The Politicalization of Black Students: Northwestern University

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The mid-sixties saw a rapid increase in the number of blacks attending college, much of it occurring at predominately white campuses. Part of the increase reflects historical trends in formal education among American blacks, but much of it reflects the encouragement of black enrollment by interested white institutions, governmental and private. Significantly, by 1968 large numbers of black students were involved in organizations and demonstrations on both predominately black and white campuses, a development which few policy makers or ordinary citizens had expected. This paper looks at a particular group of blacks, those who became a politicalized mass at Northwestern University between 1966 and 1969. The objectives of this analysis are twofold: (1) to explain fluctuations in black student political activity as influenced by the organization of the campus and competition between racial norms among blacks; and (2) to describe different orientations to middle-class status which are apparent among those who have recently graduated.

The discussion is organized in the following manner: (1) an analysis of the past and current political context of black
college enrollment, relating this to other developments in American society; (2) a discussion of the Northwestern University campus social order and the norms brought to it by blacks in the mid- and late-sixties; (3) an analysis of the politicalization process over a three-year period; and (4) reflections on the dilemma posed for the black struggle by increases in the number of college-educated blacks.

**THE POLITICAL CONTEXT**

The consistent pattern of relationships between white and black Americans has been the former's domination and exclusion of the latter. The mechanisms of control have changed, but the overall result has been remarkably consistent. The South was unprepared for the end of slavery and resorted to naked force to reestablish racial control. Since the Civil War, the North has been able to "have its cake and eat it too," i.e., the North has been able to pursue economic priorities without relinquishing racial dominance. The institutional complementarity and efficiency of Northern urban areas has allowed these same results to be achieved with far less dependence upon overtly racial barriers. Lip service to nondiscriminatory practices has not prevented real estate agents from manipulating blacks' access to property, industry from reserving skilled positions for whites, or unions from ignoring unorganized black labor.

This system of racial controls has continued at the same time that American economic institutions have steadily reduced the need for unskilled labor, while increasing the need for larger markets at home and abroad. This economic dynamic, plus conscious discrimination and "credentialism" have combined in a trend toward eliminating from the productive process substantial portions of the black population (Boggs, 1970). Since formal education is so important to developing the skills and credentials which are necessary to
successful participation in the U.S. economy, it is instructive to look at the way that racial differentiation in education has operated to complement the overall pattern of race relations. For the century between the Civil War and 1964, the majority of black college students attended traditionally black institutions. Although black enrollment has shown a consistent and dramatic increase during this century (Crossland, 1971: 34), it is evident that until the last few years these graduates have seldom been allowed to participate in the same labor markets as whites.

More than thirty years ago, in examining the forces which had shaped Negro education in Alabama, Horace Mann Bond (1969: 290) wrote:

The education of Negroes at public expense in Alabama has depended upon the social and economic utility which this education was thought to have for the class of white persons in control of legislation and finance. Whether this control has been that by slave-owners, humanitarians, planters, financiers or white farmers and workers, it is obvious that each has wished to provide for Negroes an education designed to meet its own concept of Negro status in the social and economic order.

As one of his examples, Bond pointed to the labor and educational policies of the Tennessee Coal and Iron Company, a subsidiary of U.S. Steel. After U.S. Steel acquired the subsidiary in 1906 it upgraded black labor to positions formerly reserved for whites. This was one to reduce its dependence on white labor which was being vigorously organized by unions. In order to accomplish this transition to a more manageable labor force, the Tennessee Company had to upgrade the health, education, and work habits of black workers who heretofore had been trained for lower occupations. Thus, the company established towns entirely owned by it where black workers enjoyed a standard of living unlike that available to industrial or agricultural workers in other parts of the South. The quality of education and medical care
provided to these workers was linked to the national labor situation with which U.S. Steel was attempting to cope.

Bond's conclusion, written in the late 1930s, has contemporary relevance for two reasons: (1) it prepares us to understand the argument that rapid increases in blacks attending prestigious white universities like Northwestern represent only one of several responses by elements of the dominant racial group to the challenge of the black struggle; and (2) he reminds us that the dominant group (whites) is not homogeneous, but rather is composed of numerous institutional powers which frequently conflict in their attempts to respond to the "race problem." The Nineteenth Congress slashed money for model cities, rent supplements, and rejected a rat control bill. At the local level, state, municipal, and private police forces were reinforced. Major businesses and the federal government, however, have expressed interest in sponsoring the mobility of more blacks (Turner, 1960: 855-867; Allen, 1970: 193-245). Recruitment of more blacks into higher education, particularly at predominantly white schools, is the primary means chosen for promoting greater legitimacy for the American opportunity structure among blacks.

Recent increases in black enrollment in academically selective, white colleges are politically significant for the very reason that credentials and training made available to them are atypical of opportunities made available to most blacks. Pressure from civil rights groups and a liberal environment for both financial aid to students and eradication of formal racial barriers in higher education (1965 Higher Education Act), all contributed to the initial programs to recruit black students to several prestigious schools in the mid-1960s. Nationwide disruptions by blacks added further impetus to this selective recruitment. However, most of the substantial increases in overall black enrollment in college since 1968 (Crossland, 1971: 32-35) have come at nonelite, predominantly white, two-year colleges. Whether or not a two-year college education will have incremental value in improving the position of
most blacks remains to be seen. The total picture of what is happening—the high unemployment, the programmatic phasing out of many traditionally black colleges (Daedalus, 1971), the move toward a volunteer army, the very high dropout rates in urban black high schools, extreme differences in the quality of higher education available to blacks—clearly indicates that status and mobility differences among blacks are increasing. Schools like Northwestern are currently training and certifying that portion of an emerging black middle-class which has the best prospects for upper-middle-class participation in the American occupational structure. Whether such highly certified blacks serve consciously or not to legitimate "the system," to insulate white institutions from black discontent, is an important question for the future of race and class inequality in the United States.

AN OVERVIEW OF BLACK STUDENT POLITICALIZATION

Development of political consciousness among a subordinate category of people is always problematic. Unequal status provides but an important precondition for widespread politicalization; additional social factors are always involved to facilitate or hinder a collective political response. The following narrative focuses on the growth and maintenance of race consciousness among a particular stratum of the black population introduced into a particular environment. Race consciousness is defined (Pitts, 1974) as behavior addressed to maintaining advantages or overcoming disadvantages accruing to one's racial group. These advantages and disadvantages are the product of structured inequality. Three sets of factors appear to be important in generating black student politicalization in predominantly white colleges: (1) the societal context of structured inequality and prevailing manifestations of interracial conflict; (2) the prevailing social order of
a particular campus; and (3) the collective behavior norms and level of ambition among entering black students. The first set of factors, societal inequality and manifestations of race conflict have already been discussed. Now we proceed to a sketch of the salient characteristics of Northwestern University in the late 1960s.

THE NORTHWESTERN CAMPUS

Northwestern University is a small school (6,500 undergraduates), largely directed to training and certifying candidates for upper-middle-class status and occupations. Meritocratic norms permeate the academic environment and are reflected in the training and research orientation of its faculty, as well as in the high achievement profiles of the students. However, meritocratic performance was not the sole, nor even the most important, preoccupation of Northwestern students of the mid-1960s. Invidious practices and ascriptive norms were apparent everywhere. In March 1964, a Mrs. Prudence J. Scarritt told the Daily Northwestern that her job in the admissions office from September 1959 to October 1961 had been to designate the religion and race of applicants. Jews were only about ten percent of the freshman class in 1965 (Emphasis: Daily Northwestern Magazine, December 3, 1969). American blacks totaled 26 in the same year (Daily Northwestern, March 2, 1966), fewer even than blacks from African countries. Traditionally, Northwestern students come largely from upper-middle-class backgrounds, often having fathers who are business executives. Selective recruitment policies within a strong fraternity-sorority system helped to perpetuate a status hierarchy among students based on such factors as wealth, ethnic and religious background, and physical attractiveness (with a high premium on nordic features). With few exceptions blacks were not recruited into this status system.¹ Black students, nearly
eighty percent of whom were males on athletic scholarship, were almost as peripheral to the campus social environment as the many blacks who worked as janitors, kitchen help, and maids.

