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Black College Presidents After Brown

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The *Brown v. Board of Education* decision handed down on May 9, 1954 forever changed the face of education. Although other Supreme Court decisions initiated desegregation at institutions of higher learning, *Brown* had a significant impact on black colleges and universities. *Brown* called into question the overall legitimacy of educational institutions whose existences were based primarily on race.¹ Yet it seemed to some that the HBCU might be or become an anachronism, and as a result, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU's) faced growing opposition. The college presidents of Virginia State College, Virginia Union University, and Hampton Institute all felt pressure to defend their institutions against the charge that their schools were no longer necessary because predominately white colleges and universities were open for integration. But competition for students and money among the HBCU's hindered the schools' abilities to present a unified front. Even at a time when the Civil Rights Movement mobilized and united student activists, black college presidents in Virginia remained divided in their promotion of black education. As the primary black public college in Virginia, Virginia State faced criticisms from the private schools that it perpetuated segregation as a publicly funded institution at the will of the state government. In its defense, the presidents of Virginia State attacked private HBCU's in Virginia as outdated and inferior. The added pressure of facing desegregation and responding to *Brown* consequently resulted in an internal conflict that deeply divided black colleges until the Black Power movement in the 1970's.

¹ Albert L. Samuels, Is Separate Unequal? Black Colleges and the Challenges to Desegregation (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2004) 64.

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The establishment of HBCU's was a gradual process that had roots in the late 19th century. The Morrill Act of 1862 facilitated the establishment of some black colleges; however, as one historian notes, states significantly under-funded black land grant colleges, setting a precedent for state-supported inferiority of institutions of higher education for blacks.² Both Hampton Institute and Virginia State College were initially funded, at least in part, through this program. The public Virginia State College—originally Virginia State Normal and Collegiate Institute—was founded in 1882, while the private Hampton Institute—officially the Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute—was founded in 1868.³ As a result of state neglect, other privately supported colleges for blacks were established. Virginia Union University began in 1899, providing an additional predominately black educational institution in Virginia.⁴

Booker T. Washington played an important role as an educational pioneer during the early operation of these black colleges. Washington graduated from and later taught at Hampton Institute, and served as executive administrator and founder of the Tuskegee Institute. His primary pedagogy underscored technical and industrial training as essential to the education of black students. His personal educational experience emphasized the conjunction of labor and education, and he utilized such in the formulation of his own theories:

“Our greatest danger is that in the great leap from slavery to freedom we may overlook the fact that the masses of us are to live by the productions of our hands, and fail to keep in mind that we shall prosper in proportion

² Samuels, *Is Separate Unequal?*, 35.

³ Francis Greenwood Peabody. *Education for Life: The Story of Hampton Institute*, 1918 (New York: McGrath Publishing Company, 1969) 99.

Robert P. Daniel, “Commencement Speech,” Virginia State College, 27 May 1957, Robert P. Daniel Papers Collection, Johnston Memorial Library, Virginia State University, Petersburg, VA.

⁴ Dr. Raymond P. Hylton, “University History,” n.d., <<http://www.vuu.edu/aboutVUU/history.htm>> (11 November 2004).

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as we learn to dignify and glorify common labour and put brains and skill into the common occupations of life.”

Yet Washington was often criticized for his role in society as an ‘assimilationist’. As he noted in his famed Atlanta Exposition address, “In all things that are purely social we can be as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress.” Washington failed to question the outright oppression of African Americans and acknowledge the implications of social inequality. In spite of his failure to do so, Washington made significant contributions to the education of African Americans as a leader during the formative years of HBCU’s.⁵

The ideologies of Booker T. Washington expounded on the initial intention of black colleges to provide remedial education to former slaves, to include the technical training necessary to create a skilled labor force. With the establishment of the NAACP in 1909, however, African Americans began to collectively question, at least in some part, the status of their civil rights. In turn a renewed focus on education occurred, utilizing “the ideological orbit of eighteenth century liberal democratic traditions” to argue for better educational opportunities for blacks.⁶

Standing in direct contrast to the theories of Booker T. Washington were those of W.E.B. Du Bois, whose educational ideology transformed black colleges at the turn of the 20th century. Du Bois was a graduate of Fisk University and the first African American to receive a Ph.D. from Harvard. He emerged as a civil rights leader through his leadership in the early years of the NAACP and with his book *The Souls of Black Folk*. In *Souls*, Du Bois recognized HBCU’s as more than just industrial and trade

⁵ Booker T. Washington, *Up From Slavery: An Autobiography* (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1901) <<http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/toc/modeng/public/WasSlav.html>> (10 December 2004).

⁶ Samuels, *Is Separate Unequal?*, 38-39.

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schools. Black institutions of higher learning were responsible for providing African American communities with a “talented tenth”—a segment of the population trained to actively participate in society. However, Du Bois made it clear that not all black men were capable of such enlightened thinking, and that “the loving reverent comradeship between the black lowly and the black men emancipated by training and culture” was necessary to bridge gaps in education.⁷ The “talented tenth” was therefore a distinction relegated to only a narrow segment of the black population.

Du Bois, in contrast to Washington, saw college as an opportunity to train African Americans to challenge their oppression. Besides providing them with academic and technical knowledge, HBCU’s would “socially regenerate” blacks and help aid in “problems of race contact and cooperation.”⁸ The first black colleges developed into institutions that helped transition black men into a segregated society with the skills necessary to deal with the implications of such. Du Bois provided black colleges with their first line of defense as race-based institutions through his ability to highlight the importance of mentally preparing blacks for participation and leadership in a segregated society.

