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### Black Women: The Forgotten Trailblazers

The 1960s and 1970s were decades of large-scale upheaval and change in the United States. Several social movements brought about this change, two of the most prominent being the Civil Rights Movement and the Women's Liberation Movement. The group who experienced the intersection of these movements, black women, suffered greatly from never being a priority in either one. This compounded oppression did not end within these movements but was a part of their everyday life. While both movements aimed to bring about positive change, black women were pushed to the side and forgotten. This pattern did not end at these social movements, but rather was the norm in society and even on college campuses. Black women attending Towson State College in the 1960s and 1970s were the most marginalized group of students due to the intersection of both racism and sexism that they experienced. This intersection created challenges for black women such as lack of leadership roles, minimal representation in student government organizations, and very few programs or services meant to engage and uplift black women on campus.

After the end of the second World War, the issue of race and racism in the United States was once again brought to the forefront. The Civil Rights Movement was pushed forward by black servicemen who wanted equality after returning from the war. The 1950s and 1960s saw the most progress because of the movement. In 1954, the Brown v. Board of Education decision to integrate schools initiated the hard fighting for equality after it was met with unprecedented

white resistance. Organizations like the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) worked together to push for equality further than the integration of schools. Protests like the Montgomery Bus Boycott, sit-ins, and Freedom Summer allowed for victories like the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 (Janken). While all these changes were steps forward for equality for African Americans, the movement had issues internally, but it also created waves of change that appeared on college campuses.

When reflecting on the Civil Rights Movement and its leaders, a male-dominated group comes to mind. Names like Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, and Stokely Carmichael often receive the most recognition. However, black women played an essential role in the success of the movement and are often forgotten in history because of the sexism within the movement. Of course, there are a few prominent women that are often talked about in history books like Rosa Parks, Dr. Angela Davis, and Coretta Scott King. While these women were important and positive leaders, they were far from the only women involved in the Civil Rights Movement. Black women were not only on the ground walking marches but were the foundation for the movement. Black women worked behind the scenes in supporting the movement through things like food, organizing meetings, and logistics. In rare cases, there were women like Gwendolyn Zoharah Simmons, who was a member of SNCC, and one of three women chosen to be a field director for the Mississippi Freedom Summer Project. There were women like Diane Nash, who was passed over when it came to choosing a Nashville representative when SNCC went nationwide, despite being considered by many as the face of the movement in Nashville. There were women like Mildred Bond Roxborough, a long-time secretary of the NAACP, who

were responsible for organizing and generating meetings, even traveling to other cities to gain members and organize new branches. Even when women were in leadership positions, they often had to fight to get sufficient resources because their male counterparts would get priority. It is also important to note that sexual harassment was not an uncommon occurrence within the movement as well. This sexism was not only a result of the male dominated society that the United States was at the time, but also the remnants of slave culture and patriarchy within the black community. Mary Ann Weathers' "An Argument for Black Women's Liberation as a Revolutionary Force" explains this concept simply when she says: "Black men are still parroting the master's prattle about male superiority", meaning while black men were slaves, they still held tightly to misogynistic beliefs (Weathers). The black community both then and now still adheres to a very patriarchal setup within the household, once again pointed out by Weathers: "..., you should be warned that the opposition for liberation will come from everywhere, particularly [...] from Black men. Don't allow yourselves to be intimidated any longer with this nonsense about the 'Matriarchy' of Black women. Black women are not matriarchs, but we have been forced to live in abandonment and been used and abused" (Weathers). The antiquated view of black women as caregivers and strong, silent support was the foundation for their treatment in the Civil Rights Movement. The focus became black men gaining equality, with black women falling to the side. This then translated to the relationship between men and women in the Civil Rights Movement, and why women were not taken seriously and very rarely held positions of power.

With the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision to integrate schools in 1954, State Teachers College at Towson admitted the first two African American students in 1955. Prior to the historic Supreme Court decision, State Teachers College at Towson had already permitted

African American graduates from Morgan State College into its one-year teaching-certificate program. The difference this time, were the struggles and microaggressions that these two women, Marvis Barnes and Myra Harris, faced as a result of being the first African American students and black women.



