students are given fair treatment will not be made ridiculous by some of those same students. . . . More seriously, perhaps you will also understand that incidents such as those I am writing about make it infinitely harder for me to defend what I have done and to try to accomplish those things that need to be done. Such incidents simply make me look like a sucker.³³

Though he claimed that he was not being "pious" or asking for "credit," simply by bringing up these topics, Truman contradicted himself. In a letter that only should have been about the propriety of student behavior and confirmation or denial of facts, Truman attempted to invoke guilt on the part of the individual black students involved by insinuating that they had somehow betrayed his efforts on the part of black students at Mount Holyoke. He implied that black students somehow owed him for the positive changes that had occurred on campus in their regard. In her response to the accusations, Sybil Hammond called Truman on his brazenness. She argued that many of the alumnae were racist and that Truman should not have immediately taken their word at face value without further investigating and analyzing the situation. "If you have spent as much time doing those many things for Black MH students then you should be able to analyze objectively the type of people you have to deal with."³⁴

³³ David B. Truman, "Letter to Miss Patricia L. Smith, et. al," June 9, 1972, Truman, David B. Records, Series C: Box 9, Black Students and Alumnae, 1968-1977, Mount Holyoke College Archives, South Hadley, MA.

³⁴ Sybil Hammond, "Letter to Mr. Truman," July 13, 1972, Truman, David B. Records, Series C: Folder 9, Black Students/Alumnae, 1968-1977, Mount Holyoke College Archives, South Hadley, MA.

Distant members of the Mount Holyoke community influenced the negative ways in which black students were viewed, as well. In February 1972, Elizabeth Barrett-Connor '56, who had recently visited the campus, deplored what she saw as black students' harmful tendency to separate themselves from the rest of the Mount Holyoke College community:

When I was a student at Holyoke there were very few black students. . . . I seldom thought of them as black students, but rather as friends and fellow students whose skin color . . . did not enter my relationship with these girls. We seldom "rapped" about what being black or being black at MHC meant to them. . . . I certainly hope that it won't take another 50 years to get back to the natural and warm feelings I believe we shared, and that current MHC students of whatever minority will not feel that they will allow a major part of their college experience to be separate but equal.³⁵

She did not think to question why black students felt the need to sit together or why white students chose to sit in all-white groups. Furthermore, her letter indicated a belief that it was healthier to ignore race rather than to discuss it, and that making it a topic of conversation was somehow in opposition to nature. In Barrett-Connor's opinion, the state of race relations at Mount Holyoke College squarely rested on the shoulders of black students.

Barrett-Connor was only a visitor, however. Those living and working on campus had similar difficulties in understanding the situation. College Secretary, Mary Tuttle, provided Barrett-Connor with her own explanation:

I agree with you that both white and black students stand to lose valuable experiences *because of the present tendency of some black students to draw apart* [my emphasis]. . . . Before 1964 we had very few black students at Mount Holyoke and

³⁵ Elizabeth Barrett-Connor, M.D. '56, "Letter to Ms. Tuttle," February 14, 1972, Secretary of the College Records, Series D, Box 3, Black Students and Alumnae, 1965-1976, Mount Holyoke College Archives, South Hadley, MA.

they were mostly from middle-class families. . . . They seemed comfortable with life in a white community—or at least we thought so. The situation changed markedly when Mount Holyoke started admitting substantial numbers of black students. Many of them came from a ghetto environment and had never lived in a white community before. At about the same time black people began to feel and express an intense need to discover an identity of their own and found support and security in close associations with other blacks.³⁶

Embracing an analysis of class, race, and politics and their intersections within a recently integrated community, Tuttle's explanations were superficially progressive and understanding. But while her explanations probably answered for some black students' tendency to withdraw from white students (though none of the women interviewed for this project were raised in what could be considered a "ghetto environment"), Tuttle's explanation was flawed. Never did she entertain the thought, at least not in this letter, that white students' reactions to their presence may have been at least partially to blame. Instead, she instantly turned the issue into one in which white students were the confused, hurt victims and black students the "problem."

Some white students placed themselves in the position of innocent victim in the days following the King assassination. When black students decided to sit together at King's memorial service, white students were upset. They found the decision self-centered and called it a tactic for "shock appeal." Even the reporter for Choragos added her disagreement with the black students' desire to sit together: "It may be necessary that whites . . . be jarred out of complacent hopes that there are no real differences and that an easy smoothing-over is possible.