Bringing 54 nonathletic blacks into the university in 1966 represented a significant first step in diversifying the composition and moral order of the campus. Nonetheless, this move initially represented the reform vision of a small faculty committee on admissions policy and new personnel in the admissions office. Most of the university, particularly the student body, had not anticipated this recruitment, nor the challenge it posed for the campus. Scholastically competitive but differentiated into a caste-like social order among middle-class whites, Northwestern was a lonely environment for students who didn’t become integrated into its social clubs.

NORMS AMONG BLACK STUDENTS

The most salient factors contributing to the eventual politicalization of black students were the normative perspectives they brought to the campus. Black students who entered Northwestern after 1965 brought two distinct but overlapping and frequently competing modes of behavior which are quite prevalent among American blacks. Race consciousness and race communion are indicative of the extent to which race relations in the United States have produced generalized inclinations to quasi-group behavior among blacks. Black students, despite differences in status and regional origin, constituted a nascent group from the moment they entered the university, sharing honor, stigma, elation, and frustration. This nascent group, not simply individuals, became politicalized in their attempts to cope with the campus environment.

Race-conscious persons and organizations (Drake and Cayton, 1970) want to “further the Race.” Black race-
consciousness aims to alleviate or even reverse blacks’ unequal status vis-à-vis whites. This behavior is not of recent origin, nor is its expression limited to a narrow range of ideologies or actions. It is evident in famous black spokesmen such as Frederick Douglas, W.E.B. DuBois, and Martin Luther King, Jr. It is also evident in the behavior of less visible persons. Furthermore, it is equally evident among so-called “integrationists” and “black nationalists.” The Civil Rights Movement of the fifties and sixties, a particular historical expression of this race purpose, emphasized the benefit which would accrue to blacks (and whites) from interracial associations based on similar class status and mutual interests. In contrast, most of the race ideology and activity which came into prominence in the late 1960s places primary stress on group solidarity, i.e., race-conscious cooperation between blacks. Black students who entered Northwestern in 1966 were overwhelmingly sympathetic to the objectives of the Civil Rights Movement, but few saw themselves as crusaders or activists. Their experiences between 1966-1969 reflect much of the general pattern of change in race consciousness among young blacks from an “integrationist” to a “black nationalist” perspective.4

Race communion was the single most important factor operating among black arrivals to produce a group. In relationships characterized by communion (Schmalenbach, 1961: 331-347) the feeling experienced is the basis of the relationship, i.e., the interaction between individuals is affective and an end in itself. When applied to the black students under discussion, it simply means that the overwhelming majority were inclined to treat other blacks as significant others (see Ballard, 1973: 55) just because of race. Quite literally, blacks arriving on the white campus actively searched for other blacks and introduced themselves to each other. Even today it means that blacks on campus more often than not make a point of nodding hello to other blacks
passing by even though they may not be acquainted. This interaction also pulled many black university-service workers into a network based among black students.  

Black communion has some of the outward characteristics of group solidarity forms of race consciousness, in that both have developed in response to a history of race dominance by whites and emphasize intraracial norms and interactions. They differ, however, in a significant way; the practice of communion provides its own reward, while race-conscious behavior can be recognized by its intent to advantageously affect the status and welfare of blacks vis-à-vis whites.

It is very easy to misinterpret the meaning of the above comments, so a word of caution is offered. The term communion need not connote harmony to the neglect of friction. Almost all of the black students participated in this network of interactions, but it is still possible to point to nucleations of preferred interaction within the communion. Communion does not equate with homogeneity of thinking. As one might expect, most blacks found their closest friends within this pattern of interaction; but then it follows that persons who disliked each other were “linked” to each other by this pattern of normative interaction. Black communion is based on the reciprocal imputation of significant similarity, of which Afro-American ancestry is but the initial and qualifying indicator. Beyond that initial qualifier, the range of intimacy among participating persons varies.

The final important characteristic of blacks recruited to Northwestern in 1966 was their firm expectation for continued academic success and upward socioeconomic mobility. Their parents typically held stable blue- and lower white-collar employment. Compared to most blacks, they were middle class; compared to whites at Northwestern they were materially disadvantaged. However, their high-school-class rankings and career aspirations suggest that these blacks were at least as ambitious as their white counterparts. Many entered with plans to enter graduate and professional
schools. Understandably, the most prevalent sign of race consciousness among arriving black freshmen was an identification of racial progress with their own career aspirations and hopes for social acceptance.

THE FIRST YEAR

The first year academic adjustment of black freshmen was more successful than their social adjustment. Many of them were placed on academic probation at the end of fall quarter, but almost all showed substantial improvement during winter and spring quarters. On the other hand, their social adjustment was consistently frustrating. This crucial first year can be understood in terms of four themes: (1) their "instinctive" dependence upon racial communion along with their decreasing faith in the benefits of face-to-face interaction with whites; (2) their quest for a recognized and legitimate group status in the campus social order; (3) their trial-and-error efforts at building a formal organization; and (4) black students' increasing alienation from the university administration.

Communion and Interracial Interaction

The reciprocal expectations involved in communion are largely taken for granted. For this reason, face-to-face interaction among black students became a major medium of communication. Information about the campus, the frustrations of black students, and other matters, was disseminated and verified through this informal but "natural" network. For example, during the first days of the quarter, the university permitted several white coeds to change their room assignments because their parents refused to have them room with blacks. The matter was reported in the Daily Northwestern, but the "inside" view of these events was conveyed to blacks via casual gatherings among themselves.
Black students wanted to take certain aspects of their environment for granted. They wanted to believe that "black people are the same everywhere." There were quite a few indicators which they took as supportive of this belief. Most of them had low or modest family incomes which were more similar to each other than to that of typical white students. All but one or two blacks placed a high evaluation on "soul music," which dances ought to be danced, and esthetic judgments about "how to dance," i.e., they were emphatically ethnocentric in these areas. Those interested in athletics enjoyed sharing norms of excellence as measured by black achievements in baseball, basketball, and football. Finally, black students felt comfortable in their perception that all blacks shared a feeling of "us." Several who came from decidedly middle-class and nonghetto backgrounds experienced some initial discomfort, but gradually all but one or two adjusted to accept the normative authority of the group.

In light of these strong norms it is understandable that certain types of black-white student interactions gradually came to be seen as a challenge to the communion. The small set of whites who attempted to participate fully in the network of black communion were generally resented. Their readiness to use typically black vernacular, to assume their acceptance among an assemblage of blacks, even their efforts to "dance like blacks" was viewed as presumptuous. If there are no boundaries to the network of preferred interaction, then its situational character (the presence of whites) and sense of intimacy are likely to be undermined. Furthermore, since many of the "intruders" were female, black females perceived an aggressive encroachment on their field of males.