Marvis Barnes (left) and Myra Harris (right) '59, the first African American students to enroll at State Teachers College at Towson and to complete a four-year degree (Tower Echoes, 1959).

Both women were high achieving high school students with the opportunity to attend historically black institutions like Coppin State Teachers College or Howard University. When the opportunity arose to attend State Teachers College at Towson, both women were hesitant but urged to apply by school teachers and director of admissions, Dr. Rebecca Tansil (Lucas). Both women say they never experienced violent or blatant acts of racism, but rather subtle instances that reminded them of their difference. Both Barnes and Harris described instances of bias from faculty members: “One professor continually doled out A’s to white students while making Harris — who thought her work equaled theirs — make do with A minuses. ‘I asked what I could do to raise my grade, but never got much of an answer,’ she says” (Lucas). Barnes had a very similar experience: “Although Barnes’s friends had her interests at heart, she says a couple of faculty members did not. ‘They would go down the row asking questions,’ she says. ‘When it was my turn, they’d skip over me’” (Lucas). As upperclassmen, both women served as mentors to other African American students who followed their lead and enrolled at Towson State

College. Barnes and Harris' courage to be the first African American students at a white institution once again illustrates the struggle of the black woman. Despite experiencing bias from faculty members, both women never felt it necessary to report these experiences. This once again demonstrates the quiet struggle of the black woman, and the expectation to be the "strong black woman" as discussed in the previous paragraph. No programs or organizations existed on campus at the time to aid the women in their struggles. Only the support of their friends, Dr. Tansil, and Orielle Murphy, all white people who could never truly understand what these women were going through. Even today, the only recognition these women receive for their role in Towson University's history is a scholarship in their names, and a spotlight during Black History Month. No statues, plaques, or academic buildings in their name. If they were men, would there be a difference in the way they are remembered?

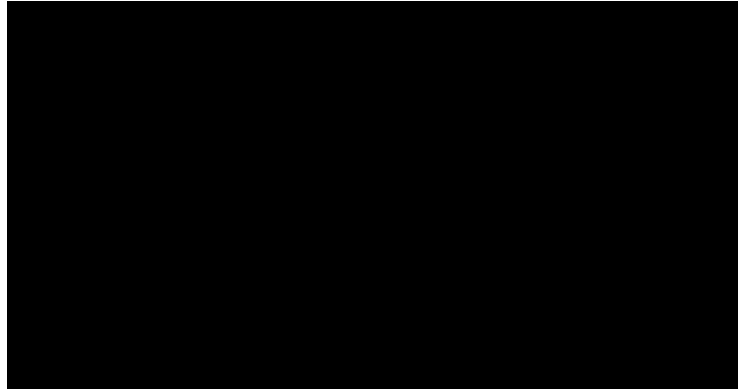
Sixteen years after the first African American students enrolled at Towson State College, a Black Student Union was established on its campus. While this was a huge step for African American students, it did not come without struggle. The creation of the Black Student Union was a result of a push. In February of 1970, a group of African American students gathered in President James Fisher's office with a list of demands for a Black Student Union (Towson University Black Student Union). For nearly a year afterward, the students struggle with the administration and other student organizations. Even when the Black Student Union got sufficient funding, office space, and office supplies, they faced other challenges. In the 1971 Tower Echoes, the annual yearbook, there was no mention or page space dedicated to the Black Student Union. Internally, the Black Student Union struggled with sexism. It was not until 1974, three years after the Black Student Union was established, that there were any women in leadership roles. Sheila Culbertson was one of three officers pictured for the Black Student

Union for the 1974-1975 academic year in the Tower Echoes. A year later, Culbertson served as Vice President the first semester and President the second semester of the 1975-1976 academic year. (Tower Echoes, 1976). It may appear as though progress had been made for women within the organization, but the following year things digressed. Both the President (Larry Hughes) and Vice President (Douglas Moore) were male, while Mary Hyman was Treasurer and Sandra Kress was Assistant Librarian (Tower Echoes, 1977). The lack of representation of women in leadership roles can be traced back to the role of women in the Civil Rights Movement. Once again, the intersection of race and sexism was affecting these women. Even though it was two women who were the first African American students on campus, they were once again pushed to the sidelines when it came to leadership in the fight for equality on campus.

