

The Sociopolitical Vessel of Black Student Life

An Examination of How Context Influenced the Emergence of the Extracurriculum

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The commercial success of the Denzel Washington-directed film, *The Great Debaters* (2007) [produced by Oprah Winfrey's Harpo Films], should inspire additional historical examinations of co-curricular or extracurricular activities in the first Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs).¹ While scholars in higher education who pay particular attention to HBCUs have responded mightily to issues involving curriculum (Anderson, 1988; Dunn, 1993; Jarmon, 2003), Little (2002) posited that the scant scholarly attention paid to America's first black collegians' extracurricular experiences ultimately limits our understanding of black education.

The dominant framework for studying the emergence of extracurricular activities suggests that literary societies and fraternities leaked out of extremely tight curricula, which were bound by rigid religious protocols and parochial ideas of what made a "man of letters" (Church & Sedlak, 1976). "The fraternities offered an escape from the monotony, dreariness, and unpleasantness of the collegiate regimen which began with prayers before dawn and ended with prayers after dark" (Rudolph & Thelin, 1990b, p. 146). While the emergence of the extracurriculum at black colleges bears a slight resemblance to the first of these activities at colonial and American colleges, student life at black colleges came out of a much different sociopolitical context, thus offering a distinctive story as to how student life at black colleges emerged. Peeps (1981) wrote, "To understand both progressive and repressive developments in the black college movement after the Civil War it is important that these developments be placed within context of that divisive historical era." Moreover, educational histo-

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rians have challenged the predominate view of the birth of the extracurriculum and its usefulness as a critical pedagogical device (Saslaw, 1979).

Hollywood scripts may be more likely to focus on explicit scenes of racial segregation and discrimination than on the less noticeable development of the extracurriculum. Nevertheless, the sociopolitical context surrounding *The Great Debaters*' Wiley College and other HBCUs at the turn of the 20th century forces historians to reconsider the birth of the extracurriculum (Fisher, 2003; Franklin, 2003). In this article, the following questions are explored: Can the predominant view of the emergence of extracurricular activities at colonial and American colleges be used to explain the birth of extracurricular activities at HBCUs? What inspired college students to act out of the day-to-day doldrums of early college schedules based on their standing in a highly racialized sociopolitical environments? And, how was a debate team viewed as a "break" from a rigid curriculum when placed within an overtly contentious sociopolitical environment? In engaging these questions, this article reveals that race, class, social standing, and school type must be considered in order to craft a robust understanding and description of the emergence of college extracurricular activities.

Goals

An understanding of black colleges' extracurricular activities must first be placed in an historical stew whose main ingredients are slavery, the abolitionist movement, Reconstruction, white supremacy, interdenominational and community resistance, economic hardship, as well as Southern culture. Thus, the primary purpose of this article is to uncover the context that gave birth to extracurriculum at early black colleges so that more accurate future comparisons can be made to the rise of extracurricular activities at colonial colleges.

Frederick Chambers (1972), whose analyses preceded Little's, encouraged historiographers to study the developments of individual colleges and universities and avoid the practice of studying institutions collectively (Chambers, 1972). The benefits of this approach provide audiences with rich nuances, which can lead to broader inductive generalizations and analyses. Therefore, the secondary purpose of this article is to examine Straight University² and the contextual factors that led to the emergence of the extracurriculum there so that future research will be better equipped to pose comparisons of the quality of student activities in relation to their institutional contexts.

Accordingly, this article is divided into seven sections. The first section, *Founding Fathers*, introduces the predominant view of how the extracurriculum developed at colonial colleges. Section two, *Denominational Giving and the Emergence of Black Colleges*, reveals the parallel beginnings of black colleges and early colonial colleges. The third section, *American Missionary Association's Evolving Mission*, continues the discussion on the general similarities of black and colonial colleges, but introduces

an important distinguishing feature in the discussion of evangelicals who sought to educate American Indians, and missionaries who sought to undo the harms of slavery. Section four, *Parallels and Contrasts to Black Institutions*, expands upon section three by providing additional distinguishing factors between black and colonial colleges related to their settings. In the fifth section, *Legal and Social Context*, an analysis of the Straight University setting is offered. Section six, *Regional Tensions*, discusses the challenges Northern education-focused organizations faced in the South. And, finally, in the seventh section, *Black National Discourse on Athletics*, the potential impact of intraracial discourse on extracurricular activities is presented.

