

*Black Student Life at a Predominantly White Institution: A Historical Analysis of Black Students  
Experience at The Pennsylvania State University from 1968-1971*

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## I. Introduction:

From 1965-1969, the number of African Americans in higher education in the United States, was around 4.5%. This is a very small number compared to the African Americans population<sup>1</sup>. The African American college student came from families of various different educational backgrounds and of varying socioeconomic status, while yet pursuing an educational experience that was not accessible for all, but crucial for personal growth and success in a culture where prejudice and discrimination were the norm.<sup>2</sup> For many white Americans, 4% of African Americans attending Predominately White Institutions should be enough for these students to excel, but for many African Americans, just like their white student peers, success would not be limited to admission, rather n environments for black culture, studies, and community. The unsatisfaction that African American student life would force the hand of the university administration to respond with change. Theses African American students, leaders, and activist would be students at The Pennsylvania State University.

The black student experience at universities during 1968-1971 was an increasingly large movement, especially since it was the era for student activism. This wave of youth activism that spanned across many colleges/universities not only created a new idea of the life of a college student but left a mark on the country due to the large call to action, setting an example that influenced social justice change. Although the fight for social justice for some student activist focused on state and national matters, other black students would be faced with the duty to constantly fight the systematic injustices on the grounds of campus life. For the black students at Penn State, this task was not easy since they were so few in numbers, but by the use of protest

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<sup>1</sup> Henry Ibram, Rogers. "The Black Campus Movement: An Afrocentric Narrative History of the Struggle to Diversify Higher Education, 1965–1972, <https://search-proquest-com.ezaccess.libraries.psu.edu/docview/305227447?accountid=13158>

<sup>2</sup> Carl H., Walker and Betty Hollow. "Soulful Bobcats: Experience of African American Students at Ohio University, 1950-1960, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/pensu/detail.action?docID=3026981>

demonstrations, letters written to the president of the university articulating demands, the creation of organizations to establish community and unity, and the persistence for an identity on campus, these young college students, nevertheless created an identity that enhanced and celebrated black culture, history, and students.

## **II. Student Activism:**

Penn State student activists were no different than the student activists that were present on most universities in the U.S. during this time. They rallied, they held demonstrations, they expressed grievances and echoed for change for all university students, with the intentions of maintain peace, while pushing for change. There were some universities including, but not limited to :University of California at Berkley, Columbia, Harvard, Temple, Kent State, who would gain the attention of national news, however these same issues wouldn't seem too unfamiliar to students, even in Happy Valley.

Activism was not the same for every student group on the Penn State campus. As white students were protesting against the parental role that the university administrators set in policies which placed restriction on dress code, for the dormitories, a curfew for students, which students resisted.<sup>3</sup> In addition to, antiwar protest, that included the entirety student body, although even these antiwar demonstrations during the Vietnam war were in view of different for white students and blacks. Black students were faced with the fight of racial equality and inclusivity on a campus that admitted blacks, while not truly accepting blacks. The form of activism that was demonstrated on campus by black students was learned from the movements of which they were a part of outside of the university and brought strategies, ideologies, and goals to their immediate

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<sup>3</sup> Michael Bezilla. "Penn State: an illustrated History" <https://libraries.psu.edu/about/collections/penn-university-park-campus-history-collection/penn-state-illustrated>

context: the university<sup>4</sup>. With these present differences at hand, the experience and importance of student activism held the same importance, but only brought change and attention when the color was “right”.

### **III. Diversity:**

The experience that white and black students were having were not one in the same nor shared amongst one another. A black student wouldn't hesitate to express, “they -white students- show an appalling lack of regard for the special problems the disadvantaged students- black students- face in adopting to Penn State life. Some go so far to believe that these students (disadvantaged students) owe the white middle-class their eternal gratitude for being allowed to study at Penn State.<sup>5</sup> Despite the belief of white students, black students worked just as hard to attain universities and deserved a spot and space on campuses without having to assimilate to the racial oppressive system and practices. As white students and administration would turn an invisible eye to black students, their presence would be to make sudden interruptions to the steps of Old Main on to the president's office.

