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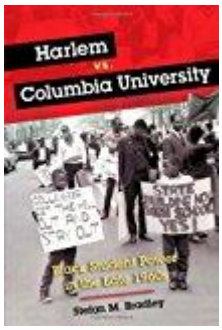

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Black Power Challenges the Ivy League

One of the most well-known and studied examples of the 1960s student rebellions was led by Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) at Columbia University. In *Harlem vs. Columbia University*, Stefan M. Bradley, assistant professor of history and African American studies at Saint Louis University, focuses on the lesser-known rebellion led by the Students' Afro-American Society (SAS) at the school and the predominantly black and Puerto Rican communities of Harlem (in the valley below the university) and Morningside Heights (the area in which the university is located). Bradley presents his narrative in eight informative chapters. The publication opens with a prologue and an introduction and closes with a conclusion and an epilogue. The brief epilogue, "Where Are They Now," is based primarily on information gathered from an April 2008 commemoration of the events of 1968 attended by approximately two hundred former demonstrators.

Bradley came to New York City in 1997 to do research on the events at Columbia and quickly saw that "recreational space was as much a commodity as was living space" (p. vii). The central event in his narrative concerns the conflict between the university and the black populations (in SAS and in the larger community) over the university's attempt to construct a ten-story gymnasium on 2.1 acres of recreational space in Morningside Park. This public park is located to the east of the campus between the campus in Morningside Heights and Harlem in the valley.

This story begins with an account of the increasing expansion of Columbia's ownership of land and buildings at the expense of Morningside Heights and Harlem residents. As the black and Puerto Rican populations in the surrounding areas grew during the 1950s and 1960s, "the university attempted to deal with the problem of the ghetto by taking it over before it overran the Morning-

side Heights campus" (p. 27). For instance, as part of "urban renewal" plans, many Single Room Occupancy units (SROs) owned by the university were converted into housing or other facilities to be used by university personnel. Not only were residents moved, but the university also failed to inform the community about its expansion plans, and was accused of treating residents with indifference; thus, the title of the first chapter, "Why I Hate You."

In the early 1960s, Columbia and the city made an arrangement for the university to build two softball fields in Morningside Park. At first, the fields were used by both university and community members. However, in the mid-1960s, the university incrementally cut off community access to the fields. The "critical event" that led to action can be traced to the 1961 state legislation permitting the university to rent 2.1 acres of park land for a gymnasium. Columbia wanted the new gym to compete with the athletic opportunities at other Ivy League schools. Opposition to this private use of public land gradually grew among community residents, community organizations, and elected officials in New York City.

The anti-gym movement united working-class and middle-class blacks, students and residents, and moderates and militants. With a meaningful play on words, protestors began to refer to the proposed gym as "Gym Crow." Community residents discovered that they would be limited to 15 percent of the building and that they could enter their separate spaces only through a basement entrance. Whatever the explanation for these decisions, one can understand the use of "Gym Crow." On February 28, 1968, twenty community members and Columbia students went to the site to prevent construction. As community demonstrations increased in frequency and number of participants, a number of black leaders made it clear that blacks would take the lead.

On campus, the leader of SDS urged a mostly white audience of students to stand with the protestors against the gym. In addition, SDS leaders put forth their own agenda; for example, they sought to radicalize students, enhance student power on campus, end the war, and end Columbia's ties to the military-industrial complex. In contrast, an SAS leader stated that his group had not proposed "to do anything but to keep the university from building the gymnasium" (p. 69). It was time for the SAS to follow the community protestors and to lead protests concerning black issues. However, both groups realized the strength of an SAS-SDS coalition. Bradley's analysis of the back and forth relationships between SDS and SAS in terms of tactics, agendas, and goals is informative and insightful.

A group of four to five hundred students took control of Hamilton Hall, a classroom building and the location of most of Columbia's administrative offices. Once in the building, conflicts between the two groups of students became clear and SAS decided to break away from the larger predominantly white group. The movement toward separation was encouraged by visits from perhaps the two most well-known Black Power advocates at the time, H. Rap Brown and Stokely Carmichael (aka Kwame Ture). According to Bradley, during his initial visit to Hamilton Hall, Rap Brown announced, "the black community is taking over" (p. 74).