Founding Fathers of the Extracurriculum

Denominational giving fertilized the growth of American Higher Education. English religious donors may not have possessed primary interest in endowing colleges, but they did invest in evangelical programs designed to deliver American Indians from “savagery” (Thelin, 2004). Taking advantage of the messianic zeal of British evangelicals, colonists created schemes to funnel money—intended to convert “heathens” to Christians—to help finance Oxford- and Cambridge-like institutions in the colonies (Wright, 2006). Wright demonstrated that much of the seed money dedicated to educating and converting Indians to Christians was actually used to benefit white males. For example, the first sentence of The Harvard Charter of 1650 announced the dedication of financial resources “for all accommodations of buildings and all other necessary provisions that may conduce to the education of the English and Indian youth of this Country in knowledge and godliness” (Dudley, 1650). The founding architects of Harvard accentuated its religious mission relative to the Christianization of “Indian youth” in order to rally political and economic resources, but with the concomitant mention of “English youth” decision makers could exercise discretion as to where those resources would ultimately be directed.

In addition to the international support from English evangelical sponsors, early colonial towns solicited the development of institutions of higher education to help grow budding urban centers. Colleges were seen as necessary to transition urbane, homogenously religious towns into progressive metropolitan cities (Boorstin, 1965; Church & Sedlak, 1976). This transitioning notwithstanding, municipal leaders assumed that founders of mid-eighteenth century colleges would ascribe to the religious expectations of the settlement. And though colony residents and their leaders expected “reasonable” amounts of religious diversity especially among the populations attracted by the colleges, they also presumed that religion would provide a common thread across the various organizational entities that comprised the town. “As understood in the colonies, toleration meant the tacit recognition that the dominant church in each province was the established ecclesiastical authority” (Herbst, 1976). Clearly, colonial colleges were perceived to be cultural and religious extensions of host towns’ “mainstream” inhabitants. Still, early urban

planners recruited higher educational leaders, usually from outside the host towns, and generally supported them in their work.

Religion also influenced college curriculum content and pedagogy (Rudolph & Thelin, 1990a; Wright, 2006). Grounding college students in the basic tenets of the Protestant faith through a rigidly classic liberal curriculum was a high priority for community founders and, therefore, for the leaders of each colonial college (Klassen, 1962). Harvard, for instance, built a curriculum around three distinctively religiously rooted academic exercises—the lecture, the declamation, and the disputation (Cremin, 1970). Cremin describes: (1) lectures as oral textbooks, which students transcribed verbatim; (2) declamations as student speeches with an emphasis on grace and style; and (3) disputations as highly organized debates in which students critiqued each other's logic, content, and presentation. Even though older liberal curricula eventually made way for the Scottish influences of science and practical subjects like world languages and algebra, this new knowledge entered pre-existing curricula only with due deference to discipline, subservience, and piety. Thus, colonial colleges generally embraced a liberal educational model that weighted religious training over intellectual inquiry. Amherst President Herman Humphrey, reflected a common sentiment of the time, that “to have prayed well is to have studied well” (Le Duc, 1946, p. 22). Resultantly, early American higher education placed a greater emphasis on molding character than producing scholars (Rudolph & Thelin, 1990a). From sun up to sun down for approximately three years, students received lectures, orated, and argued in Greek, Latin, logic, ethics, and religious content again reflecting the English penchants for verbal acuity and religious training. It wasn't until the Eighteenth Century, when administrators' sanctimonious demands came into conflict with students' demands for freedom, that the extracurricular movement began (Moore, 1976).

Higher education scholars generally agree that the rigid curriculum inclusive of the extensive workday forged an intense desire among students to find alternative modes of intellectual and social expression. The first break from the rigorous religious training curriculum manifest in debate teams and literary societies. (Rudolph & Thelin, 1990b). These organizations emerged from the rich sociocultural, sociohistorical, and sociopolitical contexts out of which the colonies grew and, thus, focused their intellectual and social exchanges on topics that mirrored actual ethical complexities of the time, often played out in courtrooms and newspapers. Commonly male dominated, these extracurricular spaces enabled students to apply intellect and reason to controversial current events of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth centuries. Questions such as “Ought freedom of thought be granted to all men?” were avidly engaged, providing students the opportunity to express themselves in a more animated manner (Rudolph & Thelin, 1990a, p. 141). It is important to note, however, that the discussion of these contentious issues even in these extracurricular contexts emphasized developing and refining arguments *about* the issues, not direct political discourse *of* them. Further, debating sides of an issue did not necessarily

lead to empathic or critical awareness (Westbrook, 2002), rather, it merely provided "...a protected arena for the discussion of political, philosophical, religious, and historical topics" (Saslaw, 1979) outside of the suffocating obedience of the formal curricula.