Du Bois and Washington provided HBCU’s with an internal direction, but it was the NAACP who first challenged the inequalities that existed between black and white institutions. The NAACP significantly altered the course of education for blacks, playing a crucial role in breaking down educational segregation by questioning its existence at all levels. HBCU administrations initially united in support of the NAACP’s legal battles. Hampton University president and graduate Alonzo Moron saw the NAACP as one of the

⁷ W.E.B. Du Bois, The Souls of Black Folk, 1903 (New York: W.W. Norton Company, 1999) 72-73.

⁸ Du Bois, The Souls of Black Folk, 73.

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few partners he could count on to support early attempts to challenge the status of the rights of African Americans.⁹ Virginia State president Robert Daniel agreed, acknowledging that the Supreme Court decisions “buttressed” the social progress of African Americans.¹⁰ This was almost to a fault, though, because in supporting the Supreme Court’s decisions, these presidents validated the NAACP’s claims that separate was unequal and that black schools—including black colleges—were inferior.¹¹

As one of the NAACP’s most important legal victories, *Brown v. Board of Education* was instrumental in activating public response to school desegregation. A series of court cases prior to *Brown*, however, marked the beginning of the end of segregated colleges and universities, at least in theory. The Supreme Court ruled in *Missouri ex rel. Gaines v. Canada* (1938) that attempts to fund scholarships for blacks to go to out-of-state schools and avoid providing in-state educational opportunities were illegal.¹² Yet little action resulted from the decision, with the exception of a few cases of integration in Maryland and West Virginia.

With the end of World War II, HBCU’s saw a marked increase in student enrollment. This trend was reflected in higher enrollment numbers at Virginia Union. Thomas Henderson, future president and dean of Virginia Union at the time, remarked to then Virginia Union president John Malcus Ellison in a letter in 1945, enrollment was the

⁹ “Alonzo Graseano Moron,” *Dictionary of American Biography, Supplement 9:1971-1975*, Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1994, <www.galenet.com> (6 December 2004). Alonzo Moron, “You Can’t Go Home Again,” Alabama State College, 8 May 1957, Alonzo Moron Papers, Hampton University Museum Archives, Hampton University, Hampton, VA.

¹⁰ Robert P. Daniel, Speech to Farm and Home Agents of the Extension Service, 31 October 1956, Robert P. Daniel Papers Collection.

¹¹ Samuels, *Is Separate Unequal?*, 26.

¹² Michael J. Klarman, *From Jim Crow to Civil Rights: The Supreme Court and the Struggle for Racial Equality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004) 204.

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largest he had seen.¹³ The G.I. Bill, formally the *Serviceman's Readjustment Act* of 1944, provided federal funds to veterans who wished to pursue higher education and caused a drastic increase in college enrollment nationwide. Returning black G.I.'s consequently took advantage of the educational opportunities afforded to them in record numbers. The courts remained dormant, however, until 1950 when they handed down a decision in *Sweatt v. Painter* that ruled the University of Texas' black law school inferior and required admission of an African American student to the UT Austin law school. The specific language used in the decision asserted that intangible as well as concrete inequalities existed, claiming that it was unfair for Heman Sweatt—the plaintiff—to be denied the opportunity to interact with whites. The case highlighted the inability of Sweatt to access alumni networks, a higher quality of faculty, and superior physical facilities through his attendance at the black law school. On the same day, in the case of *McLaurin v. Oklahoma*, the Court ruled that segregation within University of Oklahoma facilities inhibited George McLaurin's education. The courts ruled that at the level of higher education, segregation was an obstacle to a student's ability to learn.¹⁴

The higher education decisions handed down by the Supreme Court in 1950 were initial efforts to acknowledge the weaknesses of the "separate but equal" doctrine from *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896. The *McLaurin* and *Sweatt* cases officially overturned *Plessy* at institutions of higher education. The *Brown* decision, however, marked an important turning point in the legal battle for civil rights, even when considering the prior cases of desegregation in higher education. *Brown* mobilized and polarized public opinion on the issue of school segregation, some of which was in the form of a backlash against

¹³ Thomas H. Henderson to John Malcus Ellison, 22 October 1945, John Malcus Ellison Papers, Archives and Special Collections Dept., L. Douglas Wilder Library, Virginia Union University, Richmond, VA.

¹⁴ Klarman, *From Jim Crow to Civil Rights*, 207-208.

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desegregation.¹⁵ This backlash against *Brown* from pro-segregation Southerners

provided black college presidents, as leaders in their communities, with an additional challenge to face during this time period.

The *Brown* case also changed what it meant for these schools to be black colleges. The designation of being a black school marred all HBCU's, in the public mind, because the NAACP capitalized on the use of "black" as a synonym for "inferior" in their objections to the dual system of education. Robert L. Carter, in arguing on behalf of integration in the *Brown* case, claimed segregation, "tended to relegate applicants and their group to a lower caste; that it lowered their level of aspiration; that it instilled feelings of insecurity and inferiority with them; and that it retarded their mental and educational development."¹⁶ The NAACP's case for integration rested on the fact that no matter how equal the schools were physically, separate schools would always be unequal because of the inherent inferiority of black schools, illustrated by the psychological damage children experienced while being there. Carter also claimed blacks' interactions with whites an important part of school integration, placing an inherent value on the race of the majority. The legal arm of the NAACP capitalized on notions of white superiority to dismantle educational segregation, yet in doing so relegated black schools to inferior status.