Taking inspiration from the fight for equality that African Americans in the United States demonstrated, feminist thinking blossomed in the 1960s. The Women's Liberation Movement was also a response to the changes that occurred during and after the second World War. Women had gotten a taste of what it meant to be independent and working, and the goal of the movement was to expand on that. Women wanted social, political, and economic change. Women no longer wanted to be objects in every aspect of their life. They took issue with the expectation to be breeders and caregivers and wives and mothers. The focus became men acknowledging their oppressive power, and to dismantle it. They saw education as a tool, and college aged women became the driving force behind the movement. The movement created monumental change, and the effects were seen specifically in young women, and yet the movement fell victim to internal struggles like the Civil Rights Movement.

Once again, the pattern of black women being erased and forgotten continued into the Women's Liberation Movement. Although the movement claimed to have no hierarchy, white

middle class women became the face of the movement, and only their needs and demands were the ones being brought to the forefront. The most prominent of these women were Gloria Steinem and Germaine Greer, who are both white. The only high profile black woman of the movement was Dorothy Pittman-Hughes, as a result of the iconic portrait of her and Steinem with raised fists side by side. She did also work closely with Steinem.



Steinem (left) and Pittman-Hughes (right) in the iconic portrait that propelled them to the front of the Women's Liberation Movement (Huffington Post).[Due to copyright restrictions this image has been redacted for ScholarWorks@Towson]

Other than Pittman-Hughes, there was very little representation of black women within the movement. It is important to acknowledge that the goal of the movement did not set out to exclude black women, but rather early documents and manifestos recognized and embraced the concept of intersectionality. The Redstockings Manifesto sixth point recognized that not all women faced the same level of oppression:

“We identify with all women. We define our best interest as that of the poorest, most brutally exploited woman.

We repudiate all economic, racial, educational or status privileges that divide us from other women. We are determined to recognize and eliminate any prejudices we may hold against other women” (Redstockings).

By acknowledging early on that intersectionality exists and that it has real effects, the Women's Movement started out on the right footing. Additionally, intersectionality did not just stop at black women, as pointed out by Mary Ann Weathers:

“All women suffer oppression, even white women, particularly poor white women, and especially Indian, Mexican, Puerto Rican, Oriental and Black American women whose oppression is tripled by any of the above-mentioned. But we do have female oppression in common” (Weathers).

Despite recognizing how different demographics were having profoundly different experiences with sexism, the movement lost touch with that sentiment along the way, and middle class white women became the focus in the end. The movement became centered on the lack of women in white collar jobs and the contraceptive pill, which were issues that white women struggled with. At the same time, black women, women of color, and poor women wanted access to education and the low paying jobs that white women were tired of. Over time, white middle class women's struggles became priority. Intersectionality is essential in explaining why black women could not find a place in two movements that, in theory, were supposed to create change and progress for them. The sexism that they faced in the Civil Rights Movement coupled with the racism in the Women's Liberation Movement silenced their voice.

Prior to the Women's Liberation Movement trying to gain equality for women, sexism was still rampant in every corner of society, including college campuses. Before the effects of the movement started creating change, institutions like Towson State College struggled greatly with sexism in the workplace and between students. Despite starting out as a women-dominated campus, with an influx of male students, Towson State College evolved into having a separate section in the handbook for students just for women by the early 1960s. Not only does this show



different expectations for each sex, but it also shows the sexist environment the campus became. The sexism did not end at students, but rather it carried through to faculty members. There was evidence of pay discrepancies of men and women in the same positions at Towson State College.