The surfacing of extracurricular activities in early American colleges signaled a shift in the intellectual and social culture on campus. Not surprisingly, it was met with resistance from administrators and host community observers. These activities were perceived to threaten the carefully guarded way of life that promoted only discipline, subservience, piety, and, ultimately, religious obedience. In the development of beginning American colleges Rudolph writes, "The fall from grace was facilitated by the recognition that the fraternity movement gave way to secular values, to good friendship, good looks, good clothes, good family, and good income... For in the end polished manners were necessary for success in this world, and not the next" (Rudolph & Thelin, 1990b, p. 149). By the mid-Nineteenth Century the disdain of college administrators towards the replacement of religious values with secular ones was well known, but did not stop the progression.

Denominational Giving and the Emergence of Black Colleges

While English denominations assumed early colonial colleges would use their granted seed money to educate the "infidel" Native population, Northern mission societies sought to undo the harms of slavery to Blacks through education (Wright, 2006). The American Missionary Association (AMA), The Freedmen's Aid Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church, The American Baptist Home Mission Society (ABHMS), The Presbyterian Board of Missions, and the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) church opened dozens of "black-friendly" postsecondary institutions throughout the United States (Anderson, 1988).

The abolitionist and eventual egalitarian cause of the AMA in particular led to the founding of Straight University. A brief analysis of the AMA reveals the religious (and philosophical) motivations that framed the curricular milieu of Straight University. In addition, an historical examination of the progression of development of the AMA provides insight into the political tensions that led to the opening of a college in the post-bellum Deep South.

American Missionary Association's Evolving Mission

In July of 1839, a group of fifty-three enslaved Blacks, natives of the Mendi tribe for Sierra Leone West Africa, were placed on the schooner *La Amistad* for transport to their registered owner's land in Cuba. The captured Africans, led by a man named Cinque, organized a revolt. They killed the captain, cook, and some crewmembers, commandeered the ship, and attempted to force its remaining defeated crew to sail back to Africa. Unbeknownst to the now liberated Africans, the

crew sailed East by day and North and Northwest at night. This circuitous zigzag route resulted in a sixty-three day trip to New England. Once along the Connecticut coast, the U.S. Coast Guard intervened, boarding the *La Amistad* and ultimately bringing it ashore. One of the surviving crewmembers appealed to the Coast Guard for protection, revealing the details of the revolt. The Africans argued the original crewmembers captured and enslaved them illegally, justifying their mutiny. The U.S. District Court subsequently charged the Africans for murder on the high seas and jailed them in New Haven pending trial.

Several organizations sought to support the defense of the *La Amistad* Mendi men at trial. The Amistad Committee was formed to garner funds to assemble a prestigious legal defense team to represent these men. Lawyers, including John Quincy Adams and Roger S. Baldwin, argued on behalf of the now jailed Africans. After a two year legal battle, the Supreme Court ruled that the Portuguese slavers illegally captured these Mendi tribe members, so their killing of the captain, cook, and crewmembers was an act of self-defense.

A group of five missionaries accompanied the Mendi men back to Africa. This and other anti-slave missions were organized to express opposition to the both international and domestic slave trading (as well as to caste systems, polygamy, and liquor). These missions eventually focused their efforts exclusively on opposing slavery in United States under the auspices of the American Missionary Association. "The American Missionary Association was formed to promote the cause of Christian abolitionism in the U.S." (Robinson, 1996, p. 5). After emancipation, the mission of the AMA quickly evolved into shifting national culture from one organized around a racial hierarchy to one that acculturated Blacks into mainstream society. Education, specifically postsecondary education, became the main vehicle through which the AMA sought to accomplish this acculturation.

Reverend L. C. Lockwood, a member of the American Missionary Association, writes, "Yesterday I opened a Sabbath school [for Blacks] in Ex-President Tyler's house. Little did [Tyler] think it would ever be used for such a purpose. [The Blacks] felt that it was the beginning of better days for them and for their children" (Beard, 1909, p. 121). But, the AMA believed elementary and even secondary education to be insufficient in the upliftment of Blacks.

There must be long looks forward, for it was evident that millions of people whose antecedents were barbarism and centuries of slavery could not be upraised to Christian civilization and privilege by ever so much mere elementary education...No race can be permanently dependent upon another race for its ultimate development.