Symbolic expressions of the communion seemed to require collective affirmation in a special event. As the campus homecoming (late fall quarter) approached, concern arose among blacks as to what they were going to do about
celebrating the occasion. Dances in dormitory basements were tolerable as a general practice, but only a very special dance in a special setting would be acceptable for this occasion. An all-school homecoming dance was already scheduled for a large Chicago hotel, complete with several rock and roll bands. Significantly, there was very little discussion among blacks about whether they ought to attend. Most felt that a black-sponsored party was a "must." The possibility that they might be unable to stage a successful black homecoming dance was anticipated with a sense of communal shame. The dance was held at a nearby hotel and many guests from nearby Chicago and Evanston attended. Their homecoming dance was the most rewarding event of the school year for most black students.

**Quest for Legitimacy**

Despite the intimacy of communion, blacks felt that they, as a group, were not an acknowledged part of the campus; their presence seemed illegitimate. Most entered the university with a commitment to make racial "integration" work, i.e., they were anxious to participate in the material and normative reward structures of predominantly white institutions. As persons enrolled in the university, they had access to the curriculum content, competition, and grades which would presumably payoff in career advancement. Integration into the formal reward structure of the university was primarily a matter of individual academic effort and persistence. On the other hand, there existed no formal mechanisms for crossing that threshold of acceptance which automatically concedes the worth of a person's background.

Neither the campus social order, nor the academic arena afforded them a sense of dignity. Many blacks reported that white students seemed to ignore them. Many also reported that white roommates did not share their love of black music. Whites living in dormitories were visibly annoyed when large
crowds of blacks would enter a dormitory lounge to generate spontaneous dances. Black students who petitioned the university to reactivate chapters of traditionally black fraternities and sororities found the administration reluctant to do so. Among reasons offered (Daily Northwestern, April 19, 1967) was the argument that this would be a step backward.

In the classroom some blacks came to resent both liberal and conservative white perspectives on race relations. For example, acting on the writer's suggestion, fifteen black undergraduates registered for a spring quarter sociology lecture and discussion course, Social Inequality: Race, Class and Power. A great deal of heated debate took place in this class, sometimes involving black and white students, at other times only involving whites. In the initial weeks of the course, blacks were inclined to debate opinions which seemed to them uninformed or racist. As the course progressed, even the most patient blacks began to posit "irreconcilable" differences between themselves and their opponents.

A vocal minority of liberal white students often argued against conservative positions on current campus issues such as: (1) whether the university should support open housing in surrounding Evanston; (2) whether the university should take disciplinary action against a fraternity whose minstrel-faced members had harassed a black coed; and (3) whether the student senate should investigate racial and religious discrimination in fraternity and sorority recruitment. As whites debated how whites ought to relate to blacks, the latter grew more cynical and aloof. The very experience of being fought over was demeaning to blacks and only served to alienate them from those whites who saw themselves as friends of the race.

The sense of illegitimacy had a noticeable affect on interactions among black students. As fall quarter progressed, they became more sensitive to the expensive life style around them. Almost all of them were receiving financial aid and held work-study jobs to earn money. Most Northwestern
students were not on financial aid and did not work. Several blacks complained of condescending remarks from whites who questioned their right to be in the university. These invidious circumstances were reflected in the frustrations that blacks brought to their interactions with each other. Well before the homecoming dance, blacks began to complain about having to use dormitory lounges for their dances. A group of five or six males began to drink heavily and accuse several girls of being "too bourgeois." The spontaneity of the lounge dances diminished as cliques formed and bickering increased. By the middle of winter quarter, one of the more middle-class girls suggested to the writer that more racial integration would occur if blacks were less clannish.

Experiments in Organization-Building

The first organized effort to achieve a legitimate black presence on campus came at the beginning of winter quarter. Two or three blacks and their several white associates announced the formation of the Afro-American Culture Club (Daily Northwestern, January 20, 1967) which would promote "cultural exchange." This venture hardly got off the ground before it flopped. More than forty blacks attended the first meeting, anxious to see what was involved. About thirty white students attended and sat in the front of the room. A white professor of history delivered a brief talk on the abuse of black people and how their history had been distorted and neglected. Many blacks left the meeting wondering what the organization was to accomplish and reticent about the role of whites. A smaller meeting was scheduled to draw up a constitution which was to be voted on by the general body at a second general meeting. Ten people came to this meeting and more than half were white. Four white females and one black male volunteered to write the constitution. Ironically, even this gathering failed to clarify the organization's philosophy. The whites suggested
concrete activities such as fraternity dances and bus tours of the ghetto so that other whites could be educated about black life in the United States. Although they lacked alternatives, blacks who attended this meeting later admitted resentment of the whites who seemed prepared to run the organization. The Afro-American Culture Club ended with a second general meeting that was poorly attended.

A second collective effort to address the needs of blacks was limited to black students and began in mid-May of 1967, two or three weeks before the end of the school year. This venture came about while the sociology course, Social Inequality, was in progress. Doubtlessly, it reflected some of the black experiences with whites in that course. Eight undergraduates and two graduate students (including the writer) went to a YMCA in Evanston to discuss the merits of starting an all-black student organization. The fact that only ten students were interested enough to attend this reasonably well-publicized meeting is evidence of the disillusionment that most blacks felt about previous attempts to form an organization. School was nearly over for the year and few wanted to risk another futile gesture when final examinations were near. Perhaps because of this selective factor, those who attended were not long in deciding to give such an organization a try. The reasons for starting the organization ranged from the principle of black self-determination of group objectives to gut-level justifications such as those voiced by several of the black girls. They voiced very harsh judgments of white girls, describing them as brazen, promiscuous, and eager to join black activities so that they could get at black males.

Those who attended the May meeting decided to act immediately as an ad hoc committee to initiate lectures and discussions which would appeal to the black students on campus. Through the professional contacts of a particular graduate student, two nationally prominent black educators came to Evanston to speak to Northwestern black students.
Approximately thirty-five or forty students attended each of these lectures which were held in the black community in Evanston so that they would not be "bothered" by persistent whites or by the school administration. Students responded enthusiastically to these meetings and felt that they needed more gatherings with people who could inform them and help them extract meaning from their experiences.

The school year ended with a fragmented black-student group. The ad hoc committee had not operated long enough to win the allegiance of most of the students, though it was successful enough that many wanted to see more. It was clear that black students wanted some sort of organization which would be responsive to their concerns. Both a large integrated club and an all-black committee had been attempted, but the question still remained as to what kind of organization would be most acceptable to the majority of blacks. Further, it was not clear what objectives it would address.

Grievances

A few words should be said about the growing alienation of some black freshmen from the university administration. As a case in point, a sizeable number of blacks developed a less than favorable attitude toward the financial aid office. The financial aid office develops a financial aid "package" (scholarships and loans) for each Northwestern student receiving aid. This office also administers the federally subsidized work-study program whereby needy students can earn money for working at part-time jobs in and near the university. Administrators of the office felt (interview with dean of admissions, October 1973) that they were at least fair in meeting the needs of black students. But a number of the freshmen (more than ten) were openly disgruntled. Two common complaints concerned the work-study jobs: (1) that the hours were inflexible; and (2) that the jobs were compulsory. Technically, the jobs were in fact optional. That
some blacks felt that the jobs were compulsory may suggest something of the economic strain they and their families experienced in attempting to meet their financial obligations. Many students were worried about their ability to repay university loans. Students’ perception that working hours were inflexible suggests that some of the employers benefitting from this new pool of cheap labor had yet to appreciate the academic demands placed upon student-employees.¹⁰

Several students complained to the university about their jobs and about the size of their debts. According to student reports, they were unable to persuade administrators that their plight was real. During spring quarter, one black student reported (to several blacks) that a university official had said that in the future more attention would be given to recruiting blacks who possessed more substantial middle-class resources, culturally and materially. Reportedly, they were thought to present fewer problems in adjusting to the campus, i.e., they wouldn’t complain as much.