Table IV. Hiring Patterns for the Last Three Years

|      | Professor |          | Associate |         | Assistant |         | Instructor |          |
|------|-----------|----------|-----------|---------|-----------|---------|------------|----------|
|      | Men       | Women    | Men       | Women   | Men       | Women   | Men        | Women    |
| 1969 | 0         | 0        | 50% (4)   | 50% (4) | 68% (23)  | 38% (8) | 60% (9)    | 40% (6)  |
| 1970 | 0         | 100% (1) | 71% (12)  | 29% (5) | 74% (19)  | 26% (7) | 45% (9)    | 55% (11) |
| 1971 | 0         | 0        | 75% (6)   | 25% (2) | 76% (16)  | 24% (5) | 75% (21)   | 25% (7)  |

Conclusion: Hiring percentages for the last three years are even more discriminatory than overall faculty population percentages. In an era in which women's rights in such areas as equal opportunity in hiring have become a prominent issue, Towson State College has hired proportionately fewer women than in earlier years.

Table V. Salary Averages, All Faculty

|            | Men      | Women    | Difference |
|------------|----------|----------|------------|
| All Ranks  | \$12,758 | \$11,727 | -1,031     |
| Professor  | 17,464   | 16,922   | -542       |
| Associate  | 14,011   | 13,610   | -401       |
| Assistant  | 10,594   | 11,014   | +420       |
| Instructor | 9,310    | 8,985    | -325       |

Conclusion: Women Faculty are underpaid in relation to their qualifications. The evidence of Tables II and III identifies Assistant Professor as the level at which many women faculty are 'stuck' - qualified for promotion, but not promoted; these women may therefore be earning salaries very slightly higher than the average male Assistant Professor, but not salaries commensurate with their qualifications.

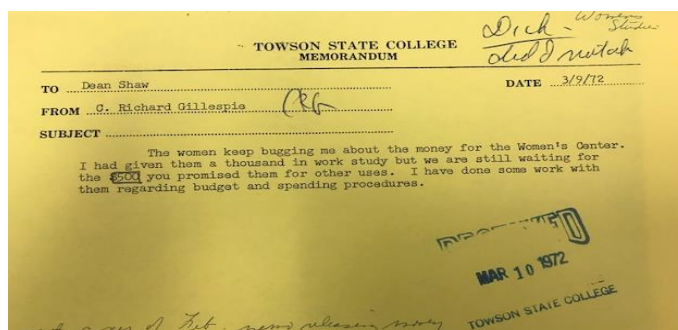
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As a result of the statistics outlined above and the other surveys and negotiations we have been conducting in the last year, the Faculty Association Committee on the Status of Women has presented to the Towson State College administration a ten-point Action Plan (copy attached) for the elimination of discrimination based on sex at this college. We feel that even without the encouragement provided by recent national legislation (Executive Order 11246, amended by Executive Order 11375; P.L. 90-284, Title VII, the Higher Education Bill, the Equal Rights Amendment), Towson State College should act upon its assertions of progressive leadership by taking immediate positive steps toward true human equality.

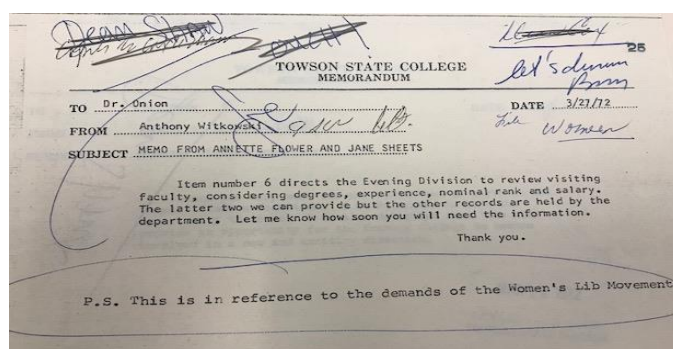
Study showing pay and hiring discrimination based on sex at Towson State College (Archives, Albert S. Cook Library).

This sexism and discrimination not only reflected the climate of the United States but allowed for change to be ushered in with the Women's Liberation Movement.