This Negro race must be taught to save itself and how to do it; to work out its own future with its own teachers and educators. (Beard, 1909, pp. 146-147)

Accordingly, five years after emancipation, the Sabbath school evolved into the Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute, currently known as Hampton University. The founding of Hampton reflects the abolitionist group's shift in focus

from freeing slaves to establishing schools that were dedicated to the advancement of Blacks.

For decades prior, education laws in the South prohibited teaching Blacks how to read and write. Such laws fomented white resistance to the establishment of black schools. Consequently, the AMA was heavily criticized for erecting colleges for the “uneducable.” The AMA countered this argument with its strict brand of evangelical egalitarianism:

[C]olleges certainly are needed, and we must set the standards for the education of the race now! Thorough training, large knowledge, and the best culture possible are needed to invigorate, direct, purify, and broaden life; needed for the wise administration of citizenship, the duties of which are as sure to come as the sun is to shine, though to-day or to-morrow may be cloudy; needed to overcome narrowness, one-sidedness, and incompleteness. . . . Therefore, they said, educate, educate, educate! In all ways, from the lowest to the highest, for whatever is possible for a full-orbed manhood and womanhood. (Beard, 1909, pp. 149-150)

And so the AMA joined the missionary movement to open postsecondary institutions for Blacks. As a first step in this direction, the AMA purchased the “Little Scotland” estate, which was dedicated to the Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute after its Academic Hall was erected in 1870 (Beard, 1909). With this dedication, the AMA sought to establish a permanent institution of higher learning that combined “practical schoolroom education with mental and moral uplift of industrial training and self-help” (p. 126). In 1869, through the financial support of the Congregational Church, the AMA opened the doors of Straight University. The University was named for the wealthy cheese manufacturer from Ohio, Seymour Straight, who provided the University with its initial endowment gift.

The proliferation of normal schools and colleges was at the center of the AMA’s strategy for achieving their goal of black self-sufficiency. By providing training to Blacks to help other Blacks, the AMA assumed that black teachers could and would adopt and promote the white values and related skills sets that it felt Blacks needed to advance in society.

Parallels and Contrasts to Black Institutions

Harvard, William and Mary, Yale, New Jersey, King’s, Philadelphia, Rhode Island, Queen’s, and Dartmouth colleges opened before 1770 (Rudolph & Thelin, 1990b). Colleges frequented by a majority of black students emerged approximately one hundred years after the start of these first American colleges that were primarily attended by white males. Thus, to examine any aspect of black colleges (and academies) during Reconstruction and shortly thereafter is to study them in their infancy, whereas many white colleges were already well past their institutional adolescence.

While Cheyney University (founded in 1837 as the Institute for Colored Youth), the first to open as an institution explicitly devoted to the postsecondary education

of Blacks, was established prior to the Civil War, most black colleges emerged after the Civil War (Beard, 1909). Like their white counterpart institutions, black colleges' religiosity disfavored extracurricular activities. Thus, these budding institutions focused on establishing core curricular programs (and did so for some time, long before they had the inclination, much less the means, to establish school sponsored extracurricular activities).

The link between the religious sponsorship of higher education, the liberal arts curriculum missionary societies promoted, and missionary beliefs around the educability of blacks is not incidental (Peeps, 1981). While many denominations of Christianity professed the belief that that Blacks could learn as well as Whites, they sought to prove this belief only by exposing Blacks to education predicated upon a strict religious/liberal arts curriculum (Willie & Edmonds, 1978). "Yale University, which lately celebrated its two hundredth birthday, began when half a dozen ministers of the gospel brought together a few books and said, 'we will give these for the founding of a college... The true method is to show the colored people the possibilities of their own race, and inspire in them, by visible and living examples, a noble ambition... These leaders must be trained. For this, Christian colleges are needful'" (Beard, 1909, pp. 155-156).

Religion's profound influence on both white and black student life can also easily be seen in the founding mission and goals, as well as the ceremonial practices, of colleges. The tenets of the denomination and/or the host community sponsoring the college provided a framework that set general expectations for campus life. And, the clergy-like robes that college officials and student alike wore for graduation further conveyed higher education's kinship with religious organizations. The first American colleges embraced holiness and faith over intellect and reason (Newman & Svaglic, 1982; Rudolph & Thelin, 1990b). Further, these college's liberal arts curricula provided training for religious membership. Accordingly, the missionary societies that supported black colleges pushed black students to adopt religiosity over logic, and to pursue the same religiously rigorous liberal arts curricula espoused by the country's founding colleges. In fact, the AMA predicated its sponsorship of normal schools and colleges on the condition that they prepare freedmen for citizenship primarily through Christian education (Holmes, 1969).

