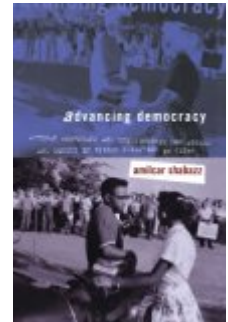


Amilcar Shabazz. *Advancing Democracy: African Americans and the Struggle for Access and Equity in Higher Education in Texas.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004. xiii + 301 pp. \$25.00, paper, ISBN 978-0-8078-5505-8.



Reviewed by Charles H. Martin

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Amilcar Shabazz has written an important book, which chronicles the long and difficult struggle against racial discrimination in higher education in Texas. As the subtitle indicates, *Advancing Democracy* is not primarily a study of institutional policy but rather a comprehensive survey of the quest by black Texans since emancipation to gain both access and equality in post-secondary education. Given the small numbers and scattered nature of previous historical writings on the subject, the book is a welcome addition to Texas history. Specialists in southern history, African American history, and the history of education will also benefit from the study. Shabazz, who earned his Ph.D. degree at the University of Houston and now teaches at the University of Alabama, focuses most of his account on the period from 1940 to 1965, giving special attention to the sometimes neglected years preceding the Supreme Court's famous *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling in 1954. He concentrates on public colleges and universities, rather than private ones, since the state's higher education system claimed to serve the needs of both white and

black citizens alike and was an integral part of an extensive Jim Crow system.

Shabazz aims to achieve three goals in his study: to describe fully the dynamics of the protracted struggle for black equality in Texas higher education and the key role played by the NAACP in this campaign; to connect the black quest for higher education to black freedom struggles on the state and local level; and to examine "the 'implications' that liberal integrationism had both for African Americans and for society as a whole" (p. 5). He fully accomplishes his first goal, mostly achieves the second, but falls short on the third. Since this last issue is not essential to his project, its underdevelopment does not detract from the overall value of the book. In describing the struggle for democracy in higher education, Shabazz acknowledges the importance of federal court action and timely concessions from pragmatic whites, but he places special emphasis on the agency of individual African Americans. The essential factor in the ultimate victory over Jim Crow in college education, he writes, was "the

self-determined struggle of blacks themselves" (p. 5).

Shabazz begins his story with a chapter devoted to the initial development of public education for African Americans in Texas after emancipation. The state's constitution of 1876 specifically mandated separate schools for whites and blacks. The establishment in 1879 of Prairie View Normal and Industrial College, an administrative branch of Texas A&M College, gave black Texans their first public institution of higher learning, but one which emphasized industrial education as the proper outlet for black aspirations. Satisfied that one college fulfilled the needs of African Americans, the state legislature declined to create a second school which would serve, at least on paper, as the black counterpart to the University of Texas. Prairie View officials finally gained permission to add a liberal arts curriculum in 1901, but graduate courses were not authorized until 1937. Even then the college still lacked a separate library building. Continued black complaints over the limited nature of graduate and professional training led to the legislative creation of an out-of-state scholarship program in 1939, even though the federal courts had recently ruled such programs unconstitutional.

Chapter 2 describes differing strategies and specific actions pursued by African Americans in the 1940s. During much of this period black Texans embraced a "Texas University Movement," which sought the creation of a separate but equal black University of Texas. In response, regents at Texas A&M promised to upgrade Prairie View, but the resulting changes were mostly cosmetic (the school was now officially called a university). More telling, the A&M regents reaffirmed the exclusion of Prairie View from the use of revenues generated by the Permanent University Fund (PUF), which provided essential funding for both A&M and the University of Texas. After World War II, a new and more aggressive legal strategy advocated by Thurgood Marshall and the national

NAACP office challenged the traditional paradigm of "interracial conciliation." Instead of seeking to upgrade the quality of black education within the confines of segregation, Marshall endorsed the ideology of "civil libertarianism," which is Shabazz's term for what other scholars call liberal integrationism. This new approach directly attacked the fundamental principle of segregation and sought to have black students admitted to white colleges. Many local African American leaders, including newspaper publisher Carter Wesley, did not immediately embrace this new philosophy. Nonetheless, the NAACP's new assertiveness frightened the notoriously tight-fisted Texas legislature in 1947 into upgrading black higher education by creating Texas State University for Negroes (TSUN), now Texas Southern University, in hopes of undermining the association's legal challenges to continued segregation on campus.

