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Black Student Protests in World War II, and the
Historically Black Colleges and Universities in Virginia

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During World War II many black men were called to fight as soldiers for a war that aimed to spread “democracy” at a time when blacks in America were being subjected to racism, segregation, violence and reduced to second class citizenship.¹ The idea of fighting to spread “democracy” in Europe while still suffering in their own country angered most African Americans.² It was at this point that blacks decided to fight two wars; one against racism at home and the other against fascism abroad, called the “Double V Campaign.”³ Black colleges and universities embraced the idea of winning both the war against the Nazis in Europe and Jim Crow in America and viewed the war as an opportunity for advancement. They believed that the war would open up many more opportunities to blacks that were elusive in the segregated past. Early in the war effort, black colleges and universities in Virginia supported the “Double V Campaign,” but the students and administrations of these schools were reluctant to use direct action to protest racism and segregation. Instead these institutions opted to work within the confines of the Jim Crow system, and focused on extensive involvement in the war effort and improvement of black higher education as a means to open a few doors for blacks. Hampton Institute led the way; however, by 1943 hopes for winning the war on racism at home began to look dim. As a result, the students and in some cases faculty members of Virginia’s black colleges took small actions to combat injustice but many remained reluctant to abandon their “education equals equality” approach for direct action protests.

Assessments of World War II protests and militancy usually focus on black soldiers who grew so tired of the racial abuse that they suffered in the armed services that

¹ Michael Klarman, From Jim Crow to Civil Rights: The Supreme Court and the Struggle for Racial Equality, (Oxford University Press, 2004), 175.

² Klarman, 176.

³ Klarman, 176.

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they retaliated.⁴ Black colleges and universities had a large stake in the war effort. Since wars usually temporarily erode the color line in the mobilization for the war effort, many blacks were given a larger share in America's economy than ever before during World War II.⁵ Black colleges and universities felt that they had an obligation to prepare black men and women for the promise that the future held. The World War II era was seen as a time of great promise for blacks to gain equality since the United States was fighting a war to spread and protect democracy. Many African Americans felt that it would have been hypocritical for the United States to join in a war to protect democracy when its own black citizens were oppressed and did not enjoy democracy.

Black colleges, particularly in Virginia, focused on education rather than direct action to combat inequality. This approach was taken largely due to the long held tradition that educated blacks were to serve as leaders within the black community, therefore acting as vehicles to bring about socioeconomic change.⁶ Educated blacks were expected to serve as role models to inspire and encourage uneducated blacks to better themselves through education, which was expected to bring equality for all blacks.⁷ In the 1940s enrollment at black colleges and universities was steadily increasing.⁸ The administrations of these colleges and universities delighted in the opportunity to educate more blacks to serve as leaders within the black community. By doing so, the administrations of black colleges and universities sought to improve black higher

⁴ Klarman, 177.

⁵ Klarman, 174.

⁶ Barbara Lee Smith and Anita L. Hughes, "Spillover" Effect of the Black Educated: Catalysts for Equality," *Journal of Black Studies* 4 (1973): 52.

⁷ Smith and Hughes, 53.

⁸ C. Eric Lincoln, "The Relevance of Education for Black Americans," *The Journal of Negro Education*, 38 (1969): 220.

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education during the crucial war years. As a result, black college administrations and students got deeply involved in the war mobilization effort in any way that they could.

Early in the war effort Malcolm S. Mac Lean, President of Hampton Institute, argued what he felt African American institutions of higher learning were responsible for in terms of educating black students during and after World War II. Mac Lean urged the colleges to continue “fighting, pledging, planning, and cajoling” because he believed that full democratic participation in the war effort was crucial to the survival of all African Americans.⁹ He encouraged the colleges and universities to get as involved as they could with all branches of the armed services even if those branches seemed to be unwelcoming. He urged black colleges to take advantage of the few opportunities that existed because he knew that after the war there would be fewer economical and social opportunities for advancement.¹⁰ Mac Lean encouraged the black colleges and universities to support the NAACP’s “Double V Campaign” and he felt that in order to achieve such a goal one key area that would need to be mobilized was the black college campus.¹¹

Among Hampton Institute, Virginia State College, and Virginia Union University it might not be surprising that Hampton was at the forefront of mobilization and aiding with the war effort. In January 1941, Hampton Institute sold a 770-acre farm called Shellbanks to the War Department for \$155,000, which was \$100,000 less than the \$225,000 that the farm was worth.¹² Since the Shellbanks farm was four and a half miles

⁹ Malcolm S. Mac Lean, “The Impact of World War II Upon Institutions of Higher Education for the Negro,” *The Journal of Negro Education* 1 (1942): 342.