Despite the obvious similarities between many colonial and black colleges, Straight University interacted with its host community much differently than especially its colonial college predecessors did. Northern carpetbaggers and other interlopers, including Christian missionaries, found establishing relationships in the rural South difficult. As a result, the AMA initially struggled with how to gain the political support it needed to establish and sustain a liberal arts college in the rural, agricultural South. However, the establishment of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands (more commonly know as the Freedmen's Bureau) by Congress in 1865, created safe zones from which Northern missionaries worked to build and maintain more than 4000 free schools, among them Straight

University. These unique legal and social circumstances surrounding the founding of Straight University inspired similarly unique circumstances leading to the emergence of its extracurriculum (Beard, 1909).

Legal and Social Context

The citizenship status of Blacks continuously evolved and changed from the time of the earliest establishments of French, Spanish, and English colonies, through the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863, after the Civil War in 1865, during Reconstruction, and until *Plessey v. Ferguson*. The benefits and burdens of this status afforded certain educational rights and imposed certain educational prohibitions.

While the literature on the emergence of extracurricular activities at early colonial colleges reveals that white students sought freedom from confining curricular demands, black collegians wanted freedom from the larger sociopolitical realities that prevented them from being recognized as citizens. The architects of early black colleges used the confining curricula from early colonial colleges to educate black students as white students were educated. Resultantly, black students at Straight University had to negotiate being Black (the sociopolitical reality) and being black students (confined not only by curricula but white curricula) in New Orleans (Funke, 1920).

The multiple conceptualizations and related traditions of race in New Orleans requires different understandings of blackness and citizenship than in other states (Funke, 1920). Louisiana in general and New Orleans in particular embodies a unique combination of African, French, Spanish, and British cultural, religious, social, and legal traditions, and, therefore, differs significantly from the more narrow Anglo Saxon-only customs found in other parts of the United States.

Meanings of race can be attributed to two specific nationalistic and/or ethnic systems of slavery impacting New Orleans. The English created a widespread system of chattel slavery that gave owners complete dominion. Enslaved blacks could not own goods because they themselves were exclusive property. As a French colony however, Louisiana, and specifically New Orleans, followed the “Code Noir” which mandated, among other things that were ultimately beneficial to Blacks (though not unilaterally), that: the enslaved be baptized into and educated in the Catholic faith tradition; enslaved women could gain freedom through marriage to a white owner; and that the formerly enslaved (freed Blacks) had the same rights as persons born free (Funke, 1920). Resultantly, by 1836 in New Orleans, 855 freed Blacks owned 620 slaves and other property valued at \$2,462,470 (Funke, 1920). Property ownership generally correlated with higher levels of literacy among Blacks.

The development of these disparate educational levels among various black sub-groups in the New Orleans region prior to the erection of Straight University may have played a significant role in shaping the character and nature of its extra-

curricular activities later. Free Blacks in New Orleans established schools across Louisiana. In contrast, English systems not only discouraged Blacks from developing literacy skills, they also discouraged conversion of Blacks to Christianity because it was not customary to enslave Christians in English territories. Thus, when benevolent missionary societies and industrialists explored introducing higher education into the Deep South, Louisiana was a logical starting ground. Although the overwhelming majority of Blacks in New Orleans (as well as Whites) could not read and write throughout the 19th century, free Blacks were more likely to be literate in New Orleans than in other far Southern cities (Funke, 1920). Critics of the missionary schools argued that these schools' curricula were detached from the poverty stricken realities with which many black students were presented during the Reconstruction and Jim Crow eras (Fairclough, 2000). School texts seldom represented, much less accurately portrayed, the experiences of formerly enslaved or free Blacks in describing Blacks in the South. It is hard to say for sure if these critics were sincere in their advocacy for what could be described as an early iteration of culturally responsive education, or if they were covert supporters of the English system.

By the middle 1800s, slavery fueled a global economic engine that strongly discouraged educating the enslaved. Throughout the South, high demand for commodities such as tobacco, cotton, and sugar reinforced sociocultural and socioeconomic systems of racial hierarchy, division, and control. These systems permeated major governmental, educational, and religious institutions around the world, but had the greatest impact in regions that used slave labor to produce and distribute avidly sought commodities. Although admitted into the Union as a slave state in 1812, prior to the arrival of the Civil War to Louisiana's borders in 1864, the Louisiana State constitution did not delineate slavery as an institution, nor did it use the word, "Negro" (Kunkel, 1959). It did explicate restricted activities for "free white males," including as members of the state legislature (Louisiana Constitution, 1812a, Article 2, Sections 4 & 12; Louisiana Constitution, 1845a, Title III, Articles 6 & 18) and as having the right to bear arms (Louisiana Constitution, 1812b, Article 3, Section 22; Louisiana Constitution, 1845b, Title III, Article 60; Louisiana Constitution, 1852, Title IV, Article 59). Unfortunately, this did not mean the state was less repressive; it still used forced black labor in the production of tobacco, cotton, and sugar. Nevertheless, the presence of literate and free people of color in the state made New Orleans fertile ground for the establishment of postsecondary institutions.