The presence of African Americans on predominantly white universities was few in number because the racial belief and historical influences that blacks were not able to be educated as whites because of their inferior status to accessing any opportunity that white Americans received. This idea that white Americans weren't necessarily troubled when blacks were receiving “separate but equal” education in facilities that were not always sufficient in resources, which white students had; the trouble only sparked when black parents and students demanded that they attend schools that would allow that the same opportunities as white

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<sup>4</sup> Joy Ann, Williamson. “Black Power on Campus: The University of Illinois, 1965-75.”

<https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/pensu/detail.action?docID=3414279>

<sup>5</sup> “Editorial Opinion Black and White.” <https://panewsarchive.psu.edu/lccn/sn85054904/1971-10-29/ed-1/seq-2.pdf>

students. Black Americans could have jobs, own businesses, get an education, become community leaders, so long that they didn't get too high or become an "upped black" becoming a threat to white Americans. And these ideologies were present even at universities.<sup>6</sup> These oppressive belief systems gave reason for many African Americans at predominantly white universities to seek out ways for a presence of diversity on campuses, which was necessary for the acknowledgement and value for educated blacks.

Diversity was not solely sought for in enrollment of more black students because if the environment for performance and success of black students wasn't available it many students would not have any chance of excelling at the university. With less than 1% of Penn State's student population amounting to black students, the black students who would accept admission would realize that their education abilities would not be counted for much, because they would still be viewed as the "other", which the university held no reserved spaces to accept in academics and social life. In the awareness of being the other black students would find a new method of college survival by establishing and pushing, which they could identify as their own community.

By the 1968-1969 quarterly term the black student population amounted to about 200 students. These students mainly coming from the cities of Philadelphia and Pittsburg, faced the hard reality and adjustment when arriving on a college campus. With efforts being made by student leaders to reach out to black high school to increase the diversity on campus, the white students would resist the idea in the welcoming of more African American students on campus. Due to the racial experience and discrimination that was present, students from the Philadelphia high school were being encouraged by other black alumni and/or students not to apply to Penn

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<sup>6</sup> Kolb Ron. "The Return of Jesse Arnelle." <https://panewsarchive.psu.edu/lccn/sn85054904/1968-05-21/ed-1/seq-3.pdf>

State knowing that the black experience was one that restricted black culture and education achievements.<sup>7</sup> Even some of the black students at the university would remark to not accepting admission into the university because there was no place for “Blackness”. In seeing all the racial violence of police brutality that blacks were enduring nationwide because of the racism and hatred of black identity, families and black communities did not want their children to experience the fatalities that was triggered by hatred.

While the university took the acceptance of African Americans as all the diversity needed on campus, this did not remove the prejudice and discrimination that was the reality for black students amongst campus life, which prohibited inclusivity.

#### **IV. Student organizations:**

The creation of student led organizations were the starting grounds for the building of community for black students. One of the first of these to appear as a social and political action organization was the Fredrick E. Douglass Association, which was founded in 1967, but did not really become a noticeable organization until fall term of 1969. The founder of this group was Frederick B. Phillips and his fraternity brothers of Kappa Alpha Psi.<sup>8</sup> During this time black fraternities and sororities were central avenues of black community, but these groups were of also of exclusivity, so to attain community and unity for all black students who were not involved in greek life, the Douglass Association was the way achieve that purpose. The mission of the organization was to act as a liaison between the black student body and the administration which pertained to matters of possible racial or any form of discrimination that black students

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<sup>7</sup> Beth, Golder. “White Racism isn’t only found in the cities: Black Student Dislike University”.  
<https://panewsarchive.psu.edu/lcn/sn85054904/1968-03-07/ed-1/seq-8.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Black history PSU. “*Penn State University African American Chronicles: 1899-2016*”.  
<https://web.archive.org/web/20190302215913/http://blackhistory.psu.edu/>

were experience by students or faculty .<sup>9</sup> This group of young leaders would represent and express the grievances of the lack of diversity and representation of black culture around campus. As the white students, faculty, and administration resisted against change, the black students resisted against assimilation to white culture. The organization would expand during 1968 as a new platform for black voices and student activism that solely focused on the black causes. The activities, demonstrations, programs that branched out of this organization can reflect the value of black student activism to get the attention of the administration to implement change whether they supported or resisted.