¹⁰ Mac Lean, 342.

¹¹ Mac Lean, 344.

¹² “Hampton Institute Sells Farm to War Department,” *The Richmond Afro-American*, 4 January, 1941, p.7.

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away from the college's campus the school used the money from the sale of Shellbanks to purchase the Tabb Farm, which was closer to campus.¹³ Mac Lean argued that the farm was sold to aid national defense and to expand Langley Field—making it one of the largest military air bases in the world.¹⁴ The college's sale of the farm to the War Department was significant because it directly displayed Dr. Mac Lean's desire for black colleges and universities to get deeply involved with the war effort, particularly the military to open doors for all African Americans.

Mac Lean's article also stressed the need for black colleges and universities to unite and “plan efforts on a national basis and on a regional southern basis” in terms of utilizing the war as an advantage.¹⁵ Since the war brought the need for qualified people in the fields of science, medicine, nursing, and engineering, black colleges felt that they needed to revise their curriculums in order to educate blacks in those respective fields.¹⁶ By educating blacks in more professional fields of study, blacks would gain more respect and be seen as more than domestic servants. In 1942, at Virginia State University in Petersburg, the presidents and deans of Virginia's black colleges met and discussed the formation of an emergency wartime organization.¹⁷ The organization would consist of the twelve black colleges in Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania and the District of Columbia. John M. Gandy, president of Virginia State University, felt that such a coalition was a “necessity for unified action by our colleges with the general war effort.”¹⁸ At another conference held in Boston, Mr. Gandy's proposal was unanimously approved and the

¹³ “Hampton Institute Sells Farm to War Department,” p. 7.

¹⁴ “Hampton Institute Sells Farm to War Department,” p.7.

¹⁵ Mac Lean, 342.

¹⁶ Mac Lean, 343.

¹⁷ “College Heads to Form War Emergency Group,” The Richmond Afro-American, 31 January 1942, p. 9.

¹⁸ “College Heads to Form War Emergency Group,” p. 9.

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provisions were adopted by the National Conference of College and University

Presidents on Higher Education and the War.¹⁹ At this conference the schools decided to “speed up academic courses” and devised plans for the implementation of year-round schedules for their colleges.²⁰

Almost immediately after the resolutions were made at the conference, Hampton Institute with the help of President Mac Lean initiated its new academic program.²¹ The program called for the cancellation of all holidays, shorter vacations, and more rigorous academic programs held at nine-week intervals through out the year.²² This initiative was put in place so that students could still gain a quality education but earn their degrees and graduate in a shorter period of time. Freshman students who entered school by September 9, 1942 would be eligible to graduate in two and a half to three years as opposed to four years.²³ Also, Hampton devised a plan for students who were classified as seniors but who were called to fight in the war. Senior students who were enrolled in “sufficient credit courses” would be given special “war credits” so that they could graduate before entering the army.²⁴

Hampton Institute’s academic policies proved the school’s dedication to the “Double V Campaign” in several ways. First, by accelerating courses and allowing students to obtain their degrees faster, Hampton was able to educate more qualified blacks to serve in various branches of the army and to compete in the wartime industry. By doing so, more African American men and women were given the opportunity to

¹⁹ “College Heads to Form War Emergency Group,” p. 9.

²⁰ “College Heads to Form War Emergency Group,” p. 9.

²¹ “Hampton Initiates New Program for the Duration,” The Richmond Afro-American , 21 February 1942, p. 9.

²² “Hampton Initiates New Program for the Duration,” p. 9.

²³ “Hampton Initiates New Program for the Duration,” p. 9.

²⁴ “Hampton Initiates New Program for the Duration,” p. 9.

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better themselves intellectually which in turn was expected to bring social gains in regards to breaking down racial discrimination.

The black college administrations were getting their message across because during the early 1940s black students and even teachers could be seen utilizing education for advancement while still supporting the war effort. In 1941, Phillip Lee and Roscoo Draper, two former Hampton Institute students, were enrolled at Tuskegee Institute and took teacher air training courses.²⁵ They hoped to return to Hampton Institute to teach aeronautics to men who had hopes of flying in the Air Force.²⁶ Both men had excelled in the field of aeronautics, and applied for Air Youth of America Scholarships.²⁷ The scholarships were worth \$4,000 and if selected, the two men would be able to attend one of the prestigious aeronautics schools.²⁸ Also, in 1942, Douglas Ryan Turner, a chemistry professor at Virginia State University, was called by the Secretary of the Navy to teach meteorology.²⁹ His appointment was considered a major advancement in the face of Jim Crow, because the Navy was notorious for its strict adherence to policies of racial segregation.