HBCU's were required to reposition themselves within the framework of education that these important decisions created. Presidents at these schools had to legitimize their historically race-based institutions and simultaneously, as black leaders in

¹⁵ Samuels, *Is Separate Unequal?*, 65.

¹⁶ Gerhard Casper and Philip B. Kurland, "Landmark Briefs and Arguments of the Supreme Court of the United States: Constitutional Law, Vol.49 *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954 & 1955)," n.d., <<http://www.lib.umich.edu/exhibits/brownarchive/oral/Carter&Wilson.pdf>> (6 December 2004).

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their communities, support court decisions that ultimately threatened their institutions' existences. Their attitudes towards racial issues surfaced in the process of reclaiming and redefining the role of black colleges in the 1950's and 1960's. What grew from such discussions of race and the role of the black college in the public sphere was intense competition between black public and private schools for students. But prior to dealing with any sort of intraracial competition, the presidents of black colleges had to ensure that their institutions could weather the dismantling of educational segregation.

Virginia State was directed through the fifties and sixties by Robert P. Daniel, a Virginia Union graduate. After graduating in 1924, Daniel taught math at Virginia Union and simultaneously oversaw the establishment of the Norfolk division of the school, which later became part of Virginia State College. He then served as president of Shaw University from 1936 until 1950, when he became the fifth president of Virginia State.¹⁷ President Daniel faced the difficult challenge of defending Virginia State as a black college in the wake of the *Brown* decision. Blacks themselves questioned the existence of HBCU's because the maintenance of black colleges by the state enabled the segregation they fought so hard to overcome, while white Americans, excluding pro-segregation Southerners, saw the institutions as a needless expense once white schools opened their doors to black students. Whites who challenged the existence of HBCU's saw the interest of African American students in attending white schools, their opposition to segregation, and the inherent inferiority of black college facilities as proof they were unnecessary.¹⁸ Daniel initially responded by dismissing the critics—as long as everyone

¹⁷ "Biographical and Historical Information," Robert P. Daniel Papers Guide, <www.ead.lib.virginia.edu/vivaead/published/vsu/vivadoc.pl?file=vipets00052.xml> (10 December 2004).

¹⁸ Samuels, Is Separate Unequal?, 68.

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had the opportunity to attend predominately white schools, he wrote in the *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, a black student, “should not feel that he is perpetuating segregation” by opting to attend an HBCU instead. Black colleges, therefore, had no desire to exist solely for the purpose of maintaining segregation.¹⁹

In a speech entitled “A Place to Stand,” President Daniel bolstered his defense of Virginia State as a race-based institution. First and foremost, he argued, “some of the deepest convictions of one generation are the rejections of the next.” The possibility that Virginia State would shoulder the responsibility of providing education for black students in the future should the integration of colleges and universities fail justified its continued existence. The ability of the *Brown* decision to overturn *Plessy* did not necessarily guarantee the integration of African American students into colleges. Instead, it provided them with a new foundation on which to view their educational opportunities as distinct from the “separate but equal” doctrine of the past. Similarly, Daniel noted, “integration and disintegration are polar opposites.” The quest for integration of schools broke down barriers to education, but did not require the dismantling of HBCU’s.²⁰

President Daniel recognized the role of Virginia State as a center of black education, but also pushed for institutional changes to help secure a place for the school on a larger scale. He proclaimed a desire to welcome students of all races to Virginia State in a commencement speech in 1957, in the attempt to transcend the idea of it being a “school conceived for Negroes.”²¹ He also stressed the need to collectively elevate the

Humphrey Doermann and Henry N. Drewry, *Stand and Prosper: Private Black Colleges and their Students* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001) 103.

¹⁹ R.P. Daniel, “Supreme Court Decision Has Far Reaching Effects,” *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, 19 May 1955, 3.

²⁰ Robert P. Daniel, “A Place to Stand,” 5 February 1954, Robert P. Daniel Papers Collection.

²¹ Robert P. Daniel, “Commencement Speech,” 27 May 1957, Robert P. Daniel Papers Collection.

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academic standards of HBCU's in order to attract more applicants and prevent efforts to circumvent the *Brown* decision by exceeding the expectations of those who wished to do so.²² By raising the standards of Virginia State, and accepting white students, Daniel tried to keep the school from being solely categorized as a black college.

The challenge of being both the president of a black public college and a leader in the black community, as a college president, left Daniel in a predicament. His role seemed inherently contradictory because of criticisms from private HBCU's and the general public that Virginia State enabled segregation at the level of higher education. However, President Daniel tailored his response to such charges differently during the years of civil rights mobilization at black colleges and universities. In an address to Virginia State students, Daniel remarked that education complemented sit-in demonstrations. He also reclaimed Virginia State as a college for black students, acknowledging that while the school was a state institution, "we are Negro too."²³ This shift in attitude reflected the changing social climate that Daniel was operating in. He could not afford to alienate his student body by stressing integration of the school, and contradicted previous statements concerning such in response to the progression of the Movement. In doing so, he also redressed the charge that Virginia State enabled segregation. By reclaiming the 'blackness' of Virginia State, Daniel began to embrace the label of "HBCU" for the school, which both reflected the changing ideology of the Civil Rights Movement and rejected the NAACP's labeling of "black schools" as inferior.