While the country debated and challenged the merits of Reconstruction, abolitionists, as well as the black intellectual community, placed access to postsecondary institutions and attainment of postsecondary education high on the "race uplift" agenda. Academies and colleges figured prominently in these education reformers' plans. Between 1866 and 1910, approximately 230 academies and colleges were established through missionary and industrialist giving, and federal grant programs. Historians and other scholars who study this period speak to the importance these

new academic centers played in movements for racial advancement and acculturation (Ware, 1913).

Denominational giving at both colonial colleges and HBCU's shared similar early purposes. Initial donors generally wanted postsecondary institutions to assimilate people of color into existing society. Despite these donors' intentions, their denominational giving may not have actually influenced colonial colleges to make sincere efforts to educate these populations, but their initial gifts did at least usher in liberal arts curricula, akin to the religiously influenced curricula in postsecondary institutions of Europe.

Regional Tensions

Questions remain as to how, if at all, denominational giving influenced extracurricular activities. A brief examination of North-South tensions related to educational proliferation, especially for Blacks, in colonial and post-bellum contexts may suggest answers.

In importing their brand of theology to the South, the AMA and other missionary societies were able to carefully craft the impact that regional ideology or provincialism had on the curricula and extracurricula in the schools they established in the South. These specific religious orientations served as the basis for regionally-specific abolitionist and social uplift practices.

As the president of Atlanta University, Edward T. Ware, described, "Northern philanthropy took the Negro by the hand and said, 'I know that you have the ability to learn,' and then opened before him the door of opportunity" (Ware, 1913, p. 216). Ware argues further that as a result of these practices, white Southerners' appreciation for the educational needs of Blacks grew. Black intellectual, W.E.B. Du Bois, himself a product of AMA's Fisk University, eschewed the logic justifying the vocational training of Blacks promoted in the South, over, or at least ahead of, New England's liberal arts training. "This was the gift of New England to the freed Negro...The teachers in these institutions came not to keep the Negroes in their place, but to raise them out of the defilement of the places where slavery had wallowed them" (Du Bois, 1989, p. 70).

But much of the South was reluctant to swallow these social remedies prescribed by Northern institutions (Peeps, 1981). While the end of the Civil War dismantled the economic engine of slavery, thereby creating opportunities for missionary groups, government programs, and carpetbaggers to take root throughout the South, the social order rooted in slavery proved more difficult to erode. This became even more the case as the legislative fight for Southern sovereignty gained strength as it built towards its climax in the *Plessey v. Ferguson* decision of 1896.

Still, legislative actions undertaken by the Freedmen's Bureau, including the desegregation of Southern schools and the establishment of Northern-style colleges shaped the movement to uplift blacks. As a result, this movement acted as both a

sort of political and cultural occupation of the South. Accordingly, Southern black colleges became home-away-from-home bases for Northern interests. Against the backdrop of these constantly shifting regional political, economic, and social tensions and related interests, the AMA erected their schools; a sharp contrast to how colleges and universities were established in Northern denominational towns where the establishment of these institutions was actively sought by town leaders as a vehicle to advance and promote the more stable and singular political, economic, and social interests of town residents.

By the dawn of the twentieth century, some white Southerners initiated a widespread effort to organize education in their region (Anderson, 1978). State legislatures changed laws to facilitate the growth of education. Louisiana prohibited the establishment of separate schools in 1867; this encouraged Northern missionary societies' and industrialists to sponsor the development of schools in New Orleans. Later, state superintendent Thomas W. Conway laid the legal and policy framework for desegregating schools; this led to the very rapid expansion of black education in New Orleans (Harlan, 1962).

Ensuing political battles over Northern educational influences in the South accelerated the growth of education for Whites and Blacks in the region (Harlan, 1962). The American Missionary Association, the Freedmen's Bureau and other like foundation, and "carpet-bag" governments, were responsible for establishing dozens of Southern colleges, and normal and primary schools. This Southern education movement of sorts plowed the political soil so that schools could plant themselves in various communities throughout the region (Anderson, 1978).