Lee, Draper and Turner symbolized the determination that black college students and teachers had in terms of breaking down stereotypes by increasing their intellectual capabilities through higher education. Whites often used black intellectual inferiority as justification for segregation and discrimination.³⁰ In response, blacks felt that it was extremely important to show that they were capable of learning complex and technical

²⁵ "2 Hampton Students Seek Air Scholarships," The Richmond Afro-American, 18 January 1942, p.14.

²⁶ "2 Hampton Students Seek Air Scholarships," p. 14.

²⁷ "2 Hampton Students Seek Air Scholarships," p. 14.

²⁸ "2 Hampton Students Seek Air Scholarships," p. 14.

²⁹ "Navy Hires VA. State Prof. to Teach Technical Subject," The Richmond Afro-American, 7 March 1942, p. 14.

³⁰ Carl Jorgensen, "The African American Critique of White Supremacist Science," The Journal of Negro Education, 64 (1995): 233.

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subjects.³¹ Lee, Draper, and Turner proved that blacks had the initiative, will, and drive which made them strive for socioeconomic justice. But these individuals worked within the segregated and discriminatory system to achieve advancement while still aiding with the war mobilization effort.

The administration's tactics to get their colleges more involved with the war effort were successful, because by January 1942 the students on several of these college campuses were mobilized and willing to contribute to the war effort. Hampton, VA was the location of a major military base, so the students were very involved in a variety of activities that were designed to boost soldiers' morale. Students at Hampton organized a traveling show that traveled around the Hampton Roads area performing for soldiers.³² Also in 1942, students from Hampton Institute's fine arts department were chosen to paint murals at an army recreation center at Fort Eustis.³³ At Virginia Union University in 1942, the Richmond chapter of College Women pledged their support to the Defense Service Council and aided in defense efforts.³⁴ These women planned and hosted dances and social events for black soldiers around Virginia in order to entertain them and to raise the soldier's spirits. This mobilization of black college students demonstrated that both the administration and students at black colleges and universities in Virginia felt they had an important stake in the war effort, especially since the selective services act, which called for highly trained soldiers, depleted many black colleges of their male students. For example in February 1942, Charles H Flax, director of the Men of Hampton choral group, lost six of his singers to the selective services and several more to government

³² "Talented Students at Hampton Institute Put on Traveling Show for Soldiers," The Richmond Afro-American, 31 January 1942, p.5.

³³ "Hampton Students to Paint Eustas Murals," The Richmond Afro-American, 31 January 1942, p. 6.

³⁴ "College Women to Aid Defense," The Richmond Afro- American, 31 January 1942, p. 5.

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services.³⁵ As a result, black college students felt that it was important to support their black soldiers and fight the war on racism at home while their classmates were fighting fascism in Europe.

Between late 1941 and 1942, black colleges and universities in Virginia geared up and mobilized in support of the war effort. Black colleges and universities in Virginia were in favor of supporting black troops and helping in anyway that they could for the United States to win the war on fascism abroad while also improving black higher education to win their own war on racism at home. These colleges were working within the system relying heavily on education as a means to advancement and as a way to break down the strict Jim Crow system in Virginia without attacking segregation and discrimination directly. During this time period black students were reluctant to protest against discrimination and segregation because the administrations of their colleges preached that as long as they got educated and supported the war effort they could force open doors that had been previously slammed in their faces. By 1943 significant events in Virginia and on Virginia's black college campuses made chances of winning the war on racism at home look unlikely.

It was in 1943 that Virginius Dabney wrote his controversial editorial in the Richmond Times Dispatch in which he asked the Commonwealth of Virginia to do away with its laws that required segregated public transportation.³⁶ Dabney argued that since wartime conditions forced more people, both black and white, to utilize public transportation that the laws forcing segregation on public transportation ultimately

³⁵ "U.S. Army Calls Men of Hampton," The Richmond Afro-American, 31 January 1942, p. 5.

³⁶ Virginius Dabney, "To Lessen Race Friction," The Richmond Times Dispatch, 13 November, 1943, p.14.