²² Robert P. Daniel, Speech, Opening of Second Semester, Virginia State College, 29 January 1959, Robert P. Daniel Papers Collection.

²³ Robert P. Daniel, "President's Closing Address to the Student Body," 19 May 1960, Robert P. Daniel Papers Collection.

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Daniel's acceptance of Virginia State as a school for blacks reflected a larger trend that occurred amongst black adults in response to the student movements. Older generations of African Americans and black educators initially hesitated to support the tactics of the direct action campaign, and "sought to protect their gains by emulating the manners of their associates and minimizing conflict situations."²⁴ They were forced to respond to the Movement's progression, however, as their children and students began filling jail cells.²⁵ HBCU presidents could no longer afford to remain neutral on civil rights once the public at large focused more attention on black colleges because of student activity.²⁶ Daniel's response as the president of a public HBCU was to outwardly reclaim Virginia State as a school for blacks, acknowledge his institution as a center of African American pride and history, and internally praise student efforts.

While Virginia State was primarily directed throughout the Civil Rights Movement by a single president, the private HBCU's in Virginia changed hands much more frequently. The presidents of Hampton and Virginia Union were all similarly educated, most having attended northern private schools for both undergraduate and graduate study, with a few receiving undergraduate degrees from Virginia's HBCU's. These presidents, like President Daniel, faced the dilemma of defending their schools in the changing post-*Brown* educational climate and at the same time responding to such changes as leaders in the black community.

The presidents of Hampton Institute and Virginia Union University operated under the same social conditions as President Daniel, but faced a different set of

²⁴ Samuel D. Proctor, *The Young Negro in America, 1960-1980* (New York: Association Press, 1966) 30.

²⁵ Daniel C. Thompson, *Private Black Colleges at the Crossroads* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, Inc., 1973) 16.

²⁶ Doermann and Drewry, *Stand and Prosper*, 109.

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problems as leaders of private black colleges. In the 1950's, private HBCU's faced the challenge of responding to fluctuating enrollments while operating on a tight budget. The *Brown* decision increased focus on the higher education of blacks, but at the same time, the opening of white colleges threatened enrollment numbers at all HBCU's, making student enrollment somewhat unpredictable. Virginia State was a publicly supported institution, and despite charges that it operated as a vehicle of segregation, it at least had a consistent source of funding. Presidents of both Hampton and Virginia Union stressed the need to keep down operational expenses in response to the added pressures placed on private institutions because of *Brown* and other school desegregation cases. Alonzo Moron, Hampton's president in the 1950's, remarked in an article in *The Journal of Negro Education*, "There has never been enough money available for the private colleges to do the job." The private college, therefore, "must be selective in what it proposes to do," both in terms of physical and departmental expansion.²⁷ Private college presidents also relied on notions of population pressure to defend their institutions existences and quell fears surrounding diminishing enrollments. "Everyone knows," remarked Virginia Union president Samuel Proctor, "that by the time the six year olds... reach college there will be twice as many of them as we have in college now."²⁸ Every good school was needed to relieve enrollment pressure in the future, stemming from the educational focus of *Brown* at lower levels and a general population increase. Therefore, Proctor argued, HBCU's were necessary.

²⁷ Alonzo G. Moron, "Maintaining the Solvency of the Private College Through Efficient Management," *The Journal of Negro Education*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (Spring, 1958) 141-142.

²⁸ Samuel D. Proctor, "The Private Colleges and the Enrollment Boom," *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, 19 April 1958, 8.

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Presidents of both schools, however, had unique conceptions of how they would justify Hampton and Virginia Union as more than just schools for African American students. As a result, the private HBCU's sought to carve niches for themselves in response to the *Brown* decision separate from their defense as black institutions.

Virginia Union capitalized on its religious affiliation to justify it as more than just an HBCU. President John Malcus Ellison, a graduate of Virginia Union, Oberlin, and Drew Universities who began his tenure at Virginia Union in 1941, remarked in an article in the *Norfolk Journal and Guide* that all private colleges fulfilled the need for affordable education through cheap tuition.²⁹ Virginia Union differed from Hampton, however, in its role as a Christian college. In a speech delivered by President Henderson, the Christian mission of Virginia Union was explicitly connected with containing costs as one of the most important responses to the *Brown* decision.³⁰ The faculty of the private church-related college, President Ellison noted in May of 1954, had the specific responsibility to impress these beliefs upon their students. Virginia Union gave equal weight to affordability and Christianity to defend the college as more than just a school for black students.

Both Virginia Union and Hampton had achieved some degree of integration by 1954, as opposed to Virginia State, and utilized such in their defense. President Daniel praised the interracial faculty of Virginia Union, and in 1958 the school graduated two white students.³¹ Yet Hampton Institute differed from Virginia Union in that it was a

²⁹ "John Malcus Ellison," *Contemporary Authors Online*, Gale 2002, <www.galenet.com> (6 December 2004).

John Malcus Ellison, "The Private College in Our Educational Structure," *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, 8 May 1954.

³⁰ Thomas H. Henderson, Speech, n.d., Records of the President's Office, Archives and Special Collections Dept., L. Douglas Wilder Library, Virginia Union University, Richmond, VA.

³¹ Robert P. Daniel, Speech to Virginia Union, 13 February 1953, Robert P. Daniel Papers Collection.

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private technical college—initially funded in part as a land grant college but predominately privately supported after eliminating its agricultural program.³² As leaders of one of the most prominent HBCU's, Hampton presidents played particularly important roles in justifying black schools in the public eye. Their ability to defend such set a precedent for other schools, like Virginia Union, to follow.