Northern educational sponsors and Southern educational practitioners agreed that Blacks should have some level of education, but the AMA's beliefs in educational egalitarianism for Blacks, including at the postsecondary level, did not mesh with the segregationist leanings of many industrialists and foundations (Anderson, 1978). As a result, only weak linkages existed between Northern missionary societies and these industrialists and foundations.

Faced with black flight to Northern cities, Southern industrialists promoted their vocational education under the auspices that it was more congruent with the economic goals of the region. Accordingly, these industrialists aimed to educate Blacks so they could adapt to their "natural environment" (Anderson, 1978, p. 377). Initially, these interests may have encouraged a North-South educational "coalition" to form around what was initially perceived as a common goal of increasing educational opportunities in the South. However, missionary societies' and black civil rights activists' desire for racial equality revealed key industrialist and foundation desires to maintain a racial political and social hierarchy (including segregated schools) to foster regional economic competitiveness.

George F. Peabody established America's first wholly education-focused foundation in 1867. Initially, the Peabody Foundation sought to establish non-sectarian, public, desegregated schools. However, Peabody's general agent, Barnas Sears, did

not want to interfere with states' position on mixed schools. As a result, desegregated (and Negro) schools received limited funding in New Orleans because Sears could not find among them any with the infrastructure to meet the conditions stipulated for funding during his post-Civil War visits to the region (West, 1966). Thus, the Peabody Foundation came to support the expansion of exclusively black, public industrial education at the primary and secondary levels (Peeps, 1981; West, 1966).

Soon thereafter, not wanting to preside over racially mixed schools, Robert M. Lusher resigned his post as the Louisiana state superintendent to serve as the state agent for the Peabody Foundation (Harlan, 1962; West, 1966). Lusher's more extremist separatist views eventually led to the funneling of Peabody Foundation funds to private schools causing Sears to terminate the Peabody program in Louisiana shortly thereafter.

The John F. Slater Fund and the General Education Board also funded educational projects in the New Orleans region that encouraged segregated schools (Harlan, 1962; West, 1966). Nevertheless, New Orleans public schools were still desegregated through the efforts of the Freedmen's Bureau, coupled with the support of various philanthropic and grassroots organizations. For six and a half years, Blacks attended formerly all white schools such as the Dunning School, and Lower Girls and Central Boys' High (Harlan, 1962; West, 1966). Unfortunately, this desegregation movement was ended by school race riots in December of 1874, prior to the *Plessey v. Ferguson* decision. For decades thereafter, a political battle ensued between Northern abolitionists, missionaries, and other whites for control of the Freedmen's schools and colleges (McPherson, 1970).

This regional history highlights the complexities that local milieu brought to the texture of college student life during this period, and, more specifically, how interracial political battles likely impacted the nature of extracurricular activities on campus.

Black National Discourse on Athletics

By the time many AMA colleges opened their doors, white schools had firmly established athletic teams and leagues. AMA college leaders and students alike saw the positive impact of athletics on campus culture. However, like their white counterparts, first attempts to institutionalize athletics were met with "hostility and indifference." While some members of the college community felt that physical fitness was an important attribute of an educated person, others saw such as a distraction from the character development in "a man of science" (Rudolph & Thelin, 1990b).

At the turn of the century, black leadership began to measure the merits of athletics within their conceptualizations of higher education and racial upliftment (Miller, 1995). Many leaders in the Black Diaspora believed that athletic victories helped to dissolve stereotypes. Victories by black college and university teams were

viewed as *literally* leveling the playing field during Jim Crow. Athletics were also seen as unifying humanity; thus, athletic events were thought to accentuate human potential. But these notions did not proliferate uncontested. Du Bois, historian William Pickens, and others felt that athletic contests would distract black (and white) students from making traditional gains in academics and even promoted stereotypes of exaggerated physical prowess in Blacks (Miller, 1995).

While increasingly esoteric debates on the educational value of athletics swirled in black newspapers and among black educational leaders, administrators of nascent black colleges sought athletics out as effective mechanisms in helping their institutions grow. Student pride in their institutions inspired early black collegians to champion campus sport teams and covet the name recognition their campuses gained in athletic competitions.

Unfortunately, while college administrators wanted the rewards athletics brought to their institutions, at least initially, they did not want the costs. In the initial years of black college establishment, limited extracurricular activities were supported and funded. As a result, black student athletes often had to make or purchase their own equipment.