Through the Douglass Association leader, the black students would find need to address the 1% quota for the acceptance of black students that the university set. Jesse Arnelle<sup>10</sup>, in his return to Penn State in his 1968 speech, stated that this quota was more than mere coincidence, but appeared to be under heavy affliction with what he called the ‘super black syndrome’.<sup>11</sup> The super black syndrome was the idea that African Americans had to be above the requirement of even white student acceptance requirements, despite the differences within socioeconomic status of black students, education disparities that resided within urban cities and suburban communities, and the simple fact that race was already another impeding factor to their entrance into higher education. The response of black students as Jesse Arnelle supported their efforts in change, would provoke the students to create a list of demands to push the hand of the university administration to take notice of the concerns of black students.

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<sup>9</sup> *La Vie 1969 v.79*”. <https://digital.libraries.psu.edu/digital/collection/lavie/id/50320>

<sup>10</sup> Mitchell, Wilston. “*Jesse Arnelle: A Catalyst for Change in 1968*” <https://onwardstate.com/2014/02/07/jesse-arnelle-a-catalyst-for-change-in-1968/> \*Jesse Arnelle was an All-American basketball and football player at Penn State from 1951-55. As a junior at Penn State he was elected the first black student government president to serve at a major white university. Following this in 1969 he was elected by the Alumni to serve the Board of Trustees.\*

<sup>11</sup> Kolb, Ron. “*The Return of Jesse Arnelle*”. <https://panewsarchive.psu.edu/lccn/sn85054904/1968-05-21/ed-1/seq-3.pdf>.

By the end of the 1968 school year, black students would meet with vice president of student affairs Charles L. Lewis with a list of twelve demands for the creation and cultivation of black student life.<sup>12</sup> The demands consisted of black student enrollment, initiative for new Afro-American studies program, more black professors, a building named after Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and a section in the Pattee Library for black literature. The demands that were being made at Penn State would not fall short to the demands that other black students were proposing at other predominantly white institution, one being the University of Texas, where students demanded the university refrain from using a slow process of enhancing minority student life.<sup>13</sup> One of the most important demand for the majority of black students was increase enrollment. Black students' in Happy Valley, would ask for 400 black students be admitted the fall of 1968, 1000 by 1969 fall, and an overall 10% increase for the undergraduate population. The black student leaders who came forth with these demands, would realize that they would have to reach the president of the university, if they wanted complete change.

In the address to the president concerning the demands, David Patterson<sup>14</sup> would call for the enrollment of ten new black students from the Harrisburg community to be admitted. The challenge that came directly after the request was that several of the students out of the Harrisburg group would be under question if their prior academic experience would allow them to be success students, having what it takes to meet all university requirements. The questioning of black students academic ability's by administration and President Walker surrounding the request would not phase Patterson's or the other member of the Douglass Association to continue to push the university into providing more resources to black students once being enrolled to

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<sup>12</sup> Serrill, Mike. "Black Confront Lewis with Demands: Confer for Three Hours in Old Main; Increase in Black Enrollment Asked", <https://panewsarchive.psu.edu/lccn/sn85054904/1968-05-14/ed-1/seq-1.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> Dwonna, Goldstone. "Integrating the 40 Acres: The Fifty-Year Struggle for Racial Equality at the University of Texas." <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/pensu/detail.action?docID=3039056>

<sup>14</sup>David Patterson( one of the first leaders within the Douglass Association- in 1968)



make transition more adjustable in an environment that isolates black identity. This request was nowhere different from what was already accessible for white students on campus. The academic plan that black students would suggest was relative to what Temple University used in the admission of black students. This program required that black students maintain a 2.00 grade-point average by the end of every academic year to continue to be a student. Although this plan was meant for the success for the newly admitted black students, there would be other factors that limited the success of black students outside of the classroom. By the summer of 68', ten black students would come to Penn State through the Upward Bound program.