Hampton President Moron, for example, saw integration of higher education as a two-way street, predicting the incorporation of whites into the student body of Hampton Institute and using their inclusion to categorize Hampton as more than just an HBCU. The *Brown* decision would, according to President Moron, dissolve the distinction of HBCU and leave African American students simply with good private educations.³³ Nearly a decade later, in 1965, President Jerome Holland shared similar sentiments and simultaneously expressed the need for Hampton to continue supplying education for blacks.³⁴ Holland's desire to continue bearing the responsibility for the education of African Americans illustrated the changing public response of black college presidents to the Civil Rights Movement. Private schools, as opposed to public schools, bolstered their defense by emphasizing their potential to integrate and at the same time accepting responsibility for the education of black students. As integrated institutions, not only did these schools open their doors to people of other races, but they also presented themselves as sites of progressive social thought. Virginia State had less of an opportunity to do as an instrument of the state.

Samuel Proctor to Dudley Mallory, 27 January 1958, Samuel DeWitt Proctor Papers, Archives and Special Collections Dept., L. Douglas Wilder Library, Virginia Union University, Richmond, VA.

³² Alonzo Moron to Dean Marvin Booker, June 1955, Alonzo Moron Papers.

³³ Alonzo Moron, Interview, *The Goodwill Hour*, 17 May 1954, Detroit, MI, Alonzo Moron Papers.

³⁴ Jerome Holland, Address to Alumni of Hampton Institute at the Alumni Day Program, Hampton Institute, 29 May 1965, Jerome Holland Papers, Hampton University Museum Archives, Hampton University, Hampton, VA.

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Holland, a Cornell University graduate, all-American football player and future diplomat, laid out expansive plans to define Hampton's place in higher education through his inaugural speech, "New Horizons in Education for Hampton Institute."³⁵ His four-fold plan addressed Hampton's response to the changing social climate of the 1960's and the lasting effects of the *Brown* decision. He emphasized the training of black students for participation on the world stage and in teacher education. More important than any individual program, however, was Hampton's ability to equip black men with the skills necessary to successfully operate in an oppressive society and address the challenges segregation posed them with.³⁶ The presidents of Hampton consequently utilized the legacy of Du Bois in combination with proposed integration to defend their school against the perceived threat of closure.

The administrators of black private colleges did not face the accusations of enabling segregation, as the presidents of black public colleges did; however, the presidents of these colleges were notably more conservative in their views on civil rights than would be expected given the philosophy of black empowerment behind the colleges themselves. Whereas Virginia State president Daniel told students that education complemented movement efforts, the presidents of Virginia Union and Hampton seemed to think otherwise.

Communist charges misrepresented the more conservative racial views of private HBCU presidents in the public sphere. President Moron and President Ellison from Hampton and Virginia Union respectively were both charged as communists through

³⁵ "Jerome Heartwell Holland," The Scribner Encyclopedia of American Lives, Volume 1: 1981-1985, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1998, <www.galenet.com> (7 December 2004).

³⁶ Jerome Holland, Inaugural Address, "New Horizons in Education for Hampton Institute," Hampton Institute, 29 April 1961, Jerome Holland Papers.

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their participation in civil rights groups outside of their schools. President Ellison's name landed on the Attorney General's Subversives List for charges stemming from activity with the National Council of the Arts, Sciences, and Professions, and a Georgia commission on education charged President Moron as a communist for his activity with a commission outside of Hampton Institute.³⁷ Yet such charges suggested more liberal attitudes than either of these men held concerning civil rights. Ellison warned a local church not to pick preachers based on their ability to cause "arousement," and wrote to an editor of *Ebony Magazine* that he feared its publication was doing the race irreparable harm.³⁸ He disagreed with the way that the movement was progressing, and disputed the use of preachers and publications as tools of mobilization. Similarly, President Moron remarked five years later, in 1958, that the Supreme Court was smart to leave the implementation of the *Brown* decision at the district level.³⁹ He rationalized that doing so gave blacks an opportunity to decide the pace of integration. Moron either did not foresee the challenges that would lie ahead or hoped that in having control over the implementation of *Brown*, the black leadership class would be able to set the pace of its progress. In either case, he was satisfied with the Supreme Court decision and the pace of implementation.

These conservative attitudes, despite evolving to become slightly more liberal with the progression of the movement, characterized the presidents of private black colleges into the 1960's. President Proctor of Virginia Union acknowledged a notable

³⁷ Leon Pacht and Jeffrey Roche, "Name 21 Pro-Reds on Dixie Racial Commission," *New York Journal American*, 7 September 1955, John Malcus Ellison Papers.

Alonzo Moron, "Sunday Evening Vesper Service Address," 27 October 1957, Alonzo Moron Papers.

³⁸ John Malcus Ellison to Rev. B.A. Harrison, 1952, John Malcus Ellison Papers.

John Malcus Ellison to ed. Vincent Tubbs, 3 August 1953, John Malcus Ellison Papers.

³⁹ Alonzo Moron, "The Challenge of Change- NAACP Staff Meeting," 10 October 1958, Alonzo Moron Papers.