SECOND YEAR

Programmatic development of black student organization and politicalization started with the summer of 1967. The second preparatory program for incoming freshmen recruited 34 Chicago-area blacks with backgrounds similar to those of the previous year, i.e., a good number had parents who were teachers, postal workers, and the like. The political importance of this summer can be stated succinctly: the lessons of the previous year were wedded to race-conscious enthusiasm imported from the Chicago ghetto. The writer and several upperclassmen who were counselors in the program decided among themselves to initiate a black student organization which would address the various needs of the black student population. Using the summer to plan, they readied a structure and a preliminary program to offer to incoming freshmen and returning upperclassmen. Their objective was
to facilitate a smooth transition into the coming year by presenting black students with a prototype of an organization, thereby hopefully avoiding a repetition of some of the previous year's trials and frustrations. They were convinced that a racially integrated organization would not work. They presented their plan to the students in the summer program. The students were very receptive to the idea and committed themselves to publicizing the organization among other new freshmen and upperclassmen when school opened in the fall. A significant indicator of the crescive race consciousness which characterized this cadre before they entered their freshmen year was their behavior during and after the civil disturbances in Detroit that summer. Each night they gathered before the television to watch the news and to cheer the "rioters." When they left campus at the end of the summer preparatory program, the incoming freshmen executed a group project. Using the "rock," a large stone on the south end of campus covered with innumerable layers of previously painted student announcements, the black freshmen wrote: "BLACK POWER," "MALCOLM," "RAP," "DETROIT '67," "STOKELY IN '68." Destined for middle-class status, these incoming students nevertheless attributed legitimacy to the black insurrections.

FALL QUARTER 1967

The developments of fall quarter were characterized by the interplay between programs aimed at nurturing communion, the development of a threat to the black student population, and a cheap, but significant victory for black students. The upperclassmen who initiated the new black student organization, FMO (For Members Only), administered it for approximately two months before stepping down to permit popular elections. It is instructive to look at what was achieved during these two months and what was left undone. From its very beginning during the summer, the originators of FMO had envisioned the organization as an instrument of both com-
munion and race consciousness. From their point of view, black students needed political force to protect themselves from insensitivity and exploitation on the part of the university. However, their first priority was to establish a base of confidence in the feasibility of collective endeavor. Their theory of controlled social change was simple: start by building communion and proceed to the development of race consciousness which could then be channeled into pressure on the university for changes. By what means was this transformation to be accomplished? The leaders attempted to stimulate the reading of black and radical literature, thus they encouraged discussion groups. Even though race consciousness did develop appreciably during this year, this theory received inconclusive support. Many other factors intervened to make inferences more complex.

The less political, but still significant emphasis on communion was promoted through: (1) an orientation for all incoming black freshmen (approximately 60-70 students); and (2) the giving of two large parties at which membership in FMO was solicited. In sponsoring the orientation and parties FMO continued to hold their activities off campus to avoid white interference. Once the base of communion was firmly reinforced and underclassmen were eager to participate in the decisions, the upperclassmen stepped down from their self-appointed positions in mid-October.

On several occasions during the fall of 1967 blacks spoke of harassment by whites living in the fraternity houses. Several reported that beer cans were thrown at them from upstairs windows. Because the university had shown reluctance to act decisively when similar charges were made during the previous year, blacks rarely spoke to officials about their present difficulties. Finally, a large-scale altercation happened late in November, involving large numbers of black students and the members of Sigma Chi fraternity. Police were called onto campus and arrested two blacks, both visiting from Chicago. Blacks were angered at: (1) the degree of force used
by the police; (2) the fact that only blacks were arrested; (3) the charge (mob action); and (4) the high bail ($5,000). Rapid mobilization occurred: the visceral reaction of members of Sigma Chi and some of the members of neighboring white fraternities caused the entire black student community to come together, partly in a spirit of race consciousness and certainly for fear of bodily harm. The very negative reaction to the police also contributed to the sudden unity.

At a time when tension ran high within both racial groups, FMO was inoperative. Composed of any and all blacks who cared to join, it was too heterogeneous; it lacked the structure for an immediate response. It made no statements, no decisions, and called no meetings. Indeed, until after the event was over, no voices were audibly raised suggesting that FMO, as an organization, ought to respond. It was probably the case that much of its rank-and-file membership thought of it solely as a social club! Events had arisen before it had a chance to get off the ground.

However, black students' response to the Sigma Chi incident was nonetheless monolithic. The structure of communication among them and the forcefulness and strategy of several acknowledged but informal black leaders combined to form an effective pressure group for disciplinary action by the university. The previously discussed pattern of interaction, communion, facilitated the contacting of virtually every black enrolled in the university within eight hours of the incident. Ten o'clock Sunday, the morning after the fight, well over one hundred blacks, undergraduates and graduates, came together to decide on a course of action. For the next week, until the university was moved to take disciplinary action against involved individuals, the fraternity, and FMO, blacks continued to assemble en masse, to discuss, and to demonstrate.

The characteristics and strategy of student leaders during this crisis are noteworthy. As might be expected, they were more militantly race conscious than the majority of students.
Two of the four students who were prominent at this time were graduate students and had had prior experience in activist organizations. The strategy of leaders was to demand that the university take decisive steps to control racial violence and to make it clear that future acts of intimidation or violence would result in stern disciplinary action. The fact that blacks felt that they were "in the right" is not as significant as the paradox between a militant tone and a less-than-revolutionary demand. In retrospect, it seems that the more experienced of the student leaders were aware of the paradox, but were being pragmatic in mobilizing and maintaining mass support. Student support for either civil disobedience or more aggressive action was not as strong as attendance at the first group meeting might imply. At that meeting, everyone felt that something ought to be done, but far fewer were committed to anything beyond asking for administrative action by the university. After that first meeting, a march of approximately seventy black students to the university president's mansion helped to convince most of them of the indifference of university officials. Taking deliberate care to keep the group orderly, polite, and quiet, leaders of the march requested an opportunity to discuss the incident and brewing racial tension with the president. Visibly annoyed by the gathering at his door, the president instructed the students that he was busy, could not be interrupted, and referred them to the attention of subordinate officials. Not only did the president's cool reception undermine much of the legitimacy black students attributed to administrative fairness, their belief in the rewards of "respectable" behavior also was diminished. March leaders were quick to instruct their supporters that whether they behaved "nice" or "like niggers," the response of white institutions was little influenced by questions or right or wrong. Several subsequent meetings with university officials convinced black students of the need for more pressure. Finals were approaching in seven days and blacks realized
that the initiative would be lost unless the university could be forced to act immediately.

In a meeting of all 120 blacks on campus, it was decided to present the university with a list of minimum demands which should be met within two days, or else. The "or else" was left vague for a couple of reasons. For one, any clearly defined threat could be countered; second, though every student was convinced that the demands were worthless without potential muscle, there was a large group of students, probably more than half, who were convinced that students would be unable to get the university to comply with the demands, one of which called for the immediate social suspension of Sigma Chi, pending an investigation of the matter. Also, there was the fear of suspension from school, loss of scholarship, and physical harm at the hands of police. Several of the most forceful negotiators spent six hours of the deadline day, wrestling with administration officials over the demands. Undoubtedly the mass meetings of blacks while this was going on contributed to the image of a unified black front. Actually, unity was only partial at this point. During the negotiations those who proposed stopping the regionally televised basketball game that evening were aware that probably no more than forty or fifty students were willing to take this action.