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brought the two races into closer contact.³⁷ He argued that blacks who were ordered to sit or stand at the back of the bus, pushed their way past whites and created a “constant source of trouble, irritation, and bad feeling.”³⁸ Dabney concluded that the problem could easily be alleviated if blacks were allowed to sit wherever there was an unoccupied seat.³⁹ He went further to say that the laws governing segregated public transportation were no longer needed because they were enacted just after slavery and that in 1943 more blacks were “well-educated, well-behaved, and well-dressed.”⁴⁰ Dabney claimed that segregation was meant to organize and maintain order, but the law was creating disorder and should be repealed as soon as possible.⁴¹ Instead, he believed that the real battleground to maintain segregation which was far more important than public transportation was the public school system.⁴²

Dabney, like many white southerners, argued that Jim Crow laws were not unjust, but that the methods in which the laws were enforced sometimes infringed upon the rights of blacks.⁴³ However, Dabney’s call to end segregation in public transportation was still backed by many leaders in the black community.⁴⁴ Perhaps, they believed that any action to eliminate Jim Crow was seen as one step forward in the direction toward equality and true democracy for blacks. Yet Dabney sought to protect white supremacy and segregation in the South, which was a major threat to blacks striving to win the war on racism at home. After Dabney’s editorial was published, the Commonwealth of

³⁷ Dabney, “To Lessen Race Friction,” p. 14.

³⁸ Dabney, “To Lessen Race Friction,” p. 14.

³⁹ Dabney, “To Lessen Race Friction,” p. 14.

⁴⁰ Dabney, “To Lessen Race Friction,” p. 14.

⁴¹ J. Douglas Smith, Managing White Supremacy: Race, Politics, and Citizenship in Jim Crow Virginia, (The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 284.

⁴² Smith, 284.

⁴³ Smith, 278.

⁴⁴ Smith, 281.

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Virginia still continued to practice “separate but equal” for several more years. In addition to Virginia’s decision to uphold the “separate but equal” doctrine in terms of public transportation, there were also events taking place on the campuses of Virginia’s black colleges in 1943 that conveyed that the war on racism at home was being lost.

Despite efforts to achieve equal rights for blacks through improving education and while displaying a genuine interest and participation in the war effort, black colleges and universities were not as successful as the hoped to be by 1943. Few gains had been made and the war on racism was being lost in spite of their efforts. For example, in February of 1943, an African American man named William Richardson was chosen to be an army officer candidate.⁴⁵ Richardson had recently graduated from Virginia Union University and had been employed with the War Department at the time of his appointment.⁴⁶ Some blacks may have viewed Richardson’s induction as an officer candidate as a progressive step toward democracy and equality for blacks. However, out of 36 men from the state of Virginia, who were considered for the candidacy, Richardson was the only African American.⁴⁷ These statistics suggest that regardless of the vast educational gains that blacks possessed or the extent of their involvement in the war effort, whites were still favored for important positions in the armed services.

Hampton University also displayed signs that the war on racism was being lost. In February 1943, Hampton’s president Malcolm Mac Lean resigned after taking a leave of absence to do an active tour of duty in the navy.⁴⁸ Since Mac Lean was white there was

⁴⁵ “William Richardson Picked as Army Officer Candidate,” The Richmond Afro-American, 13 February 1943, p. 9.

⁴⁶ “William Richardson Picked as Army Officer Candidate,” p. 9.

⁴⁷ “William Richardson Picked as Army Officer Candidate,” p. 9.

⁴⁸ O.S. McCollum, “Mac Lean Resigns; No Successor to be Named Until Close of School Term,” The Richmond Afro-American, 6 February 1943, p. 3.

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much uproar regarding whether a black president or white president should replace him.

The alumni advisory committee, which was a small faction of the Hampton Alumni Association, asked the board of trustees not to name a black president.⁴⁹ As a result Hampton's alumni became split on the decision of whether or not to appoint a black president to succeed Mac Lean.⁵⁰ The controversy ignited Hampton's alumni, who were split 2-1 in favor of a black president.⁵¹ Henry Scattergood, chairman of the board of trustees, then officially announced that the board unanimously decided that Hampton keep its biracial policy and continue to be head by a white president.⁵² It was not until 1946 that Hampton elected its first black president.⁵³ White presidents of black colleges were not uncommon, and for many black colleges black presidents were not appointed for several years or decades after their founding.⁵⁴ During a time where black achievement and elevation was being stressed, Hampton did not opt to appoint a black president to lead the school. The decision not to appoint a black president at Hampton in 1943 revealed a lack of faith in black educational leaders, suggesting that they could achieve more and gain more with a white president at the helm. One can not help but to wonder how Hampton believed that whites in the United States would believe in the power of black intellect if they themselves did not, especially since the armed forces continued to give white faculty members commissions over blacks.