The summer of 1968 a dozen black high-school graduates from the Harrisburg area were admitted to University Park campus. They were part of a pilot program to determine to what extent students having low grades but showing academic promise could benefit from the college experience<sup>15</sup>. This summer program according to former Harrisburg Ten student, Dr. Gwendolyn Rankin, “worked with students of color who were interested in attending college, however, due to their financial needs, they would not be able to attend.”<sup>16</sup> This program would not just offer a new opportunity for black students to receive an education, but it would be an avenue for the enrollment of black students. Before the complete admission of these ten black students, the university would receive a speech from an athletic legend Jesse Arnette, who addressed the racial issues that were , which led the university president for the admission of Harrisburg Ten.

The Harrisburg Ten, was a group of ten black students from a local Harrisburg high school who were selected to attend Penn State’s summer program, which was a bridge way into

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<sup>15</sup> Michael Bezilla. “*Penn State: an illustrated History*”

<sup>16</sup> Dr. Gwendolyn Rankin, interviewed by Maia Hill, April 17, 2020, *interview Harrisburg Ten, 1968*. \*Dr. Gwendolyn Rankin is an Alumni of Penn State, who was one of the students admitted from the Harrisburg Ten. She graduated from with Penn State with a B.A. of Science in Health and Physical Education and M.A. of Health Education. Following this she received another M.A of Arts and Religion from Lancaster Theological Seminary, and a Doctorate in Ministry from United Theological Seminary, Dayton, Ohio.\*

the university for students who didn't meet the university requirements to get solely on merit bases. The rationale behind the acceptance was that individual determination must be factored as a predictor of college success for poor black students.<sup>17</sup> This was the first big enrollment effort made by the Douglass Association and it would not be the last. With the new admittees of black students, there was much backlash and push back from white students as well as administrators, one comment that Dr. Gwendolyn recalls during this experience was that, "the acceptance of these black students, lowered the standards of Penn State."<sup>18</sup> This rhetoric was not unexpected, especially as the university tried to downplay the entrance of the ten students by keeping limited historical documentation of this major event. The university believed that this was a favor for the black students currently on campus, as President Walker wrote in a letter, "The point is that "these people" cannot admit that some of the things they ask are without merit, without reason, and in the interest of justice to everyone, they should be refused".<sup>19</sup> For black students they were not looking for merit because the university had already been working under a system that provided blacks with merit in equal and fair experience and opportunities, so they used the same tactics that the system was trying to use against them. This was a step forward made by the university, but this would not address the other challenges faced by black students following admission on campus.

Through the admission of the Harrisburg ten students, the members of the Douglass Association had just addressed the first of many challenges that black students would face to be successful on campus. Admission was just the starting place which lead to the development of a community for black students to feel welcomed not just the 1%. This is what black students

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<sup>17</sup> Mitchell Wilston. "Jesse Arnelle. "A Catalyst for Change 1968". <https://onwardstate.com/2014/02/07/jesse-arnelle-a-catalyst-for-change-in-1968/>

<sup>18</sup> Dr. Gwendolyn Rankin. "Harrisburg Ten". Interview

<sup>19</sup> Eric A. Walker, "The Pennsylvania State University: Inter-Office Correspondence: The Harrisburg Ten, 1968". Eberly Family Special Collections Library| Penn State University Libraries; Student Activism Vertical File.

wanted more than anything, to have a community, that included their history, culture, and identity, without having to reconstruct and skewed perspective of educating blacks. No later than the first set of demands, the Douglass Association would hand over thirteen new demands, to continue to improve black student life.