The continued legal fight over admission to the graduate and professional programs of the University of Texas in the late-1940s is the subject of the book's third chapter. An invigorated NAACP, whose Texas membership surged to 23,000 after the war, led the charge. Shabazz sensitively recounts the efforts of two racial pioneers supported by the NAACP, Heman Sweatt and Herman A. Barnett, to enroll respectively in the UT School of Law and the UT Medical Branch in Galveston. Since the creation and funding of a separate black medical school seemed impractical, UT regents reluctantly admitted Barnett in 1949 but initially maintained the fiction that he was really a student at a non-existent medical branch of TSUN. Sweatt was not so fortunate. After he filed suit in 1946, the regents and state officials vigorously fought his admission for the ensuing four years. Moreover, university administrators still refused to admit any African Americans to graduate or professional classes on the main campus, despite Barnett's breakthrough in Galveston. Instead they offered to teach selected courses not available at

TSUN to a few black students at an off-campus location in Austin.

In June, 1950, the Supreme Court issued its historic decision in *Sweatt v. Painter*. By a unanimous vote, the high court ruled that white Texas universities could not exclude African Americans from those graduate and professional programs for which there were no true equivalents at black colleges. Although the court declined to reconsider the *Plessy* decision, its ruling inspired the NAACP and black Texans. Chapter 4 discusses the limited compliance of UT officials with the *Sweatt* decision, the increased pressure from African Americans, and several small breakthroughs on the college level elsewhere in the state. Although UT now admitted some qualified African Americans to graduate and professional work, it still rejected others and instructed them to enroll at Prairie view or TSUN. Moreover, the new black students at UT found themselves less than welcome on campus. In one egregious example during the fall of 1950, the Ku Klux Klan burned a cross in front of the law school. As Shabazz observes, "Desegregation did not mean inclusivity" (p. 117). Heman Sweatt struggled in this unfriendly environment. Under tremendous pressure because of his high profile, he eventually saw his marriage fall apart, suffered emotional problems, and finally flunked out of the law school. Despite this slow pace of racial progress at UT, the author argues that black Texans now fully understood that the desegregation of higher education was an essential part of the broader fight for racial equality.

Chapter 5 looks at the initial response to the *Brown* decision within the state. In this section Shabazz takes partial issue with the so-called "backlash thesis," which argues that *Brown's* major immediate accomplishment was to provoke tremendous white resistance to the possibility of racial change while failing to achieve hardly any actual school desegregation. In Texas, he argues, "black activists did draw inspiration from *Brown*,"

and university integration continued to spread to additional white campuses (p. 256). Of course, Shabazz does not deny that massive resistance to school desegregation existed. In fact, he suggests that it was more substantial than most Texas historians have previously acknowledged and implies that it was similar to the resistance found in the Deep South states. His first point is undoubtedly correct, but the second argument fails to fully appreciate the depth and breath of white opposition, especially its violent side, elsewhere in Dixie. The NAACP soon became a convenient target for the wrath of segregationist state officials. Instead of taking legal action against those whites who used harassment and even physical violence against black students attempting to enter Lamar State College of Technology and Texarkana Junior College, Attorney General John Ben Sheppherd filed suit against the association for allegedly operating illegally in Texas. In 1957 he gained a permanent injunction against the NAACP, hurting the legal attack on Jim Crow for several years. Eventually the organization succeeded in resuming operations within the state, but Shabazz neglects to explain how and when this happened.

The final chapter of *Advancing Democracy* looks at the steady progression of desegregation to additional white campuses in the 1960s. Shabazz provides specific case studies on each public senior college and most junior colleges as well. Again and again he shows that the initial arrival of African American students did not usually lead to prompt inclusion and full acceptance by white institutions. As one black UT student lamented in the late 1950s, "Negro students have been desegregated but not integrated.... We are cut off from the general stream of university life" (p. 196). Shabazz identifies three East Texas colleges as the last senior institutions to desegregate: Sam Houston State College, Stephen F. Austin State College, and East Texas State College. All of these schools did not admit their first African American undergraduates until 1964. The author thus ends his narrative just as Congress finally passed

sweeping civil rights legislation, opening another era in the black freedom struggle.

This is a timely and valuable book which is well-researched and well-documented. It is written in a lively and readable manner, although sometimes a little overwritten. The author does not shrink from making strong judgments and argues his points forcefully, though rarely beyond the evidence. Like many scholars working in the field of civil rights history, he distinguishes between "desegregation," which means the mere physical presence of black students in formerly all-white classrooms, and "integration," which requires the full inclusion of African Americans into all campus activities and positions of power. For the most part, then, this volume is a study of desegregation, not integration, in Texas higher education.

In looking at desegregation in the southern and western parts of the state, Shabazz depicts Mexican Americans as "a Trojan horse" for institutional change in those areas. In his research, though, he found only a few examples of close cooperation between Tejanos and African Americans. One slight weakness of the book is the lack of very much information about the rate of progress in the desegregation of local public schools in various regions of Texas. Although Shabazz is specifically concerned with developments concerning higher education, such information could help place the action (or inaction) of college administrators in those locales in a clearer perspective. Nonetheless, *Advancing Democracy* provides us with a useful and long-overdue study of an important topic in Texas history, one which reminds us just how extensive white supremacy and Jim Crow policies were in our state's past.

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