Despite Hampton's dedication and extensive involvement with the Navy, the whole community was upset in April 1944 because black faculty members continued to

⁴⁹ W.I. Gibson, "Hampton Body Tries to Block Colored Prexy," The Richmond Afro-American, 17 April 1943, pp. 1-2.

⁵⁰ "Hampton Body Tries to Block Colored Prexy," p.2

⁵¹ "Hampton Body Tries to Block Colored Prexy," p.2

⁵² "Hampton Body Tries to Block Colored Prexy," p.2

⁵³ "The Tradition of White Presidents at Black Colleges," The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education 16 (1997): 93.

⁵⁴ "The Tradition of White Presidents at Black Colleges," p. 95.

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be refused naval commissions.⁵⁵ Richard D. Kidd expressed his disappointment by saying, “We can no longer afford to continue losing the war at home.”⁵⁶ Black faculty members who applied for naval commissions were being told, “While your record is excellent it does not appear to fit you for a billet for a commission in the ranks of the U.S. Naval Reserve.”⁵⁷ Of the 30 people instructing the Naval program at Hampton, only three were black and were assigned to menial tasks such as kitchen or dormitory duty.⁵⁸ These statistics caused much anger and dismay among Hampton’s black faculty members and its students, so they sought to make their grievances heard.

In efforts to express their dissatisfaction with the Navy’s discriminatory policies, the members of Hampton’s faculty sent an open letter to the school’s executive board of trustees.⁵⁹ The letter was signed by faculty and members of the Virginia Peninsula Teachers.⁶⁰ Hampton students voted unanimously by a vote of 973 to send the letter in which they asked the Board of Trustees to reject the Navy’s proposal to increase training facilities and to instead accept the Army’s proposal to provide basic training under the Army’s specialized training program because the army was less discriminatory.⁶¹ The letter also recommended that the Navy personnel at Hampton not increase until the Navy appointed black commissioned officers to their teaching staff.⁶² Additionally, the letter asked that Hampton Institute be permitted to train black officer candidates.⁶³ Despite the faculty and students’ efforts to express their dismay, the executive committee still

⁵⁵ “Navy Jim Crow Irks Hampton Institute,” The Richmond Afro-American, 10 April 1943, p. 1.

⁵⁶ “Navy Jim Crow Irks Hampton Institute,” p. 1.

⁵⁷ “Navy Jim Crow Irks Hampton Institute,” p. 2.

⁵⁸ “Navy Jim Crow Irks Hampton Institute,” p. 2.

⁵⁹ “Navy Jim Crow Irks Hampton Institute,” p. 1.

⁶⁰ “Navy Jim Crow Irks Hampton Institute,” p. 1.

⁶¹ “Navy Jim Crow Irks Hampton Institute,” p. 2.

⁶² “Navy Jim Crow Irks Hampton Institute,” p. 2.

⁶³ “Navy Jim Crow Irks Hampton Institute,” p. 2.

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allowed the Navy to expand its training station with the provision that Hampton's biracial policy would not apply to the Navy's program.⁶⁴

The open letter was a failure in that it did not succeed in terms of achieving the ends that the faculty and students at Hampton hoped for. But although the open letter failed to achieve its desired results, it did give the black community at Hampton the opportunity to voice their concerns to the school's executive board while working within the system and not applying too much pressure in the form of direct action protest. However, the open letter served as a clear example of black students and faculty members in Virginia's reluctance to utilize direct action as a means to protest injustice. Elsewhere, while students and faculty at Hampton were sending letters to speak out against inequality, black students just a few miles away from Virginia were utilizing direct action, hoping to strike down Jim Crow and discrimination one public place at a time.