The university, aware that there would be embarrassing action if they attempted to avoid making a decision, finally placed the fraternity and FMO on social suspension, pending an investigation. Without exposing the factions of militancy and fear within their ranks, blacks had learned that as a unified black front, they had power. As individuals, the university was willing to ignore them as it had frequently done before. Significantly, many blacks began to believe that their enrollment in the university was based on the university's calculation of self-interest in private and government funding and public relations. The Sigma Chi incident, which
did not receive campus publicity until after Christmas, taught black students that Black Power was possible.

WINTER QUARTER 1968

An analysis of the events of winter quarter 1968 indicates that the preoccupations of black and white students were becoming more and more divergent. Throughout winter quarter, the most popular focus of white activists was the objective of living unit autonomy. Student leaders consistently pressured the university administration for the right to formulate the regulations which would apply to their living units. An allied objective which they pursued was a liberalization of the hours during which people of the opposite sex were able to visit in each others' rooms. Compared to the previous spring quarter, there was much less public passion displayed in crusading for the improved welfare of blacks, on campus or in the Evanston community. While there were always some whites to whom this remained an important issue, on the whole a close reading of the *Daily Northwestern* for this period indicates that other issues had become more significant for white readers and newspaper staff alike. On the other hand, developments among black students, including their contacts with blacks off campus, stimulated a significant increase in race consciousness.

The first significant event of the winter quarter was the Symposium on Violence sponsored by the university in late January. This four-day event in January brought many prestigious persons, but the most memorable remarks were made by black panelists: scholars Charles Hamilton and Vincent Harding, Mozambique freedom fighter, Eduardo Mondolane, and Omaha barber and black spokesman, Ernest Chambers. Although both whites and blacks gave these four their undivided attention, their reactions were quite different. Blacks were impressed at the amount of agreement among the black speakers and cheered any militant state-
ments which attacked the legitimacy of American institutions. The great majority of whites in the audience, students and others, were silent during these bursts of applause by black students.

Through contact with these symposium speakers black students became more aware of race consciousness in other parts of the nation and the world. Before and after the public sessions black speakers and black students sought each other, conversed, and shared a mutual bond. At the larger of these private sessions, blacks who heretofore had had little exposure to race-conscious arguments were able to listen and raise questions. The most obvious effects of these discussions on black students were a more informed group and improved morale. Soon after the symposium, a small group of blacks, perhaps twenty, attended the black culture program at a nearby college. Likewise, some of the same students began to attend an Afro-American cultural center in Chicago’s Black Belt.

Increases in race consciousness were not confined to a few students. Whites who wrote in the school paper to criticize blacks for sitting in homogeneous clusters in the cafeteria and for desiring the reactivation of black fraternities were told by several black letter writers (Daily Northwestern, January 25 and 26, 1968) to mind their own business. In English classes using William Styron’s book on Nat Turner’s slave revolt, black students objected to the author’s interpretation of the slaves’ motivations. Tired of explaining to white audiences the liabilities of being black, black students began to refuse offers to speak to gatherings of students and professors. Feeling that such gatherings were of little value for those blacks who participated in them, the leadership of FMO let it be known that they expected honorariums from white groups, on campus or off, who wanted to be addressed by black students. The latter position was aimed less at accumulating funds than at reversing the terms of intercourse between whites and blacks.
The most important development within black student ranks was the crystallization of a self-elected cadre devoted to activity based on black (race) consciousness. Selecting among blacks only those who showed clear support for the goal of Black Power, the eight to ten initiators of AASU (Afro-American Student Union) agreed upon the necessity of activity consistent with that goal. Within a couple of months of their first meeting in early February, the AASU membership rose to approximately fifteen. The stated justification for limiting the growth of the organization was to minimize dissensus and to maximize flexibility and active participation. Members made a deliberate attempt to behave as a collegium, as opposed to a hierarchical organization.

Most of AASU's initial activity was oriented to blacks off campus. They maintained contact with black student groups on other campuses, both locally and nationally. They established contacts with black nationalist organizations in Evanston. They also initiated contact with black ministers who supported activism. When picketing black students in Orangeburg, South Carolina were shot by police, members of AASU publicized the event in the *Daily Northwestern* (February 20, 1968) and solicited funds from anyone who wanted to contribute to the funeral expenses. Members of the organization made a point of contributing to the relief efforts which followed black rebellions in April of 1968. Each contributing one or more days of time, AASU members delivered food and clothing donated by unaffected communities (black and white) to the victims of the outbursts. Instances such as these where AASU accepted and even sought aid from whites demonstrate their instrumental and pragmatic approach to whites. They remained consistent in their perception of nationwide and international oppression of blacks (and other nonwhites) by white institutions. They were characterized by a sense of struggle and racial mission.

The formation of AASU exacerbated normative tensions among black students. Members of FMO who were not
invited to join were quick to realize that the existence of AASU implied that their own commitment to the black struggle had been judged and found wanting. The successful use of group pressure in the Sigma Chi incident had increased the popularity of the only existing black organization, FMO. The resolution of that incident had strengthened the image that blacks had of their unity and thus contributed to an awareness of their communion. It had also attracted blacks who expected to see more examples of collective endeavor, i.e., race consciousness. At a time when many blacks were beginning to enjoy the feeling of constituting a potent group, an elite had emerged among them.

The official commitment of AASU to the support of FMO did little to reassure those in the latter who felt that AASU was competing for the resources of FMO. The most respected leaders of FMO were known to be members of AASU. The visible leaders during the Sigma Chi crisis and some, but not all, of the officers in FMO were also members. However, it was also the case that ordinary members of FMO constituted half the membership of AASU. AASU’s orientation to projects associated with blacks in the surrounding community was taken by some critics as evidence that they cared little for campus activities. Indeed, the more noticeable and successful AASU’s off-campus activities became, the more these critics argued that FMO was being short-changed.

The first black girls on campus to wear their hair without altering its texture, the Natural, were members of AASU. This was a visible indication of a more selective communion among AASU members and helped generate envy and distrust among nonmembers. A small clique developed among some of the girls who continued to alter their hair. They called members of AASU, “Afro-Jets,” demonstrating their sense of threat derived from the assertion of a black beauty standard.

The public recognition of tensions between FMO and AASU resulted in concerted efforts by members of the latter to participate more fully in FMO. At this point, the activist
and race-conscious societal perspective of AASU members began to influence the expression of relative deprivation and race consciousness generated by local conditions. Late in winter quarter leaders of FMO and AASU began to collect grievances that black students had against the university. The set of demands presented to the administration during the following quarter reflected the grafting of local and national black grievances.

SPRING QUARTER 1968

The April 3 assassination by a white man of Dr. Martin Luther King made a monumental but different impact on white and black Americans. Given the previous developments on campus, this phenomenon was observable in clear form at Northwestern. Student Senate was in a crucial discussion of the living-unit autonomy question when word came that Dr. King had just been shot. After a brief moment of silence, the discussion resumed at the point at which it had been interrupted by the announcement. At the close of the session, the persons who had made the announcement denounced the body for its insensitivity to King’s death. An embarrassed Student Senate hurriedly gave unanimous approval to a letter to be sent to the president and vice-president of the university urging that Northwestern take a strong corporate stand (Daily Northwestern, April 5, 1968) for open-occupancy legislation in Evanston. In the ensuing four weeks, several hundred white students expressed their grief and/or guilt by participating in open-housing demonstrations in the city of Evanston. These demonstrations were organized and led by churchmen in Evanston.

