

Black Representation on Campus

In 1966, civil rights leader Stokely Carmichael gave a speech at UC Berkeley where he used the phrase “Black Power” to describe an ideology of racial pride and black autonomy. The phrase “Black Power” had been used before the 1960s, but Stokely Carmichael’s speech in 1966 was the first time the phrase reached a large audience (Odlum). Black Power was an appealing ideology for African Americans dissatisfied with the direction of the civil rights movement and it became a national turning point. During this time period, activism on campuses began to increase due to the spread of counterculture. Also, Carmichael had just become head of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), which was one of the most prominent civil rights groups on college campuses, which contributed to the rise of Black Power on campuses. In the late 1960s, there were a number of historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) in Maryland that began to embrace the Black Power movement, but there was no sign of involvement at Towson State. Towson State students did not embrace the Black Power movement because of the underrepresentation of African Americans within the school. Instead, organizations on campus worked to empower black students and give them a means of expression through creating and advertising events, meetings, and resources that fostered a sense of community and acceptance among African American students.

Black Power was rooted in the belief of racial pride, self-sufficiency, and equality within the African American community and could be seen as an ideology, a movement, and a protest strategy. Before the 1960s, nonviolent protests were commonplace and were seen as the most effective way to address civil rights. However, this ideology of nonviolence lost favor with a large portion of the African American community in the mid to late 1960s (Odlum). Progress had stalled after the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and some black

activists felt that pacifism could not ultimately spark progress. Protests the media covered were often characterized by demonstrators using drastic measures, such as rioting, seizing buildings, and using violence. It became clear that dramatic action was necessary to catch people's attention, which often required civil disobedience and/or violence. Also, integration was no longer seen as a solution to the problem. There were doubts about how committed the government was to improving conditions for African Americans and many black people stopped seeing well-meaning white activists as allies. As a result, the idea that white power structures needed to be taken down – by force if necessary – became more prevalent (Williamson 24). This change in perspective encouraged blacks to focus on solidarity within their communities, whether that be in cities, churches, teams, or schools.

At the beginning of the 1960s, government action against discrimination was stalled until protests began to spring up in the South due to problems with police brutality. These protests put pressure on federal and state governments to protect black citizens and push for equality. In 1964 President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act into law which ended segregation in public places and banned discrimination in the workplace ("Civil Rights Act"). The Act also commissioned the Office of Education to assist with desegregating schools. As a result, the government began implementing more campus based affirmative action initiatives at schools, which contributed to an increase in African Americans enrolling at white colleges and universities. Between 1964 and 1970, enrollment of black students doubled nationally. Despite this jump in enrollment, black students still made up less than 6% of the population of students at colleges and universities in the United States (Williamson 24).

Integrating institutions in Maryland proved to be especially challenging. It took continuous prompting from the state government for almost 10 years for progress to finally take

place. In 1969, Towson State College was nearly 100 percent white. By 1973, Towson State was able to attract more African American students, but the University had one of the lowest percentages of integration within the state of Maryland. Merely five percent of Towson students were black; only University of Maryland's College Park had a lower percentage of black students (McCarthy 3).

As the federal government enforced integration more, there were some African Americans who felt that integration alone did not solve their problems. There were groups that felt that even though blacks now had access to better education, these institutions did not fully recognize the prejudices African Americans faced (Ogbar 124). Especially in the mid-1960s when a very small number of black students attended primarily white institutions, it was not uncommon for minority students to feel unwelcome, experience hostility, or feel isolated and unsupported in these still white dominated institutions. These feelings of dissatisfaction and alienation prompted African American students to look for other ways to advance themselves that did not rely on white authorities.

This very desire aligned perfectly with Stokely Carmichael's ideology of "Black Power". This argument for unity within the African American community became a pivotal way for students to express their desire for change. As a result, blacks at college began to bond together in solidarity and make the Black Power movement prominent on their campuses (Williamson 26). From 1968 to 1970, a number of colleges in the Washington metropolitan area adopted the ideology of Black Power. One of the most prominent protests that utilized the idea of Black Power took place at Howard University in Washington, D.C. Howard students seized their administration building to demand a change in "black education" and to promote black awareness or black consciousness. They demanded that students be taught how to use their skills

to enhance their own communities and fight segregation. The protestors preached the ideas of Black Power and black pride, and they listened to speeches from black leaders such as Malcolm X to learn about using violence to fight prejudice (“Black Awareness Moved Howard Student Protest” 3).

Despite Black Power’s presence at surrounding schools, Towson State College chose not to join the movement. Many of the schools that took part were HBCUs. With a vast majority of the students being black, institutions like Howard had the support, representation, and numbers needed to use an idea as radical as Black Power during a campus movement. Towson State had too small of a black population to successfully employ such a controversial idea (McCarthy 3). The premise of Black Power relied on blacks advocating for themselves, so having such a small population of blacks at Towson made it nearly impossible to have their voices be heard without relying on white peers and authorities to advance their cause. Many African Americans were choosing to go to historically colleges like Bowie State College, Coppin State College, and Morgan State College. In a time where solidarity within black communities was becoming more popularized, it was easier to go to a primarily black school (“Segregation Hangovers” 14). HBCUs were also able to support one another and work together to foster change because they had such a critical mass of students to form a community.