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lack of support of student protests from private HBCU presidents. Proctor commented on their worries about student protests, “how much of the leadership of the status Negro has already been lost to this new breed that had taken the Negro struggle from the Sunday afternoon forum to the streets and the jails.”⁴⁰ The presidents of black private colleges worried about going outside the traditional legal strategy to question discrimination, and continued to remain apprehensive towards more active forms of protest even when older generations of African Americans and public HBCU presidents began supporting them. President Henderson, in a speech in 1960, told his students, “we cannot have a system with each person having the right to an anarchical ‘I don’t like this arrangement, so I’ll do what I please.’”⁴¹ He feared student “licentiousness” and discouraged too radical behavior. There was an obvious conflict between the administration and students of private HBCU’s due to their different perspectives on the proper way to address social injustice.

Private and public HBCU presidents were sharply divided over the proper course of action for the larger black community in these years. Yet while the institutions’ presidents harbored different feelings about the Civil Rights Movement, the criticisms that they cast upon each others’ schools attacked the nature of the schools themselves rather than the presidents’ individual attitudes. Until 1964, Virginia State did not even have its own board of trustees, and was run solely by the state Board of Education with a president hand picked by the governor.⁴² The implication associated with state control of the school was that despite its service to the black community and the president’s support

⁴⁰ Proctor, *The Young Negro in America*, vi.

⁴¹ Thomas H. Henderson, Speech to Virginia Union Students, 1960, Records of the President’s Office.

⁴² Edgar Toppin, *Loyal Sons and Daughters: Virginia State University 1882 to 1992* (Norfolk: Pictorial Heritage Publishing Company, 1992) 81, quoted by Sarah Huggins, < refdesk@lva.lib.va.us> “ANSWER-POOLE,” 9 December 2004, Personal Email.

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of student movements, Virginia State was operated by a white executive administration that obviously failed to have the best interest of black students in mind through its continued resistance to integration. The subsequent arguments from private school presidents that Virginia State maintained segregation resulted from the nature of the school itself and its operation as an instrument of state education.

The boards that operated HBCU's typically disrespected black college presidents in contrast to the reverence they received in the black community.⁴³ However, the dynamic of the relationship between all HBCU's and their governing boards gave the presidents important decision-making power. While Virginia State was operated by the state, private HBCU's in general were either governed by denominational boards in the north or typical "absentee" private college boards, both whose primary function was fund allocation. These boards were comprised of older generations of African Americans who, like the private school presidents, were conservative on their opinions towards the Movement. Yet Earl J. McGrath, executive officer of the Institute of Higher Education in 1965, claimed that because HBCU's were, "Heavily dependent on the good will of influential benefactors or local political powers, they have tended to remain 'presidential' institutions."⁴⁴ HBCU's operated under the conditions that the boards were too far removed from daily operations of the schools to make lower level decisions, and it was easier for them to communicate with a single person rather than a group of administrators. In fact, the position of HBCU president was labeled "patriarchal" and "authoritarian," showing to some degree the autonomy of black colleges presidents.⁴⁵ As

⁴³ Doermann and Drewry, *Stand and Prosper*, 121.

⁴⁴ Earl J. McGrath, *The Predominately Negro Colleges and Universities in Transition* (Columbia University: Institute of Higher Education, 1965) 124.

⁴⁵ McGrath, *The Predominately Negro Colleges*, 123.

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a result HBCU presidents had the power to make important decisions on faculty hiring, course offerings, and basic situation management as board trustees. They also served as the voice of their institutions in the public arena, and consequently the argument between public and private institutions, while based on the nature of the governing boards, played out between the schools' presidents.

An important part of the administration of Virginia's HBCU's was the availability of funds—Virginia State's ability to access them and Hampton and Virginia Union's failure to. Consequently, the division that erupted between black public and private schools was primarily a function of economic difference. Virginia State received a lot of money from public funds, whereas the two private schools scraped by through donations from the United Negro College Fund and alumni support. In a 1958 commencement speech, President Daniel detailed appropriations for “physical plant improvements” to include a million dollars for a new library and \$100,000 for the agricultural department.⁴⁶ The two private colleges were unable to compete with the Virginia State in terms of financing developments. Virginia State's funding gave the school an advantage in terms of improvements made and the ability to attract students, but it also gave private colleges fodder to criticize the public college's commitment to Civil Rights. The presidents of Hampton and Virginia Union, despite their shared conservatism, planted the idea that Virginia State was perpetuating segregation to its benefit, in hopes that it would attract applicants to private schools despite the lack of funding. What resulted from this

Doermann and Drewry, *Stand and Prosper*, 121.

⁴⁶ Robert P. Daniel, “President's Commencement Statement,” 26 May 1958, Robert P. Daniel Papers Collection.

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competition for students, and disparities in funding, was a semi-public debate of the offerings of public and private black colleges.

Both the state's administration and the increased funding of Virginia State brought the school under attack for its role in maintaining segregation within the climate of massive resistance. President Thomas Henderson from Virginia Union vehemently attacked Virginia State in several articles in the *Journal of Negro Education*. Henderson argued in one article that both white colleges and the presidents of Virginia State itself sought for the school, "to hold the line against a too rapid influx of Negro students into colleges formerly for white students only." Advancing the criticisms beyond the function of the school itself as an arm of state policy, Henderson went so far as to question the intentions of the school's president, who was seen as a leader in the black community as a "status Negro."⁴⁷

Virginia State responded to the private HBCU presidents' criticisms of maintaining segregation in a somewhat contradictory manner. At a staff conference in 1957, President Daniel acknowledged the existence of a "seeming antagonism" between state and private HBCU's. He discouraged retorts from the staff, however, because the private schools were in error—"the state of Virginia doesn't do anything it ought to be doing for its citizens of color, whether in so-called Negro schools or white schools, a whole program open for the races."⁴⁸ While the presidents at Hampton and Virginia Union watched Virginia pour money into the public state college, President Daniel realized that it was not opening colleges for integration.