Howard University located in Washington, DC was often seen as the Mecca of black higher education. By 1943 Howard had 3,644 enrolled students, which was much more than at other black colleges. Students came from all over the United States but a vast majority hailed from the South. Howard's chapter of the NAACP was founded in 1937 but the students at Howard had taken advantage of the opportunity to get involved with NAACP sponsored activities even as early as 1934 when students picketed the Crime Conference in efforts to call attention to lynching and mob violence against blacks. Like other black colleges in the South, Howard University students were also concerned about the war and questioned whether or not they would be faced with the same injustice and exclusion when the war concluded. Since Washington, DC had evolved into a very

⁶⁴ "Navy Jim Crow Irks Hampton Institute," p. 2.

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rigidly segregated city by the 1940's, many students found it difficult to commit themselves to the World War II objective of defending democracy. This indifference stemmed from the countless instances of humiliation that students experienced when they were refused service in local drugstores, restaurants, and department stores because of the color of their skin. It was this same humiliation that caused the students at Howard to take an active stand against segregation in public places, confronting Jim Crow head on.⁶⁵

Before a united movement toward direct action in the form of sit-ins was adopted by the students at Howard, individual students who were tired of public discrimination had begun to carry out the task.⁶⁶ The call for students to unite and coordinate their efforts came after three undergraduate women were arrested upon leaving the United Cigar Store and Luncheon in late February of 1943.⁶⁷ At first the women were refused service by a waitress and an assistant manager, but were later served under the pretense that the waitress and assistant manager could charge the women whatever price they chose.⁶⁸ The women were served after they spoke with a police officer who told them, "this is the South and it is the general law that colored persons don't eat in white restaurants."⁶⁹ After a conversation between the waitress and the police officer the women were served but they were charged 75 cents for a cup of hot chocolate that only cost 10 cents.⁷⁰ In protest of the outlandish price increase, the women only paid 10 cents and were arrested upon leaving the lunch counter for doing so.⁷¹ When asked why the girls were arrested considering there was no sign posted stating that the store did not

⁶⁵ Flora Bryant Brown, "NAACP Sponsored Sit-ins by Howard University Students in Washington D.C., 1943-1944," *The Journal of Negro Education* 4 (2000): 274-276.

⁶⁶ Brown, 277.

⁶⁷ Brown, 277.

⁶⁸ "Howard Coeds Defy Jim Crow; Are Arrested," *The Richmond Afro-American*, 6 February, 1941, p.16.

⁶⁹ Howard Coeds Defy Jim Crow, Are Arrested," p. 16.

⁷⁰ Howard Coeds Defy Jim Crow, Are Arrested," p. 16.

⁷¹ Howard Coeds Defy Jim Crow, Are Arrested," p. 16.

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serve blacks the store manager G.W. Rush replied, “We don’t discriminate against colored persons; we just don’t serve them. Our policy is not written; it is generally understood.”⁷² The arrests combined with the de facto discrimination that Rush spoke of was enough to ignite the student chapter of the NAACP at Howard to form the Civil Rights Committee.

The Civil Rights Committee’s main goal was to push through legislation a Civil Rights Bill for Washington, DC that would “assure equal privileges to all places of public accommodation to all persons within the District of Columbia.”⁷³ In efforts to achieve their goal of getting the bill passed the students attempted to lobby Congressmen and other powerful politicians through a letter writing campaign.⁷⁴ But unlike Hampton Institute, who only utilized letter writing to express their concerns, the students at Howard would pair their letter writing campaign with direct action sit-ins. The students on the Civil Rights Committee spent a great deal of time planning their sit-ins, studying direct-action protest, and even signing a pledge to remain non-violent even if violence erupted against them.⁷⁵ Equipped with their knowledge and hope to end segregation in public places, students on the Committee began their sit-ins.

The first sit-in was carried out on April of 1943 at Little Palace Cafeteria, where blacks were served but not allowed to eat in the dining room of the establishment. Twelve students walked into the restaurant but refused to leave when denied service. The owner closed the store early but the protesters just came back the next day to resume their protest. After four days of protest the owner changed his policy and allowed blacks to be

⁷² Howard Coeds Defy Jim Crow, Are Arrested,” p. 16.

⁷³ Brown, 277.

⁷⁴ Brown, 277.

⁷⁵ Brown, 277.