Many of the HBCUs that were joining the Black Power movement relied on one another for support. After the protest that happened at Howard University, Morgan State College students demonstrated in order to show solidarity and let Howard know they supported the efforts being made at Howard (“Grievances Due Hearing at Morgan” 26). Towson State was a historically white school, so it was harder for black students to gain support from surrounding schools.

At the time, there was also a fear that expressing dissatisfaction about the racial climate of one's school could impact their opportunity to get an education. Black students at University of Illinois, for example, expressed concerns about their financial aid being cut if they partook in radical movements (Williamson 27). On the other hand, there were students that felt obligated to educate their peers about the injustices they faced, but they did not want to risk getting kicked out because attending a primarily white school gave them prestige and promised better job opportunities. Nonetheless, Towson students were still looking for a way to initiate progress and feel welcome on campus, so people began starting organizations for African Americans to get involved in.

One of the most prominent African American organizations on Towson State's campus was the Black Student Union. Black Student Unions across the United States had a similar set of goals that were summarized in the Ten-Point Program. The Black Student Unions wanted full enrollment to be available at quality schools where they had a say in the type of education they'd receive. They wanted to end unfair taxing for low quality schools and to learn how to live in modern society. Also, the Black Student Unions wanted an immediate end to police brutality and the presence of police to be restricted from school premises. Furthermore, they wanted racist teachers restricted from all public schools and for students that had been exempt, expelled, or suspended unfairly to be reinstated at the school. The BSUs wanted students to be tried in a student court with a jury of their peers or students from their school. Lastly, they wanted power, enrollment, equipment, education, teachers, justice, and peace. Overall, the Black Student Unions wanted fair treatment and due process as black students in America (Heath). The Black Student Union at Towson State College reflected these basic values and aimed to bring about these changes.

In an effort to establish a branch of the Black Student Union on Towson State College's campus, a group of African American students presented a list of demands to President James L. Fisher on February 25, 1970. In President Fisher's response, he stated that he was fully committed to integrating Towson State College and subsequently granted the Black Student Union a majority of their requests. Some of these requests included a place to hold meetings, duplicating materials, and supplies for the club (Quante 4). The support shown by the President acted as a symbolic step in the right direction for the improvement of the racial climate at Towson. However, President Fisher stated that the BSU must go through the SGA to have funds granted to them. Procedurally, this is not unusual but in 1970 there were no African American officers on the SGA board (Fisher). The Black Student Union was forced to work under the authority of their white peers, which indirectly diminished some of the power they had just gained. African Americans on college campuses had to learn over time that less radical approaches of empowerment required time and patience to see a successful end result.

After the Black Student Union was officially established at Towson State, the organization released a position paper outlining its purpose and intention. Among other things, the paper stated that Towson's BSU was meant to be exclusively black due to the needs of the black community. These needs included understanding the role of African Americans in American history, discussing current issues they faced, and providing educational opportunities they might not have access to otherwise (Towson University's Black Student Union). The students wanted to make it apparent that black students had different needs than white students, and those needs were not being met because black students faced institutionalized racism and were unable to voice their opinions and concerns. The BSU would aim to enhance the social, cultural, and intellectual experience of all African American students at Towson. In the position

paper, the Black Student Union made it very clear that the club would not be dedicated to rhetorical extremism, which is a kind of single-minded outlook on an issue that does not consider other perspectives (Gutmann). This statement was meant to show that the BSU did not embrace movements like the Black Power Movement, which helped them garner support from the SGA and administration. Most importantly, the BSU would move to extinguish any injustices faced by their black peers (Black Student Union).

The Black Student Union did a number of things to really create a community for black students at Towson. On a smaller scale, the organization held club meetings, brought in speakers, and planned enjoyable activities to help legitimize the club and build the community. On a larger scale, the BSU helped develop the African American Cultural Center in 1974 which helped to increase awareness about the diversity of the black community on campus. They also helped develop the African and African-American Studies program. These programs were vital to the empowerment of black students because they gave African Americans the opportunity to learn more about their culture, about their role in history, and how they can impact society in the present. This gave black students a chance to learn about their identity, which was a right denied to them in the past (Towson University's Black Student Union).

Even though Towson State College's Black Student Union did not use radicalized tactics to give students a voice, they still gave students a means to advocate for their rights. In 1970, the BSU placed an advertisement in the *Towerlight*, Towson's student run newspaper, promoting Malcolm X University (Black Student Union 3). Malcolm X University was established in North Carolina and gave black students an opportunity to learn about black history and how to advance themselves in society using the ideology of Black Power and the teachings and beliefs of Malcolm X ("Durham's Malcolm X Liberation University"). The Black Student Union's

willingness to advertise this kind of resource demonstrates that African American students at Towson still supported the Black Power movement, but they didn't have the support to bring it to campus.