⁴⁷ Thomas H. Henderson, "The Role of the Negro College in Retrospect and Prospect," *The Journal of Negro Education*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (Spring, 1958) 136.

⁴⁸ Robert P. Daniel, Staff Conference, 8 September 1957, Robert P. Daniel Papers Collection.

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Yet in an article in the *Journal of Negro Education*, Daniel claimed that there was no “hiding place” of segregation, despite the fact that earlier he said the state was not doing its job in integrating colleges.⁴⁹ He acknowledged the failure of the state to aid the education of blacks through their maintenance of segregation, but continued to endorse a school that ultimately operated to support the state’s mission. When it came to Virginia State, Daniel insisted that the school was separate from Virginia’s maintenance of segregation. This contradiction is reconciled by the fact that he faced criticism from private schools and those on the outside who deemed black colleges unnecessary. Daniel could not validly claim that Virginia was failing in its efforts to integrate higher education and then successfully promote Virginia State as more than an instrument of segregation without outright contradicting himself. As a result, he tried to join in on criticisms of massive resistance without acknowledging Virginia State as a part of it. Yet his criticism of the lack of state activity on blacks’ behalf called into question the purpose of Virginia State and undermined his argument that it did not exist to maintain segregation.

In response to criticisms of his school, Daniel labeled private colleges underdeveloped and outdated. He appreciated the legacy of private schools as the first institutions to provide black students with an education and often the only places for blacks to go to school. He emphasized, however, that state schools were at a profound financial advantage and consequently had higher enrollments. State colleges, as opposed to private ones, offered “more extensive facilities in physical plant and equipment,” “larger, well trained faculties,” “more varied and extensive curricula,” and “Federal and

⁴⁹ Robert P. Daniel, “Relationship of the Negro Public College and the Negro Private and Church-Related College,” *The Journal of Negro Education*, Vol. 29, No. 3 (Summer, 1960) 388.

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state grants” only made available to state college students. Private colleges were unable to furnish superior facilities and attract faculty because of a lack of funding, he argued, which overshadowed Virginia State’s role in maintaining segregation. “It is not enough to have been a great college,” he remarked, “What really counts is what the colleges are doing right now, and what they are planning as they face the future.”⁵⁰

In comparison to state operation of public HBCU’s, private schools responded that they served as institutions of “unhampered pursuit of knowledge,” according to Ellison.⁵¹ Despite their lack of funding, they were an attractive option for black students because they were separate from the state’s interests. Henderson concurred: “The freedom of the private Negro college has been its most cherished attribute.”⁵² This argument was vital to the defense of private schools in the face of the state school’s criticisms of inferiority. Black private schools relied on ideas of history and tradition in their defense. Virginia State president Daniel tried to adopt the power of history for his benefit by recognizing in a speech that history needed to be examined to understand where blacks stood in contemporary society. However, the history of black education occurred primarily within private black colleges, as Daniel does acknowledge in his article in the *Journal of Negro Education*. The black private colleges had this to their advantage—they existed prior to state supported colleges, and continued to coexist with public black colleges after their establishment.

Virginia State was not considered a traditional black school—in fact, Daniel makes the case that black public schools were inherently different than the private

⁵⁰ Robert P. Daniel, “Relationship of the Negro Public College and the Negro Private and Church-Related College,” 388-393.

⁵¹ John Malcus Ellison, “The Private College in Our Educational Structure.”

⁵² Henderson, “The Role of the Negro College in Retrospect and Prospect,” 139.

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schools. Private colleges were places of history, but were not necessarily prepared to compete for students with the public HBCU's. This difference is also reflected in the disparity between the presidents' beliefs on the movement itself; private HBCU presidents were bound to tradition, even to the point of remaining overly conservative, whereas Daniel, despite the nature of his institution, could espouse more progressive beliefs because Virginia State was not a traditional black college. Yet by belittling private HBCU's, President Daniel illustrated the way in which he sought to eliminate his competition, even at the expense of justifying black colleges on the whole. Without the need for traditional black colleges, the defense of all black colleges was weakened because HBCU's (including Virginia State) were defined by, and continued to identify with, the legacies that these traditional schools created.

Public HBCU's in Virginia also sought to edge-out private schools by expanding and promoting the community college. The community college movement had origins in the 1940's with the increased focus on expanding educational facilities for returning soldiers. State schools like the University of Virginia, Virginia Polytechnical Institute, and even Virginia State established satellite campuses to reach students who could not otherwise attend college.⁵³ Community colleges really flourished, though, in the 1960's with the progression of the Civil Rights Movement.⁵⁴ The democratization of education as a whole, with the focus on providing equal educational opportunities for both races, help justify a community college system to bridge the gap in economic access to

⁵³ "Virginia," The Center for Community College Policy Fact File, 2003, <<http://www.communitycollegepolicy.org/html/factfile.asp?state=VA>> (12 December 2004).

⁵⁴ George B. Vaughn, Leadership in Transition: The Community College Presidency (New York: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1989) 2-5.
Joanne P. LaBeouf, "Community College Education Foundations and Transformational Philanthropy: Resources Management, Stewardship, and Professionalism," (D.A. Dissertation, George Mason University, 2003) 76-77, <www.eric.ed.gov> (6 December 2004).