³⁶ Mary E. Tuttle, Letter to Dr. Elizabeth Barrett-Connor, February 24, 1972, Secretary of the

This reporter . . . would question the value of emphasizing . . . the sad gap that exists; especially now, when so many, black and white, are united in genuine grief.”³⁷ Though white students accused black students’ simple display of solidarity as a selfish, divisive act, their turning an event of mourning into an opportunity to complain about how they felt they were wrong and excluded was, itself, self-centered and racist.

The principle assumption working within the white Mount Holyoke community during the ‘sixties and early ‘seventies was that the college was an institution immune to the racial complications of the rest of the country. Mount Holyoke took pride in its racially inclusive and harmonious environment in which black students concerns were usually met with sympathetic understanding. But protesting black students did not want sympathy. They wanted the institution to change to suit the liberal ideals it put forth. However, as had happened in other community struggles during the Civil Rights Movement, the desire of those in power to maintain the illusion of racial harmony hindered black students’ ability to make political allies and impeded the white student body and administration’s ability to recognize that change was needed.³⁸ Thus, what was positive about Mount Holyoke became its major stumbling block to continued racial progress.

College Records, Series D., Box 3, Mount Holyoke College Archives, South Hadley, MA.

³⁷ Susan Forer, Choragos, 12 April 1968.

³⁸ See, for example, the analysis in William H. Chafe, Civilities and Civil Rights: Greensboro, North Carolina, and the Black Struggle for Freedom (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980).

Conclusion

A historically white institution's decision to integrate can lead to both positive and negative developments. In the case of Mount Holyoke College, the school's commitment to diversity undoubtedly helped motivate their recruitment of black students in the midst of the Civil Rights Movement. On the other hand, institutions can often allow their consciousness of being "liberal" or "civil" to blind them to their own faults and the ways in which they do participate in perpetuating racist thinking. The fractures that existed between blacks and whites during the late 'sixties and early 'seventies were often explained as being merely a product of antagonistic black radicalism. However, the case of Mount Holyoke College highlights the importance of examining the influence that flawed liberalism had on black attitudes towards the most "welcoming" of white institutions.

Mount Holyoke was not the most hostile place for a black woman to attend college in the 'sixties and 'seventies; still, black women had reason to complain, sometimes be offended, feel undervalued, and patronized. Though interviewees rarely complained about overt racism, just about all of them criticized the lack of

a support network for black students, the absence of a diverse faculty, and most importantly, the de-valuing of non-Eurocentric culture implicit in its traditional liberal arts curriculum. Mount Holyoke failed to anticipate what it might do to make an underrepresented community feel valued, not only as a number to boost its public image, but also in the daily academic and social realms of the college. In short, the administration functioned under the assumption that the responsibility towards black students stopped once they stepped foot on the pristine campus. These problems were the source of black women's frustrations in February 1970, when they decided to occupy Mount Holyoke academic and administrative buildings.

Any institution or organization seeking to diversify its community should be aware of the problems faced by liberal institutions trying to integrate during the late Civil Rights Movement. Numbers are not the end all and be all to integration. If a traditionally heterosexual women's group aggressively invites lesbian or bisexual women to join but continues to only discuss male-female relationships, its recruitment campaign will not, ultimately, be successful. Neither will a college's recruitment of people who happen to be a specific religion if their dietary needs are not met. The changing appearance of an institution may temporarily convince those in power that an integration campaign has been successful, but if the institution itself does not change to suit the interests and needs of its new members, attempts at diversity are more likely to perpetuate new tensions than cultural understanding.

Black students who attended Mount Holyoke between 1964 and 1974 understood these realities. Their activism on Mount Holyoke's campus is evidence that the gains of the Civil Rights Movement cannot simply be laid at the feet of charismatic male leaders. Mount Holyoke's black students were on the front lines of the Movement out of a commitment to improving their immediate world, and they were successful. The influence of black students' activism is obvious on Mount Holyoke's campus today. There are now four cultural houses, several organizations for women of varying ethnicity, and a still-standing African American Studies program that offers a diverse number of classes and better Five College connections to other programs and departments. These resources exist not because the Mount Holyoke administration fully understands its responsibility towards underrepresented communities, but because black student initiative and protest forced the issue and laid the groundwork for improvement. In addition to pioneering the integration of a small, elite college in New England and working hard to acquire a college education, black women assumed responsibility for changing Mount Holyoke for the better and left the college a valuable legacy.