While “recognized” leaders of both races spoke of King’s death as a bereavement of mutual significance to all, it appears that great numbers of black Americans did not share this sentiment. The burned cities were testimony to their identification of property with white control and the latter with Dr. King’s death. At Northwestern the closing of ranks
among black students was immediately evident. The day following the shooting, a general memorial service was conducted in the university chapel. The chaplain attempted to get a black student to address the gathering, but the request was turned down. Blacks came together in their own meeting where they could express the welled-up emotion they felt in communion with each other. Yet the growing race-consciousness among them explains why individuals frequently reminded each other of the necessity to draw more from this event than the mere solidarity of grief. In death, even more than in life, black students looked upon King as more than a good man—he was a black leader. The knowledge that they were separated from the numbers of their brothers and sisters in Evanston and nearby Chicago caused the group to restrain its members from any overt violence. However, even during the media's temporary effort to withhold from the news information regarding the rebellions, black students were confident that blacks in the nation's ghettos were in fact responding to the racial enemy. The official silence was interpreted as support for this belief. Black students also sensed that the military forces of the nation were poised to strike at all black uprisings, and thus they felt they were being watched as potential threats to white property and persons.

Indeed the dominant white mood on campus and in the community at large was fear of what blacks might do. On the day of the funeral, in the middle of the week, Northwestern and merchants in Evanston both closed their doors. Those white students who were hopeful that blacks would attend campus memorial services on this day were disappointed. Rumors of what blacks were up to circulated among white students. Few whites (Daily Northwestern, April 9, 1968) left the campus for several days. Blacks walking into a crowded room could bring it to almost complete silence.

On the day of King's funeral almost all black students left the campus to go to the black community in Evanston.
There, in the community center, they held their own memorial service. Nearly all of the black students from nearby National College of Education also joined. African students, whose presence on the campus has traditionally been sponsored by the Program of African Studies, joined the gathering and voiced solidarity with Afro-Americans. A black minister from the community held services for them. By this time, several days after the shooting, there were no tears, only determination and a martial spirit. The students spent the time before the minister’s arrival in defining the meaning of King’s death. For the first time, because of his death, a majority of black students had come to the conclusion that liberal as well as conservative whites were committed to the repression of blacks. Liberals were seen as primarily interested in committing blacks to nonviolence. More than ever, black students felt that they would have to take the responsibility for changing their environment at Northwestern.

Here, even more than during Sigma Chi crisis, race-conscious members of AASU and FMO articulated and helped shape group sentiments. In planning and executing the affairs of the day, a significant characteristic of the black student community was revealed. The less visible members of AASU, particularly the most recent recruits, were still very much a part of the normal pattern of friendship cliques within FMO. Thus, their support for race-conscious perspectives and more visible spokesmen undoubtedly contributed to the legitimacy and trust that rank-and-file members gave these perspectives and the group spokesmen who articulated them. The penetration of the black student population by cadre members was unplanned and largely unrecognized. In late April it was to provide the substructure for almost total mobilization of the black student population in support of demands given to the university.

In late April black students presented their demands to the university administration. While attempts were made to keep
these negotiations quiet, reportedly some third party leaked their entire list of demands to the Daily Northwestern. Ironically, these demands of the university became known to whites on the campus on the same day that the vice-president of the university announced that the administration was granting living unit autonomy. The objectives of white and black student movements matured within two weeks of each other. The remaining days before blacks (97 of approximately 120) took over the student finance building to force the university to act on the demands saw a series of public relations maneuvers by both university officials and black students.

It is not the purpose of this paper to analyze those tactical maneuvers or the strategy devised to gain access to the finance building. Suffice to say that the demonstration achieved university concessions on virtually all of the student demands. Here, I will briefly summarize the major demands black students made upon the university. There were six basic demands:

1. Increase the number of black students in the university until their percentage of university enrollment matches their proportion in the general population (10-12%). Guarantee that at least 50% of entering black freshmen come from inner-city schools where disadvantaged blacks are most concentrated.

2. Increase financial aid for all black students so that they can put more effort into their academic studies and less into university-solicited summer jobs designed to enable students to pay their school expenses.

3. Allow individual black students to choose whether to live in a university living unit composed solely of blacks.

4. Provide FMO with a building large enough to serve as a Black Student Union (social center). Also supply FMO with a list of names and addresses of all black students entering Northwestern so that organization can more efficiently coordinate formal communications among black students.
(5) Establish a Black Studies curriculum and recruit black faculty members into the university to teach that curriculum.

(6) Institutionalize black student participation in or even control of decision-making which affects the welfare of black students and the scholarly interpretation of black people.

The demands can be looked at from two perspectives, as expressions of ideology and in terms of their likely consequences for inequality relationships. One or more varieties of race-conscious ideology can be seen in all six demands. So-called "integrationists" and many "black nationalist" enthusiasts agreed with the intent of demands one and two, while only persons of the latter persuasion (including typical black student organizations of the late 1960s and early 1970s) supported demands three through six. For black-nationalist-oriented students, demands for separate housing, a Black Student Union, a Black Studies curriculum, and black student decision-making power were issues of group self-determination, group status, and resources for political socialization. The desire to reproduce a black social environment in the midst of white institutions, race communion, is most apparent in demands for separate housing and a Black Student Union. However, it is also true that some of those who supported the demand for Black Studies were less concerned with promoting a serious and improved study of blacks in the New World than removing themselves from unpleasant contact with whites.

A structural perspective, one which asks the likely impact of achieving these demands, suggests some ironic conclusions. Demands for increased black enrollment and more financial aid indicate a strong attachment to the American status and mobility system. A nominally black-nationalist-oriented student movement actually demanded increased participation and subsidy, insisting all the while that it desired group autonomy. Similarly, the demand for Black Studies would make a so-called "racist institution" responsible for institu-
tionalizing a program of study which many black activists sought (seek) to insulate from white influence. Despite strong white opposition to Black Studies in many universities, the desire to force Black Studies into a legitimate status in American universities suggests another example of integration into the status quo. Overall, most FMO militancy directed at the administration pressures it to take more responsibility for incorporating blacks into the university.

Only number six, a demand for black student power in the university has radical implications for changing any inequality relationships. Administrators and faculty members fully understand that students, black or white, are a subordinate “class” within the university, and there is no widespread sentiment for giving them power over either the educational “product” or the professional staff which gets credit for producing it. Consequently, since 1968, black students have achieved considerable participation in the university but no power over faculty or administration.  

1968-1969: POSTCONFRONTATION YEAR

Much of the Northwestern black student experience during the 1968-1969 school year might be described as the unexpected return to normalcy when the devil disappeared (Coser, 1956), i.e., the normal set of internal problems which developed when their enlarged niche within the university reduced their sense of exploitation and threat. This should be viewed in light of the contradiction that most blacks felt between the normative prescription for monolithic unity among blacks and the actual state of affairs. The political unity which they had demonstrated in May led them to expect consensus within the racial communion. Those who now lived on “black corridors” in university dormitories found that their relationships with roommates and neighbors were not immune to strife. Indeed, because of their consensual expectations and their acquaintance with all of their neighbors each incident where one individual inconvenienced
another became a communal problem. When the pledges of a fraternity used the black corridor for drilling, their abuse of other students' privacy was discussed within the FMO general meeting. Fraternities and sororities had to make concerted efforts not to upstage one another in scheduling parties on the same day or in competition with FMO events. Perhaps the most bizarre example of mundane individual problems raised to collective significance was the FMO-sponsored debate over tensions between males and females arising out of allegations by some of the former that the latter were not generous enough with their sexual favors. Needless to say no organizational policies came out of this heated discussion.