Despite doubts about the merits of college sports and institutional financial hardships, black colleges were not dissuaded from starting athletic programs. By the 1920s, most colleges fielded teams in football, baseball, basketball and track and field (Miller, 1995). Miller asserts that this marks the period when students started to have significant impact on campus life and culture. While sports in early black colleges were more impetus for this form of student empowerment than the debate clubs and literary societies were in early white colleges, the larger social contextual factors must, once again, be carefully considered in this examination of the overarching development of extracurricular activities in early black colleges.

Conclusion

If the underlying assumption that context influenced the growth of extracurricular activities on campus is accepted, then the examination of the broader sociopolitical context in which the education of black students in the South took place is certainly warranted. The AMA invested in schools to advance racial equality and promote a culture of self-sufficiency among black people. The towns and cities in which these schools were located sought to use them primarily for regional advancement. These competing agendas resulted in limited educational experiences for black students. Despite these limitations, an examination of the quality of the extracurricular activities at Straight reveal the important impact social contexts had on the development of these activities.

Placed in precarious sociopolitical and religious contexts, the nature of the extracurricular activities in these schools was altered. If the school community was

at odds or out of sync with the host community's social and economic network, then opportunities for political advancement or financial sponsorship lessened.

Schools were not social forts that protected students from the outside socio-political forces of the time. Particularly in the South, black students experienced face-to-face resistance that reflected the political and related policy challenges of the time. Of note, the AMA "fell heir" to the end of the Freedmen's Bureau and the withdrawal of benevolent societies from the South after the war (Holmes, 1969). This, in particular, may explain the hardship of many missionary schools' ability to maintain extracurricular activities (Miller, 1995).

The larger social context surrounding the Straight College student experience tells a much different story than does the dominant narrative regarding the emergence of extracurricular activities at colonial colleges. In Straight University's early years the extracurriculum was similar to as that in colonial colleges. But, the emergence of the extracurriculum at Straight University began as an extension of the university's mission and classroom learning deriving therefrom, and, therefore, evolved into a more holistic program emphasizing the development of the "whole student" (Beard, 1909).

Straight University's religious mission also influenced its earliest extracurricular activities. Its first record of out-of-class activities were religious worship and Sabbath School (AMA Archives, 1821). Both of these activities, much like those at their colonial college peer institutions, were wholly dedicated to instilling religious piety in students. Students even urged the university to hold revivals to broaden their experiences outside of the classroom, further substantiating the influence of the religious mission on them. Notably, the two most dominant social organizations on campus during this period were the Young Men's and Women's Christian Associations, both of which occupied high status at the institution (Straight College, 1926, p. 13 & 1927, third page; Straight University, 1900-1901).

New Orleans' rich musical legacy may have made the Straight University choir an integral and popular component of the extracurriculum. Resultantly, choir members played "ambassador" roles by further supporting the religious mission of the institution as they regularly performed hymnals and spirituals for the campus and local communities (Straight College, 1926, pp. 49-50 & 1927, sixth page; Straight University, 1918). As the choir's popularity soared, the establishment of an academic music program at Straight ensued. This program further evolved the eventually very active extracurriculum by broadening the student organization base to include a Glee Club and several small choirs, and fostering a campus culture in which regular musical recitals were given by students (Straight University, 1870-1934).

As early as 1895, students at Straight University enjoyed weekly socials (DeSpelder, 1895). Participation in lecture, debate, and literary society activities was also popular at Straight, as was the case at colonial colleges (Beard, 1909; Straight College, 1926, p. 32 & 1927, second page; Straight University, 1918 & 1921; Westbrook 2002,). Highly competitive, gender-based literary societies also

provided opportunities for additional skill enhancement during the summer months for the top ten students at the institution (Straight University, 1908-1909).

Departmental student leagues (currently known as pre-professional organizations), aiming to advance students' applied knowledge in their respective fields, were first noted in the 1929-1930 *Straight University Catalog* (Straight University, 1929-1930). Their presence begins to reveal connections with the larger social context.

Finally, athletics, the merits of which for students were initially highly debated, quickly became a source of pride for Straight University, leading to the development of athletic programs for both men and women; women at Straight even participated in classical Japanese Fan Dancing (AMA Archives, 1895-1943; Straight University, 1912-1913). Beyond these formal athletic programs, all Straight students were actively encouraged to exercise.

Note

¹ The term "extracurriculum" as opposed to "co-curriculum" is applied throughout this paper primarily because of its historical usage.

² Straight University became Straight College in 1915. Straight College merged with New Orleans University (formerly Union Normal School) to form Dillard University in 1930.

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