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education. Community colleges' provided higher education to those who could not leave home or afford the tuition of a four-year institution. The Virginia Community College System (VCCS), as it came to be called, was developed in the early 1960's, but threat of community college expansion was not fully realized until 1966, when Virginia established a statewide community college system. Regardless, the localized expansion projects of the state schools and threat of community college establishment alone upset the security of private HBCU's.⁵⁵

Private schools provided education for those who could not afford to leave home—they were localized, and gave nearby students a chance to attend school without paying room and board. However, the community college movement threatened the ability of private schools to perform such a function. Virginia Union president Ellison acknowledged, in his unfinished history of the school, "rapid growth of community colleges... made competition particularly keen."⁵⁶ Daniel also indirectly recognized the potential for competition, initially recognizing private schools as places for "non-boarders" to get an education, and then promoting community colleges as a planned expansion project for the future.⁵⁷ Community colleges eliminated the private colleges ability to justify themselves as under-funded institutions that at least provided local residents with a place of education.

HBCU presidents finally united in the late 1960's and early 1970's with the rise of the Black Power movement. Albert Samuels noted that blacks were no longer satisfied with the charge that HBCU's were inherently inferior. It seemed the presidents finally

⁵⁵ "Virginia," [The Center for Community College Policy Fact File](#).

⁵⁶ John Malcus Ellison, "History of Virginia Union University," n.d., John Malcus Ellison Papers.

⁵⁷ Robert P. Daniel, "Relationship of the Negro Public and the Negro Private and Church Related College," 389.

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realized that the important aspect of all of these schools was that they existed to aid in the education of black students in the face of an immovable and unwavering system. The black power movement essentially called into question the public and private HBCU divisions. If there was no need to respond to attacks against the necessity of black schools altogether, there was no need to question the relevancy of any of the schools individually because their existence alone was enough to justify them.

An important part of this unity between schools took place over a Supreme Court case, in which the National Association For Equal Education Opportunities in Higher Education (NAFEO) entered a brief in favor of the NAACP's opponent, the U.S. Department of Health and Welfare (HEW). NAFEO, an organization made up of public and private HBCU presidents, initially formed in 1969 to oppose President Nixon's lack of support of their institutions. The organization entered the cases of *Adams v. Richardson* and *Adams v. Califano* in 1970 to refute claims made by the NAACP that black colleges practiced discrimination and that color-blind college environments were more beneficial for the education of African Americans. The NAACP charged HEW with failing to enforce Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which forbade discrimination in institutions receiving federal funds, after HEW found ten states operating dual systems of education. HEW had previously eliminated the practice of cutting off funds to states that did maintain dual educational systems, and the NAACP claimed it a blatant attempt to maintain segregation. NAFEO filed amicus briefs favoring HEW, disagreeing with the NAACP's charge that funding to colleges in the delinquent states should stop. The threat to HBCU's was that public black colleges would lose all of their funding should HEW reinstate the practice of cutting off state funds for

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noncompliance, and private schools would lose any option of appealing to the government for funds in the future. Although the NAACP won, ultimately the outcome utilized language supporting the existence of historically black schools.

NAFEO united black college presidents against the NAACP—an organization they formerly supported—illustrating the outdated nature of the Legal Defense Fund’s methods in the eyes of black leaders. The NAACP’s utilization of the idea of separate as inherently inferior started prior to *Brown*, and yet black college presidents embraced the rulings of the Supreme Court. As time wore on, however, and the college presidents dealt with the reactions to school integration, they ultimately turned their backs on the NAACP’s strategy of labeling “black” as inferior.

The union of private and public HBCU’s through NAFEO illustrated a larger trend of private and public school cooperation. In the 1960’s, Clark Kerr—as president of the University of California—laid out a “master plan” for California’s colleges that provided a model for this cooperation. It followed a “textbook” standard, and took it further than any other prior plan, setting a precedent for other collaborations to follow. Private and public colleges and universities were to retain different missions and draw from different admissions pools in order to decrease competition between the institutions. The larger context of the resolution between private and public HBCU’s was that colleges and universities in general, from the 1950’s and 1970’s, were working towards cooperation. The black power movement catalyzed the cooperation between HBCU’s, but a larger trend of unifying public education was occurring simultaneously.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ Kathy Reeves Bracco and Patrick M. Callan, “Competition and Collaboration in California Higher Education,” (The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2002) <www.highereducation.org/reports/calcomp/callen.pdf> (13 December 2004).

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These schools faced increasing pressure to respond to *Brown* throughout the '50's and '60's, which included the pressure to ensure that they individually would live through the changing climate of higher education. In order to establish their institutions as strong schools, independent of the designation as black schools, the presidents attacked the nature of each other's institutions along the public and private vein. The conflict, which initially began because state funding gave Virginia State a significant advantage in terms of what they could offer potential applicants, divided these schools throughout the 1950's and 1960's. What this meant for the larger Civil Rights Movement was that there were increasing divisions between leaders in the black community, shattering the false image of unity. Black colleges were important factors in the movement because of the level of student activity that took place there in the 1960's. The fact that leaders of these schools were engaging in a conflict at the time when their students were uniting displayed a probable challenge to student level mobilization. More importantly, the conflict that erupted displayed a negative side effect of the *Brown* decision and the ability it had to cause internal divisions amongst black leaders, despite the fact that it was indisputably a milestone in the struggle for civil rights.

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