Bradley is at his best when he discusses the theoretical and ideological positions behind Rap Brown's statement and their applications by SAS at Columbia. Bradley's model of Black Power is based on ***Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America*** (1967) by Stokely Carmichael and the political scientist Charles Hamilton. The first significant application of Black Power on the part of SAS was that white students were escorted from Hamilton Hall. SDS-led students soon occupied president Grayson Kirk's offices in the Low Memorial Library. The position behind the exclusion of whites was that they benefited too much from the system to change it. Also, in place of the typical

sit-in tactic of SDS, SAS barricaded the building thus controlling who entered and left. The occupiers of Hamilton Hall could focus their demands on the gym and did not want to dilute their energies or demands on the broader radicalizing agenda of SDS.

If SDS wished to address the majority of white students on campus, "SAS, its members claimed, wanted to serve the interest of the neighboring black community" (p. 78). Local support came from high school students, community leaders and residents, elected officials, and workers at the university. University administrators began to fear the possible destruction of university property from the black student and community protests. The reality of the situation was that SAS students maintained discipline and order within Hamilton Hall; administrators, however, feared the entrance of black militant organizations on to the campus. Both SDS and SAS were removed from campus buildings and arrested. However, SAS negotiations with the university led to the cessation of the construction of the proposed gym; in 1974 a new fitness center was constructed at the location of the old gymnasium on campus.

In the wake of the victory over the gym site, SAS students focused on the creation of a black studies institute, inclusion of black studies courses, and increased recruitment of black students at Columbia. These more academically oriented issues meant that the students were coming into conflict with areas of traditional faculty authority. To dramatize their demands a small group of students occupied the admissions offices in Hamilton Hall for two days. Although some of the demands were rejected, for example, a separate admissions board for black and Puerto Rican students, the number of black students admitted increased from 58 in 1968-69 to 115 in 1969-70. While the university indicated that it offered twenty-two courses in the area of "black studies," a degree program was not recognized until 1987. Finally, in 1993 the Institute for Research in African-American Studies was established.

The existence of other elite peer institutions in the Ivy League provided Bradley with an opportunity to engage in an interesting example of comparative analysis in chapter 7, "Striking Similarities: Columbia, the Ivy League and Black Power." These institutions were comparable in terms of academic quality/status, enrollment of a relatively small number of black students, and employment of a relatively small number of black faculty. Students at these schools were also exposed to the same national political, social, and cultural milieu as were those at Columbia. Harvard (Cambridge/Boston), Yale (New Haven), and the University of Pennsylvania (Philadelphia) are located in urban communities and had histories of expansion into black neighborhoods and of admissions policies that were seen as racist. Each of these schools had Black Power movements that paralleled closely the experiences at Columbia.

The rural location of Cornell University, in Ithaca, New York, meant that it was not confronted with the issues of urban renewal and expansion, and represents somewhat of a deviant case. The issues at Cornell centered on such demands as the creation of a "black college" and black studies departments, and an investigation into cross-burning and other aspects of a racist environment on campus. Given its setting and the absence of outside involvement, it is interesting to note that "Cornell's protestors were much more extreme in the measures they took to exact concessions from their university" (p. 144). Many of us have seen or remember images of Cornell students carrying rifles when they left previously occupied buildings. These students may have learned too well the lesson from Columbia that the threat of violence can be a useful tactic.

Given Bradley's academic interests and training, it was surprising to find that he repeats the myth that "several Black Muslim men assassinated Malcolm X in Harlem (p. 18). Malcolm X was assas-

sinated in the Audubon Ballroom located in an area of Manhattan directly north of Harlem known as Washington Heights. Also, the existence of the Washington Heights and Inwood sections to the north of Harlem invalidates Bradley's statement that Harlem "occupies the northern part of Manhattan" (p. 22).

Bradley has done an admirable job in presenting an often overlooked movement at Columbia University and at a number of other Ivies. His reasonable conclusion is that although SAS had some victories and some defeats, "the members of SAS were able to help change a traditionally white and exclusive institution for the better" (p. 132). Historians of education can continue this line of work by examining networks of influence among other universities during the 1960s. For example, Bradley reports that black students at Cornell were influenced by ideas picked up at a Howard University conference. Case studies of public institutions might also be undertaken and compared with the movements at the Ivies and other comparable private institutions. How important was the threat of violence in other settings? Finally, ***Harlem vs. Columbia*** can be read as a study of the town-gown relationship, and a reminder that this relationship is likely to be significant in an understanding of the policies and practices of institutions of higher education in general and of urban institutions in particular.

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