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served in the dining room of his restaurant. However this success was followed by a loss with the second sit in. The second sit-in was held in April of 1944 at Thompson's Restaurant under pressure from the protesting students the owner allowed the students to be served but still did not change his restaurants policy. Before the students could resume their protest of Thompson's Restaurant further Mordecai W. Johnson, President of Howard University called for the students to stop their protests. Johnson ended the protests because he and the rest of the administration did not want a student organization affiliated with the university involved in direct action protest.⁷⁶

Though the Howard University sit-ins were ended early by the administration and did not spread to other schools like the participants hoped, they are significant because they displayed the radicalization that was taking place on the campuses of black colleges and universities during the World War II era. During the 1940s, more blacks were enrolling in college, but despite their efforts to better themselves through education, blacks continued to be discriminated against and were being left in a state of socioeconomic despair.⁷⁷ Black colleges, which were often located in the South, served as melting pots to educate students from different backgrounds, social classes, and geographic regions, which led to differences in opinion among students regarding whether to use direct action or to continue working within the system. Only a small fraction of the student body at Howard participated in the direct action protests, which would leave one to conclude that many students still were not in favor of direct action protest. A combination of forces was transforming black colleges into vital centers for resistance to Jim Crow during the World War II era, but at Howard and other black

⁷⁶ Brown, 278-279,281.

⁷⁷ C. Eric Lincoln, "The Relevance of Education for Black Americans," p. 220.

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colleges it was difficult for the administration and students to get on one accord and agree on what methods they would use to attack segregation and discrimination. Since the administrations of most black schools, particularly those in Virginia, still favored educational improvement over direct action protest to combat racism. The year 1944 depicted some black students and faculty wanting to attack segregation and inequality squarely, while others were reluctant to let go of traditional ways of thinking to employ direct action protests.

In May 1944, black students and some faculty members at Virginia State University walked out of the school's chapel in protest of the segregated seating that was implemented during Governor Darden's visit to the school.⁷⁸ Since whites had come to the school to hear the address, a segregated seating arrangement was enforced due to Virginia's Jim Crow laws.⁷⁹ One side of the auditorium had been designated for blacks and the other side had been designated for whites, and in the center of the auditorium the best seats in the front were also reserved for whites.⁸⁰ This seating arrangement angered most of the black students and several faculty members and a vast majority left the proceedings.⁸¹ When President Foster of Virginia State University was asked why a black school would be required to segregate its own students and faculty, Foster replied, "Separation is required by law and there has been no change in the twenty-one years I have been here."⁸² Their decision to walk out of the Governor's service was a blatant effort on the part of black students and faculty to show their discontent with segregation and discrimination. Though their actions were not planned and executed like the direct-

⁷⁸ "Jim Crow Usual at Virginia State," *The Richmond Afro-American*, 27 May, 1944, p. 7.

⁷⁹ "Jim Crow Usual at Virginia State," p. 7.

⁸⁰ "Jim Crow Usual at Virginia State," p. 7.

⁸¹ "Jim Crow Usual at Virginia State," p. 14.

⁸² "Jim Crow Usual at Virginia State," p. 14.

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action protests at Howard, the student's actions conveyed the radicalization that was occurring on Virginia's black college campuses. The students who walked out of the segregated chapel showed that black students in Virginia were growing restless and tired of having their human rights infringed upon simply because they were black. Unfortunately, no other instances of black students or faculty "walking out" or turning to direct action protests were reported in Virginia during the end of the World War II era, which would lead one to conclude that black faculty and students were still buying into the gospel of better education equating to equality.

In the same month that students and faculty at Virginia State University walked out of the segregated chapel, black faculty at Virginia Union were addressed by Agnes Meyer, the wife of the Washington Post publisher.⁸³ In her address Meyer spoke of her desire to see race relations improve but argued that pressure, in the form of direct action protest as a tactic to fight racism, was not the best way to achieve equality for blacks.⁸⁴ Instead Meyer strongly advocated education as a more effective means to bring about racial justice for blacks.⁸⁵ Citing that racial prejudice was an "emotional disease, more infectious than the worst physical disease," Meyer argued for the need of a "psychological offensive against racial intolerance that will get at the very roots of our inherited phobias."⁸⁶ The "inherited phobias" that Meyer spoke of were the preconceived, stereotypical notions that whites held about blacks being uneducated, lazy, and therefore unworthy of equal rights and equal treatment. Meyer, like many white opponents of racism, discouraged direct action largely due to fear—the fear that blacks would be

⁸³ "Afraid of Pressure as a Weapon Against Racism: Mrs. Myer Tells Social Scientists That Education is Technique to Wipe Out Bias," *The Richmond Afro-American*, 13 May 1944, p. 10.

⁸⁴ "Afraid of Pressure as a Weapon Against Racism," p. 10.

⁸⁵ "Afraid of Pressure as a Weapon Against Racism," p. 10.