Another group that developed during the 1960s at Towson State was the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). The Students for a Democratic Society was primarily known for its antiwar sentiments and disapproval of the Vietnam War (Hayden). However, the SDS also was involved in the civil rights movement and disapproved of the unfair treatment of African-Americans. The SDS wanted to commit itself to searching for democratic alternatives to current practices that could be instilled on campus and in the community in an effort to improve society. In 1974, the SDS released a pamphlet to Towson State College students called the *Study Guide and Manual for Anti-Racist Activity* (Students for a Democratic Society). This pamphlet was released initially to garner support to get rid of a racist textbook being used in psychology classes. The SDS hoped that the pamphlet and removal of the textbook would strengthen the anti-racism movement on campus and influence bigger changes, such as combatting blatant racism in the classroom.

The SDS pamphlet gives examples of racism on Towson's campus. The pamphlet indicates that racism could be seen in all areas of life on campus whether it be in dormitories, in clubs, or in the classroom (Students for a Democratic Society). The examples the pamphlet specifically talked about was how racism was seen in the employment practices, hiring of faculty, and advisement. The pamphlet states that black student workers held the majority of lower paying jobs and made up the majority of night shift workers on campus. These practices show that the efforts of African Americans are being undermined, and they weren't being given the chance to make more money or work more desirable hours. When it comes to faculty, there

was a minimal amount of minority staff members despite the gradual increase in minority students attending Towson State. The booklet argued that Towson intentionally was not hiring more minority faculty members and that students should encourage the college to be more inclusive in their hiring practices. For student advisement, the pamphlet said that many minority students were treated unfairly and were not given the same quality of guidance as white students. The SDSs willingness to blatantly call out these issues demonstrates how the organization is trying to combat racism and empower black students through voicing their struggles.

There were other resources on campus besides the BSU and SDS, and black students could learn about them in a pamphlet Towson State University released called *The Black Student's Guide to Baltimore* (Towson State University). One page had information for the Office of Minority Affairs and listed programs and services designed to address the interests and needs of black students. Such programs included the African-American Cultural Center and Mahogany Magazine. The African-American Cultural Center provided resources about the social, political, and historical issues African Americans faced in the past and at that present time. The center also served as a place where African Americans could relax in between classes and engage with other students of their race. Mahogany Magazine was a weekly radio show that was produced by black students and touched on topics that interested the black community, such as the daily prejudices many black students faced. Another page had information on traditionally black organizations on Towson State University's campus. Such organizations included the Brotherhood and the Sisterhood, Christian service organizations for African Americans, and Greek organizations that focused on the concerns of black people. By making black students aware of the resources available to them, they were able to interact with other black students and feel that there were places on campus where their voices could be heard. Towson State

University's release of this pamphlet demonstrates how the administration became progressively more aware of the needs of African American students.

Resources for African Americans were not exclusively available at Towson State College. There were also many materials accessible in the surrounding community. *The Black Student's Guide to Baltimore* had information on these materials to make students aware of what was being offered to them. The pamphlet provided information on near-by museums, entertainment, churches, and businesses that were either geared towards or run by African Americans (Towson State University). This guide allowed students to connect with the outer black community and provided another way for African American's on campus to grow in solidarity. Furthermore, supporting black owned businesses is a crucial part of making black communities self-sufficient ("The Black Community"). Self-sufficiency is the first step to liberation from white power structures. When African Americans rely on each other to advance their own economies, they become their own advocates for change and equality.

An important part of empowering African American students on campus was making them aware of how blacks have contributed to the history of America and how they could play an important part in modern society. In 1966, The Negro in American History was being offered as a course for the first time after students requested a course about African American history (Kahl, "New Courses"). Even though the presence of this class signified progress, improvements still needed to be made to present an accurate account of history. In 1969, the title of the course was changed from The Negro in American History to History of Black Americans because it was seen as a more appropriate title for the course (Kahl, "Changes in Course Titles"). This change was likely influenced by the diminishing use of the term "negro" and the increasing use of the term "black" to describe African Americans. The course descriptions also changed. It went from

looking at how American history impacted the “negro” to looking at the role of black American’s in developing America. This shift in viewing African American’s as contributors to the mold of American society signifies tremendous progress and shows African American students that they are accounted for. It is empowering for black students to learn about more than just a white-washed version of history.

Towson State students chose not to embrace the radical ideology of Black Power because they were unable to gather enough support. Instead, organizations provided resources to empower black students and provide a sense of solidarity. These methods were ultimately successful and continued to expand as more minority students enrolled at Towson State University. Efforts to create a welcoming environment for black students in the 1960s and 70s has contributed to making Towson State a place of inclusion and diversity today.

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