#### **V. Thirteen Demands by black students:**

On Jan. 13, 1969, five student representatives from the Douglass Association presented a list of 13 demands to President Eric Walker. These demands were a response to the lack thereof for black student life and success on campus. Due to the fact, the original twelve demands that were presented to the student affairs vice president could not be met, this charged black students to address the person who could, and his office was on the second floor of Old Main. Enlisted within the report sent by the students covered all the corners of how black student life could improve on campus. Image1<sup>20</sup>, references the thirteen demands made by the Douglass Association, which were featured in The Daily Collegian student news outline. The report that was published in the student news outline, looked as a flyer or an advertisement, which was a strategic way to catch the attention of the student and faculty readers of the paper. In addition to this, the demands were on the center of the paper, which was another method to emphasis the importance of the request that were being made by black students and to highlight what actions black students were taking on campus. The image is purposed for the establishment and acceptance of diversity that included the essences of black culture. The media attention that was given to the thirteen-demands helped publicize the true intent and voices of the request made by

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<sup>20</sup>Marc, Klein. "College of Education Backs Black Request: Douglas Request." <https://panewsarchive.psu.edu/lccn/sn85054904/1969-01-18/ed-1/seq-1.pdf>

the Douglass Association. Black students believed that this would be the only method to which their voices would be heard as well as received by administration.

**Some of the demands include:**

***by spring of 1969, 1,000 black students should be enrolled at university park; also, there should be a proportionate increase of black students at commonwealth campuses; the university must establish a program to enable black students to make a successful adjustment to the school; the university must establish “black counseling”, specifically, black psychological and academic advisors; the university must provide a black recruiter and professional staff; the university must publish and advertise available financial aid to potential black students, and guarantee that students will receive the aid; the hiring of a recruiter should be subject to the approval of the black student body of the university and the black community of the commonwealth of Pennsylvania; the university should give its commitment that the upward bounds program be made more relevant to students in the program, and also that Upward-Bound should guarantee admission to students and financial aid;***<sup>21</sup>

In a means to create more spaces and environments for black student life, the Douglass Association would hold “rap-in” for students and faculty to discussion major social and racial problems students confronted. Following the submission of the thirteen-demand report, the “rap-in” was held in an effort of creating a clear understanding of the demands and to clear up any misconception that were being portrayed in the news or around campus about the organization or the requested demands. These gatherings were not just for black students, but also for white students who wanted to learn and support the black student cause. Clark Arrington a spokesman for the Douglass Association stated, “hopefully, we will show the Penn State community that our thing is not relevant to the black students, but to the students in general.”<sup>22</sup> The demands were for the benefit for all students, including the increase enrollment of black students, the black studies program, the educational opportunity program, and the many other demands that were made. The black students desired an overall better education and social experience for white and

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<sup>21</sup> Megan, Cohen<sup>1</sup>. “Douglass Association Plans to Hold Rap-In.” <https://panewsarchive.psu.edu/lccn/sn85054904/1969-01-28/ed-1/seq-1.pdf>

<sup>22</sup> Megan, Cohen<sup>2</sup>. “Will do everything in Power, Buy First Request ‘Practically Impossible’; Walker ‘Betrayed Trust’.” <https://panewsarchive.psu.edu/lccn/sn85054904/1969-01-21/ed-1/seq-1.pdf> \*Clark Arrington leader of Douglass Association\*

black students and these demands were the essential way in attain this goal. These same actions were being executed by black students on campuses such as, but limited to University of Texas<sup>23</sup>, University of Illinois, Kent State, Cornell University with the main demands increase the enrollment of black students and the establishment of black studies courses.<sup>24</sup>

The demands were the biggest action of protest for the black student experience. The direct action that came out of these demands would produce slow, but necessary change in the establishment of black student spaces, celebration of black culture and literature, and the development and shifting of the university as a whole. The admission of black students was a tactic to increase the numbers and reconstruct the social norm of “white spaces”, to spaces that produced diversity and inclusivity for blacks in higher education. These students desired to not only change their experience but shift the historical perspective that black Americans were uneducated or could not be educated in the same institutions of whites.