⁸⁶ "Afraid of Pressure as a Weapon Against Racism," p. 10.

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successful in their direct action endeavors, that change would come about too quickly, and the fear of the backlash that blacks would face from whites who did not want them to gain equal rights. Meyer's address helped to illustrate the reason why black students and faculty at black colleges and universities in Virginia were unwilling to orchestrate organized, direct action protests during the mid 1940s, which was fear. Blacks were discouraged from acting largely due to fear of straying away from the tradition of using education to work with in the system to achieve equality for blacks, and fear of the uncertainty that came with direct action protests.

By 1945, as World War II was drawing to a close, students at Virginia's black colleges were faced with competing messages regarding the use of direct action protests. For example, in January 1945, Dr. Channing H. Tobias of the national board of the Y.M.C.A. addressed Hampton Institute's January graduates.⁸⁷ Tobias urged the graduates to "protest against every wrong and cooperate with every move for advancement, and never lose heart."⁸⁸ Tobias argued that "segregation was the heart of the issue" and "although colored people in this country have tried to make themselves believe they could operate within the framework of the segregated pattern, white people have sidestepped it by considering issues within the segregation framework."⁸⁹ Tobias offered two solutions to the problem of inaction on the part of black colleges in regards to protesting segregation and discrimination. First he asked the schools' administrations to raise awareness that segregation was the "real issue" and secondly, Tobias called for

⁸⁷ "Tobias Urges Graduates to Protest Every Wrong," The Richmond Afro-American, 27 January 1945, p.20.

⁸⁸ "Tobias Urges Graduates to Protest Every Wrong," p. 20.

⁸⁹ "Tobias Urges Graduates to Protest Every Wrong," p. 20.

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courage and action on the part of schools' administrations to inspire others to protest segregation and inequality.⁹⁰

Not everyone shared Tobias's views regarding the utilization of direct action to strike down segregation and discrimination. In February 1945, Lester B Grainger, who was secretary of the National Urban League, spoke to students at Virginia State College at the college's annual Founder's Day Address.⁹¹ Grainger reminded the students of the huge stake that blacks had in the war by telling them that they had "everything for which to fight for."⁹² He also informed the students that, "democracy does not exist in this country; it is an ideal which may never be reached, but it is a worthwhile goal for which to strive."⁹³ Grainger urged the students to keep focusing on educational advancement because they had a duty to make use of every opportunity in efforts to secure a better future.⁹⁴ Both Grainger and Tobias's addresses display the competing opinions that black students were confronted with when faced with the question of whether or not to utilize direct action protest. These differences of opinion left black college students with a very challenging decision to make in terms of securing equality for their futures as World War II concluded.

Between 1941 and 1942, black colleges in Virginia attempted to utilize war mobilization and education as a means to bring about racial equality. The schools took advantage of the wartime opportunities while working within the confines of the segregated and discriminatory system, hoping to achieve more socioeconomic gains for

⁹⁰ "Tobias Urges Graduates to Protest Every Wrong," p. 20.

⁹¹ "Race Has Big Stake in War, Granger Warns VA. Students," The Richmond Afro-American, 3 February 1945, p. 11.

⁹² "Race Has Big Stake in War, Granger Warns VA. Students," p. 11.

⁹³ "Race Has Big Stake in War, Granger Warns VA. Students," p. 11.

⁹⁴ "Race Has Big Stake in War, Granger Warns VA. Students," p. 11.

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blacks. By 1943, significant events in Virginia and on Virginia's black college campuses conveyed to black college students, faculty, and administration that the war on racism at home was being lost. Though more blacks were receiving education, they still did not possess an equal share of the socio-economic riches that white Americans did. Black students began to realize that there were limits in segregation and that the only way to be heard was through direct action protests. The radicalization that was taking place on black college campuses was strongly exhibited through the direct action protests that Howard University students staged in 1943 and 1944. This radicalization could also be seen on a much smaller scale in Virginia when students at Hampton and later Virginia State College showed outward displays of discontent in terms of discrimination and segregation. But in both instances, Virginia's black students were reluctant to employ organized direct action to protest. However, by 1945 students at Virginia's black colleges and universities were faced with competing messages regarding whether or not to employ direct action as a protest tool. These differences of opinion expressed by educational leaders left black college students with the tough decision of whether to adhere to the tradition of working within the system, or to venture out into the unknown and utilize direct action protest because obtaining real equality and democracy required real action.

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