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Interview Guide

General biographical information

- Birth date, birthplace
- Do you consider yourself African American? African? Caribbean?
- Father's name, mother's maiden name, siblings. Who lived with you in your home?
- Birth place/date of parents and siblings
- Father's work, mother's work: type of work, dates of work, places of work
- Narrator's education: schools and dates
- Marriage
- Children (names, birth dates/places)
- Narrator's occupational history
- Narrator's residential history
- Political involvement? Why or why not?

Home Community

- Did you live in an urban, suburban, or rural neighborhood for the most part?
- What was the racial make-up of your neighborhood? The town as a whole?
- Would you describe the neighborhood as poor, working class, middle-class, upper-class, or mixed income?
- How had your neighborhood changed/town changed or stayed the same when you lived there?
- Who created those changes? How? Why?
- How did you feel about the changes? Why?
- Were your schools in your neighborhood or did you have to travel to get to them? If outside, what differences did it make to you? Were they public or private?
- Were you ever involved in any activities that you considered to be political while you were in high school? Why or why not?
- Did you have any non-black peers growing up? How did they respond to your going to Mount Holyoke?
- How did your black peers respond? Did many of them go to college in your neighborhood? Your family? How did you feel?

The Mount Holyoke Community

- When did you begin your years at Mount Holyoke? When did you graduate?
- What other schools did you apply to and what made you choose MHC?

- What was your major?
- In which dorms did you live?
- What high school were you graduating from? In what town? How did it differ from Mount Holyoke?
- Did you know of anyone who had attended before? How did you learn about the school?
- Have any of your family members attended or considered attending since? Why or why not?
- Do you consider yourself an active alumnus? Have you returned? How many times? Why or why not?

Academics

- What did you think you wanted to do for a living when you first came to Mount Holyoke? How did this change and why?
- Which faculty members and administrators stand out in your mind? Why?
- What were your most positive experiences in the classroom at MHC? Negative?
- Did you ever take any classes dealing with African or African American history, politics, etc. Were they available? Who tended to take these classes? Were you active in demanding new classes?
- What did you think of Mount Holyoke's efforts to admit more women of color? (Higher Horizons, ABC, Summer Program, school visits, panels, hostessing?)
- Were you involved in any functions of admissions office? (panels, Higher Horizons, ABC, Summer Program, hostessing) What did you tell prospective black students about Mount Holyoke?

Social Life

- What institutions, offices, organizations, events etc. were the strongest and most influential while you were at Mount Holyoke? What made them strong? Any particular leaders or programs you remember? Describe?
- What organizations did you belong to? Activities?
- Did you do any volunteer work?
- Did you read the school newspaper? Write for it? Why or why not? How do you think women of color were represented?
- Were some more important to you than others? To most black students?
- Did the strengths/weaknesses of those organizations change while you were at Mount Holyoke?
- Did you do anything academically or socially to gain positive attention? What?
- Did you ever do anything that got you into trouble or tense situations? Did anyone ever do anything to you that turned into a tense situation? What happened?
- Who were your friends from school? How did you make friends?

- Were black students pretty much integrated into the community when you arrived? When you left? Why or why not?
- What was your relationship like with the other black women on campus? Did you study with them? Socialize with them? Participate in political activities with them? How often did they show up in your classes? Did you tend to sit with them in your dining room? Black students from the other colleges?
- How much time would you say you spent with other black students? White students? Other students of color?
- Did black women tend to be from mixed class backgrounds or similar? Did it ever become a divisive issue among you?
- Which black women stand out in your memory? Why?
- Do you remember there even being any non-black students of color at MHC while you were there? What was your relationship like with them?
- Did you belong to the Afro-American society? Why or why not? Would you do things differently in hindsight?
- What kind of things did the organization do? Would you define it as a social organization? Cultural? Political? All three?
- What kinds of conversations did you have with white women on campus? What kinds of arguments?