The impact of the Women's Movement did not just only stay on national headlines, but reached onto college campuses, and Towson State College was no exception. The clearest example of this was the opening of a Women's Center in early 1972. Despite being a tremendous step toward fostering a safe environment for women on campus, the center and its staff faced sexism and discrimination from the start. The center faced obstacles with funding and support from the administration as shown below:



Correspondence between Dean Shaw and Professor Richard Gillespie regarding funding for the Women's Center  
(Archives, Albert S. Cook Library)



Correspondence regarding changes at Towson State College as a result of the Women's Liberation Movement  
(Archives, Albert S. Cook Library)

The Women's Center also faced challenges with advertising in the school newspaper, the *Towerlight*. Through subtle actions like page placement, article length, and tone, the Women's Center was not given the opportunity it needed to be used to its fullest potential by the female students of Towson. The first *Towerlight* article about the Women's Center was the announcement of its opening on February 25, 1972. The announcement itself was just a few sentences long, and on the eleventh page. Not only does the page placement show that the opening held very little importance to the editors, but it also made it difficult for female students to find or know about the Women's Center and what it offered to them. The center was not mentioned again until almost a month later in the *Towerlight*. Although this time it was easier to find, the article itself was still placed far back in the paper, on page eight. An interesting aspect

of this article was that it was done by a female reporter named Kathy Wichita. Despite this, Wichita's tone was unimpressed: "No specific director will run the center. Basically, it is made up of an ad-hoc group of people whose intention is to manage it in a collective manner. At present, the workers who maintain the center do so on a volunteer basis" (*Towerlight*, 3 March 1972). One would assume that having a female reporter would be more enthusiastic and less critical of a center made to uplift women on campus, and yet the article reflects the opposite. It is hard to draw conclusions as to why Wichita wrote the way she did, but the staff of the *Towerlight* that year was made up of eleven women and fifteen men, with only one woman in a leadership role. The only in-depth article dedicated to the Women's Center was in the March 10th, 1972 issue of the newspaper. This time, the article took up almost a quarter of the page and went in depth to the services and programs provided by the center. However, the article appeared on page fifteen, the furthest back any article had been, which still shows that the editors of the paper did not feel as though it was important. In addition, all these articles were placed behind articles on topics such as concert reviews and sports commentary. While the Women's Center offered groups and programs for women, there were no services for black women specifically. Once again, this reinforces that black women at Towson State College's campus were marginalized and had very little support.

Despite black female students at Towson State College having very little representation in student government, sports teams, and housing councils, sororities were the one place an organization was focused on them. The first black sorority, Delta Sigma Theta, was chartered on Towson's campus in 1975. Sigma Gamma Rho followed in 1976, and Alpha Kappa Alpha in 1977. These sororities were the first time an organization was solely focused on the black woman at Towson. Not only did the sororities provide a safe space for these women, but it allowed them

to hold leadership roles they never would have been offered or considered for before in other student organizations. It is important to note that the advisor to Delta Sigma Theta in 1975 was a woman by the name of Mrs. Chapelle Armstead. Traditionally, a faculty member would serve as an advisor, but Mrs. Armstead could not be found in the log of that year's faculty members. This shows two things: one, that there were no black female faculty members; two, there were no mentors on campus at the time for these women who understood their struggle as black women. While Mrs. Armstead was probably a positive advisor, the bigger issue of black female students having no one who looked like them in faculty positions or positions of power is clearly demonstrated here. While these sororities brought about many positives for black women on campus, it is important to note that they were not introduced until twenty years after the first black female student stepped foot on Towson's campus. Even black male students at Towson had their own fraternity before black women, with Iota Phi Beta being chartered in 1973. This very much illustrates intersection of racism and sexism at work. Because these students were both black and women, they were given their own organization after white men, white women, and black men had already had their own for years before them.

All of these struggles: lack of leadership roles in the Black Student Union, no programs or services specific to black women at the Women's Center, and the absence of mentors or professors who understood the struggle of being a black woman made black female students the most marginalized group on campus. Despite paving the way for all African American students to enroll at Towson State College, black women were never given sufficient support and forced to struggle silently. The internal struggles of nationwide movements translated directly onto Towson's campus, and affected black women in ways that are identical to the women in both movements. The intersection of racism and sexism served as a brutal combination of oppression

that not only made it hard for black women to find their place in social movements and in society, but especially in the young women trying to better themselves and earn an education at Towson State College in the 1960s and 1970s.

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