One of the consequences of black unity and an image of racial pride was the opening up to black students of new options within the university. Along with the increased numbers of blacks, this meant that a few were in position to choose between the norms of the black student community and organizational and/or personal interactions with interested whites. Sometimes this signified that the individual attached little significance to the racial communion, but this seems to have characterized a minority of the cases. Nevertheless, for those persons in FMO who sought to function as enforcers of normative orthodoxy, these deviant patterns of interracial contact seemed a threat to black unity.

The normative tension between race consciousness and communion persisted. This was particularly evident when the communion was institutionalized on a more selective basis than that of the general black-student population. Members of black fraternities and sororities were continually arguing with spokesmen for race consciousness who questioned the ability of such social organizations to further race consciousness. Ironically, some of the former members of AASU were now attempting to combat nucleations based on nonpolitical criteria, i.e., communion as opposed to race consciousness.

Finally, differential statuses had evolved among blacks. Typically, upperclassmen were given (and expected) more
respect than lowly freshmen. This very common form of stratification was amplified by the tendency of some upper-classmen to stress their participation in the glamorous events of the previous spring. Indeed during the 1968-1969 school year one of the FMO officers made the prophetic comment that the community needed another external threat, similar to the Sigma Chi event, to produce the excitement and unity of the previous year.

Spring quarter 1968 provided the external threat and the black community mobilized; however, the effort sapped its vitality. An incident wherein a white cafeteria worker in a girls’ dorm allegedly insulted and manhandled a black girl quickly escalated to an evening raid by more than twenty black males on the alleged manhandler’s fraternity house and its occupants. In the furor which followed it was evident that most of the campus and a substantial part of the blacks did not think the retaliation proportionate to the alleged offense. The attempt of FMO to protect the accused students was characterized by bitter internal arguments as concrete measures had to be agreed upon. Disciplinary action by the university against the accused students (suspensions) increased the pressure on the organization, which felt that the judicial process was unfair. Alternative courses of action were suggested. Some felt that university property should be destroyed; others felt that only a mass withdrawal from the university would generate the political pressure to have the severity of punishment reduced. A few felt that the organization was not obliged to do anything because members had not been consulted prior to the action. The black student community felt compelled to take some corporate action, but statements to the white campus community implying that forceful action was to follow were little more than rhetoric.

The example of the previous year haunted everyone’s vision. However, the same solution was not mechanically reproducible. The one extraordinary display of mass unity,
the May confrontation, had been preceded by a fortuitous combination of political education, overlap between political cadre and mass, and a series of events which allowed a group enemy to be agreed upon. Similar conditions had not preceded the most recent crisis. When, by popular vote, blacks agreed to support a hunger strike of 21 students to dramatize what they felt were unjust penalties, they achieved mass black-student support, but compromised their cherished image of militancy. The retaliatory act was based on a standard of justice which sought no legitimacy outside the race. The hunger strike (which did not work) was an appeal to the conscience of the "outsiders."

The gap between these two collective postures illustrates how rare it is to mobilize a total student community (black or white) for struggle. The black student population at Northwestern was clearly supportive of its members. However, this was in spite of distinctions and normative differences among them, not because there were no differences.

**REFLECTIONS ON RACE CONSCIOUSNESS AND SOCIAL STRUCTURE**

Several years have passed since the events described in this paper. Black student enrollment at Northwestern is nearly six hundred and FMO continues to be a vital medium of both race communion and a black-nationalist-oriented form of race consciousness. As I mentioned earlier, these behaviors are not of recent historical origin and they are currently very evident in all stratum of the black population. Looking at these earliest cohorts of blacks at Northwestern (and similar elite schools), I see the question is not whether race communion and consciousness among them will disappear once they are beyond the campus environment. In the absolute, these behaviors probably will continue among numbers of highly educated blacks as long as they are related
to a subjugated minority by family ties, common experiences of color, and a continuing need for a lower class constituency. More interesting questions are: (1) how widespread and important will communion and race consciousness be among this cohort? (2) toward what objectives will their race-conscious action be directed; (3) which part of the total black population stand to benefit from their race-conscious activity; (4) what are the likely effects on inequality of continued communion and/or race consciousness among an educated black middle-class.

Racial communion will be far less important in structuring the daily interactions of these recent graduates than it was in the campus environment. Small, residential situations such as Northwestern’s campus structure a relatively enclosed set of interactions among persons (students) who have the same nominal status and largely similar use of available time. True, there are faculty and administrators, but they are clearly differentiated from students by superior status, authority, age, and the fact that they are paid for their activity. The fact that most are white is but one more important factor of stratification. School situations like this (or for that matter, prisons and the military) are conducive to sustaining communion among subordinates. In such a situation, racial communion is more than a mere nod of the head to a passing stranger of the same race; it is an ongoing attempt to maintain a social world which reflects the experiences and norms of black American life.

Most of these former students will now structure their daily activities around the exigencies of their careers. They will work in discrete formal organizations which are characterized by hierarchy and functional differentiation. Some of the specific work organizations will be predominantly white while others will not; in either case, their workplace associations will be influenced by differences in status, authority, and uses of available time. The practice of racial communion will not necessarily die; rather it will be relegated
to a residual role. In the workplace it serves to bring blacks of comparable status and ambition together for friendly small-talk. My unsystematic but widespread interactions with other college-educated blacks suggests that communion will continue to be practiced outside of the workplace, particularly where ecological factors associated with middle-class living put these blacks in closer proximity to whites than to other blacks. Young black couples living in middle-class predominantly white neighborhoods often comment that they make a special effort to keep their children in regular contact with other black children so that they will "grow-up black." Be that as it may, beyond the campus situation, racial communion is once again a set of normative interactions which are best exemplified by a nod of the head between passing black strangers or a "Black Power" handshake. These interactions afford emotional rewards to the participants or perhaps assuage an individual's guilt feelings about living much better than his fellow blacks. Where racial communion in the workplace carries over to association outside, it continues to show the influence of status and occupational differentiation.

Black college graduates who are likely to dedicate their daily activities to promoting racial uplift and liberation from oppressive structures are a minority, even among those who have participated in an aggressive student movement. First of all, despite their collective mobilization in the campus situation, ideological commitment to institutional change is unevenly distributed among the blacks discussed in this paper. I estimate that a minority of them actually grapple with the dilemma of how to reconcile race consciousness and the dictates of their careers. I do not have the impression that recent involvement in a race-conscious student movement has been sufficient to determine many of their occupational careers. There are those, of course, who deliberately attempt to infuse a race-conscious perspective into their careers and community service. But even for these persons, the race-
conscious movement seems to have added a level of purpose and legitimacy to career activity substantially determined by personal interest, aptitude, and earlier training. Typically, these persons choose law, social work, primary and secondary teaching, the arts, historical, and social science scholarship as careers through which they hope to make race contributions. It is worthy of note that those who are most emphatic in their ideological orientation often avoid the business world because of their perception that capitalist enterprise is incompatible with service to an oppressed people.

Some of the black Northwestern graduates have settled in the Chicago and Evanston area. Most, but not all, grew up on Chicago. At least ten or fifteen of them interact regularly. When they do, the topic of racial solidarity frequently comes up. Some are anxious to find ways to use their black alumni ties for purposes of racial uplift in local politics and educational reform. In extended discussions they grapple inconclusively with questions such as: (1) what are the ways to interface the activities and skills of middle-class blacks with the needs of the black majority; (2) how can inter-organizational cooperation among predominantly black organizations be encouraged; and (3) can black middle-class aspirations be channeled into actions which are likely to challenge significantly the inequality structures which define the position of blacks in the United States? This kind of questioning is not peculiar to blacks who have recently graduated from Northwestern (see Katznelson, 1970: 465-480), but it would be hasty to conclude that it will necessarily produce truly innovative behavior among the majority of the black middle-class. My recent observations of college-educated blacks suggest that ideologically guided blacks are less than a majority.