Environment

- What were the significant places for you on campus? (actual spaces, organizations, places where you felt most comfortable and enjoyed being) Where do you think you spent the majority of your time?
- What were the significant places for you off-campus? How and where did you draw your boundaries? Was there anywhere that you felt uncomfortable? Where did you feel the safest and did you ever venture outside of the area? Why? What was the experience like? (Amherst, Northampton, Springfield, Holyoke, South Hadley)
- Did you attend church while you were at MHC? Where? How did you get there?

Politics

Spring 1968

- What was the larger campus's response to the death of Martin Luther King? Your response? The responses of other black women? Were there riots in your hometown?

Fall 1968-Spring 1969

- Were you supportive in the efforts to establish the Black Center on campus? Why? What reasons were given? Not given? Purposely held back?
- Who tended to be supportive of the efforts of black students? Who tended not to be?

Spring 1969

- Were you involved in the creation of the Mount Holyoke Summer Program? (summers of 1969 and 1970)
- Were you one of the fourteen participants of the Mount Holyoke Summer Program accepted for admission into the college? (**class of 1974**)

Spring 1970

- Did you hear of the building takeovers that took place on campus during the spring of 1970? What that part of a frustration that was building? What did you make of it? (**for those who graduated prior to 1970**)
- Why do you think black students felt the need to take over buildings in 1970? Even with the increased number of classes and events related to the black experience and the increased number of black students on campus?
- Did you participate in the protests? Why or why not? Could you recount the sequence of events?
- Did all black students participate? Who did the participants tend to be? What were the arguments of the non-participants? Was there tension between the two?
- What was the president's response? The white students? Faculty? What did you think of their responses?
- How active was the five-college community in this protest? Mount Holyoke black community? What activities and other political issues did they work on together? Who tended to be the leaders?
- Did you vote in any presidential election while you were at Mount Holyoke? Who did you vote for and why? Did your parents vote? Why or why not?
- What did you think about electoral/party politics?
- Did you ever participate in a sit-in? March? Boycott? Voter registration drive? Explain. Why?
- Were you ever attacked either physically or verbally for your beliefs?
- Did you ever have a run-in with the police?
- Did you agree with the war in Vietnam? Why or why not?
- Did you have an opinion on busing?
- During the late sixties and seventies, there seemed to be a lot of people attempting to define "blackness" and many questions about the role of black people, especially when it came to black women in American society. Did you

ever find yourself confronting questions and debates on “blackness” and what it meant to be “black,” what the role of a black woman was? What conclusions did you come to? What issues did black women tend to agree upon at Mount Holyoke? On which issues were there varying opinions?

-Would you define yourself as a feminist? Did you then? What kind of response did you get for this from other black women at Mount Holyoke? Outside of Mount Holyoke? From your family? Males you knew?

-What were your attitudes about birth control? Abortion? How did they differ from white attitudes? Your family? Black males?

-Other Catch Words: Attica prison riots, George Jackson’s murder, Angela Davis, Black Panthers, Bobby Seale’s trial, Pan-Africanism, Stokely Carmichael, Riots, NAACP, MLK, Malcolm X, CORE, Huey Newton, SNCC, Muhammad Ali, Selma—**how did the existence of any of these people, movements, and organizations influence your time at Mount Holyoke?**

Summer vacation/Back Home

-What was it like going home each summer after having spent nine months at Mount Holyoke?

-What did you do during the summers?

-Did you participate in any political activities?

-What did your family and friends think about the choices you made while at Mount Holyoke?

Mount Holyoke Pop Culture

-Do you remember any common jokes about MHC while you attended?
Nicknames?

-What music did you listen to? Did it differ from other black women? White women? What was their response? Did it ever become a problem for you or any students that you know of?

-What clothing and hairstyles did you tend to where? Other black students?
Why? (same as above)

-Books? What newspapers did you read?

Summary

-What conceptions/misconceptions did other people have about Mount Holyoke? The black liberation movement? Who? Why?

-What did you like best about Mount Holyoke? Least?

-How did Mount Holyoke change/stay the same while you were there?

- Who created the changes? How? Why?
- How did you feel about the changes?
- Do you think that your attitude about MHC changed while you were there?
- Do you think you as an individual or as part of a group—any group—had any impact on what was good or bad about MHC? How?
- If you had the opportunity to do it over, would you? Why or why not?
- Any suggestions for future references?