Most recent black graduates, regardless of whether or not they have been active in a black student movement, are now likely to exhibit what I might label "reactive" race consciousness. They enter the same occupations as those favored by
the more ideological blacks, but are not categorically opposed to working in the business world. They display race-conscious activity most conspicuously when they perceive either a personal advantage or a threat from whites or predominantly white institutions to their jobs, status, communities, or middle-class prerogatives. Similarly, there is considerable evidence that many middle-class blacks are willing to make instrumental use of racial communion to accomplish personal or nonracial objectives. Black marketing-consultants are especially prominent in this regard (Chicago Sun-Times, November 18, 1973: 101), often promising businesses (mostly white-owned) that black experts can manipulate and interpret the "culturally different black market" to increase business sales. Many young middle-class blacks express a nominal acceptance of "black consciousness," but feel uncomfortable about infusing it into job situations which either do not directly relate to issues of race or which are likely to be intolerant of its expression. Future signs of race consciousness among this majority are more likely to reflect their circumstances within discrete organizations and sectors of the economy than a generalized ideological commitment to group liberation.

Though graduates of an elite school, students discussed in this paper face essentially the same structural situation as many other college-educated members of a growing black middle-class.

It is currently popular among some black middle-class persons to deny significant normative differences and antagonistic class differences among blacks. There are two ways that this is typically done. First, some argue that despite differences in income, job security, and education, middle-class blacks share the same "values" as lower-class blacks. I suggest that these values are too frequently no more than the spontaneous network of interaction and expectations which I have termed racial communion. As this paper has shown, participation in communication has emotional benefits, but it
in no way indicates a political stance vis-à-vis inequality. Second, statements of race consciousness on the part of middle-class persons and organizations are too often taken at face value. Aside from the issue of sincerity, there is always the possibility (probability) that such statements reflect the interest and/or ideological perspective of the more advantaged stratum within the race. True enough, class collaboration within an oppressed minority may often benefit both classes, but it is naive to expect that a bourgeois stratum advocating racial uplift will deliberately attempt to revolutionize the class-based institutions which support its advantages. On several occasions, black college students have espoused the cause of black workers on campus (maids, janitors, laborers), but this does not mean that most black students are opposed to the inequality system which guarantees that such workers will be paid less than college-educated persons. Although the following remark by Lerone Bennett (Ebony, August 1973: 55) undoubtedly expresses the sincere commitment of some middle-class blacks, one should not overlook the legitimacy it bestows on many persons who are now able to cloak their personal ambitions in a higher legitimacy:

There are to be sure, conflicting class interests within the black community, but these conflicts are non-antagonistic since the black middle class is not now and never has been the principal employer of black workers. For this reason, class collaboration is possible and necessary in the black community. The black middle class needs the black lower class for it cannot save itself without the strength of the masses and the rootedness of black culture. The black lower class needs the black middle class for it cannot save itself without the skills and resources of the black middle class.

Class collaboration within the racially oppressed group may indeed be “necessary,” but it is nonetheless desirable for scholars to place these relationships and their ideological reflections into critical perspective. Hopefully, this paper highlights some of the resilience of the black struggle as well as problems that it faces.
NOTES

1. The writer was an undergraduate on athletic scholarship at the university from 1961 through 1966.

2. Dean of Admissions William Ihlanfeldt has been most helpful in providing insight into circumstances surrounding policy changes in regard to expansion of financial aid to students and recruitment of minority students.

3. The writer began graduate work in sociology in fall quarter 1966 with the intention of studying black student responses to an environment with which I was well acquainted. From September until May 1967 I directly observed and interviewed them through informal conversations. In January 1967 I administered questionnaires to thirty of the fifty-four freshmen. Until May I refrained from offering them any advice concerning adjustment to campus. From May through June 1968, I became an active participant in activities involving both undergraduates and graduates. I was an initial member of two student organizations which developed in this period. After June 1968, academic and professional responsibilities precluded me from day-to-day participation in the black student community. Instead I attended several organization meetings and made a point of talking to informants who were differentially located in the black student population and the FMO hierarchy.

4. The terms “integrationist” and “black nationalist” are not intended to convey precise definitions. They are important distinctions within a range of race consciousness, but they are essentially connotative.

5. This pattern was also evident among blacks at Northwestern prior to 1966. Of the 26 blacks there during the 1965-1966 school year, 20 were athletes.

6. Seventy-eight percent of those who entered Northwestern as freshmen between 1966 and 1969 have graduated from that institution. Many have gone on to graduate and professional training.

7. I observed this on several occasions and it was reported to me by black students.

8. I was one of ten teaching assistants in this course, so it provided me with an opportunity to observe them in a classroom situation directly related to my research interest.

9. In 1973-1974, the university directly assisted 41% of its freshmen. In 1972-1973, more than one-third of the freshmen and more than half of the seniors worked part-time. Thus, the working student is now less of a deviant than he or she was in 1966. Since tuition costs have risen more sharply than the income of middle-class families, many whites presently receive financial aid whose families could have afforded the tuition of a decade ago. Children of the truly wealthy might have an even heavier representation in the enrollment, if it were not for aid to talented middle-class whites.

10. The student handbook still discouraged students from working, an indicator of a norm which was to become outmoded in subsequent years as more and more students worked to meet rising tuition costs.

11. In the original document these six demands are listed under ten points. The complete set of demands appears in Bracey et al., 1969: 476-485.
12. This point is made in a provocative essay by Perkins and Higginson (1971). Perkins and Higginson were participants in the Northwestern black student movement.

13. Black faculty representation on campus has increased from two to more than twenty, but few of them are sympathetic to granting students power over faculty careers and work activities.

14. This discussion of the 1968-1969 school year deliberately overlooks black students’ increased activism in the surrounding Evanston community. This significantly influenced militancy and organizing among high-school blacks, but amounts to a separate story. Most of this community activism was done by former members of AASU who had disbanded their organization during the summer. The successful confrontation with the university had brought them increased visibility from nonstudents and students on other campuses. A number of blacks at Northwestern were either envious or jealous of their stature, so ASSU members decided to dissolve their formal entity. Finally, at the beginning of fall quarter 1968, graduate members of FMO voluntarily withdrew their right to hold office in the organization so that it might be more responsive to undergraduate desires. A small number of undergraduates were noticeably pleased to have the older competitors step aside.

15. The writer is now teaching in the sociology department at Northwestern University. FMO norms and black student activities are revealed in their monthly publication, BLACKBOARD.

16. The writer is currently preparing a follow-up study of blacks who graduated in the years 1970, 1971, 1972, 1973. This will focus on their campus and postgraduate experiences. A parallel study of white Northwestern graduates from the same years is also planned.

17. The writer participates in these discussions.

REFERENCES


The University of Maryland Baltimore County is seeking a distinguished scholar as Director of African-American Studies. The candidate should have research and teaching experience related to one of the three areas of the program: Africa, African Diaspora, or Community Involvement Studies. The candidate also should have demonstrated capability in administration and community service. Inquiries, applications, or nominations should be directed to:

Chairman of Search Committee
African-American Search Committee
Administration Building, Room 701
University of Maryland Baltimore County
Baltimore, Maryland 21228