The black students’ response to the submission of these demands was demonstrated in the invasion of “white space” where 25 black students walked on the football field with raised fists during the halftime game in 1969. This demonstration was purposed to emphasize the importance of the thirteen-demands that were presented to the administration. Although this protest was peaceful, many of the perspective audience members and white students booed as the black students and were enraged that “blacks should inject the racial issue into a football rally”.<sup>25</sup> Since football and sports are a place where everyone no matter race difference can come together, the black student leaders were strategic in their efforts, to show that they had to go to the unexpected, that possibly could have resulted in confrontation, for Penn Staters’, or should I

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<sup>23</sup> Dwonna, Goldson, *The Fifty-Year Struggle for Racial Equality at the University of Texas*”.

<sup>24</sup> Joy Ann, Williamson. “*Black Power on Campus: The University of Illinois*”, 1965-75.”

<https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/pensu/detail.action?docID=3414279>

<sup>25</sup> “*Black Walkout*”, <https://panewsarchive.psu.edu/lccn/sn85054904/1969-01-15/ed-1/seq-2.pdf>

say white Americans to understand the depth of their concerns. White students would take to the Daily Collegian letters of the editor section to express that this non-violent stand for justice, destroyed the atmosphere of content in the Happy valley, “we see this drama by blacks constantly and we find it difficult, therefore, to agree with “those” students who claim that a football rally is not the place for a demonstration”.<sup>26</sup> However, the atmosphere had already been disrupted for blacks when they wouldn’t receive the same opportunities of their white student peers, having to fight endless to just be heard. Black students could not celebrate at this football game with their fellow white peers, because there was no place for them to speak, stand or sit on campus. The response of white students echoes what black students had directed in their extensive list of demands, which is that blacks would be fine on campus if they just stayed in their place, and this place was inferior to whites.

#### **VI. Presidents Walker’s response:**

In the effort of addressing each grievance made by the students, President Walker took a stand that supported the black students demands, while expressing that he cannot guarantee that any of the demands would actually be accomplished, despite what the students would prefer. Walker told the Douglass Association student representatives that he would “do everything in my to see that these goals are reached”.<sup>27</sup> This response was quite common for black students on predominantly white campuses by the administration that reflects resistant and push back to move forward in the effort of change, diversification, and inclusivity for all minority students. The administration would not hesitate to let students know that wanted would not be acceptable within the social bounds or normality for the standards of higher education facilities. If the university acted in full agreement for the demands of black students, this would cause greater

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<sup>26</sup> “Black Walkout”, 1969.

<sup>27</sup> Marge Cohen<sup>2</sup> “Will do Everything in Power, Buy First Request ‘Practically Impossible’; Walker ‘Betrayed Trust’”

disturbance possibly soliciting violence to breakout on campus between white and black students, which was happening in the country as blacks were pursuing the same rights, accessibility to resources, and opportunities to education, jobs that were historically labeled “for whites only”.

Before President Walker addressed the students, he had already stated that the request of black students is not merited for the interest of the overall university. This belief is expressed in his first point of response, which was the impossibility of enrollment of 1,000 black students by Spring semester 1969, across all Commonwealth campuses. Walker would also state that by just admitting a large group of black students to Penn State will not guarantee that they will graduate is damaging to the students who are so admitted and to the University as well.<sup>28</sup> This language undermines the abilities of black students, indicating that they were not capable to meet the requirements to even be a student at such a prestige institution. In response to the employment of black professors and counselors, walker stated, they are trying to employ black counselors, admissions officers and black professors, but there is a great scarcity of such people and many colleges as well as industry and government are seeking them.<sup>29</sup> This was a common problem that predominantly white institutions faced because blacks in higher education were very limited, and if there exist black educators they were employed by Historically Black Colleges and University or an Ivy League University. With this problem to combat, the students would not like the responses given by president Walker. Although the one demand president Walker maintained his commitment to was upward bound program and the education opportunity program. The two programs would be of great help in the enrollment and sustainability of black students. The weeks and months following this response, there was hope for the future progress

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<sup>28</sup> “Text of Walker’s Reply to 13 Request.” <https://panewsarchive.psu.edu/lccn/sn85054904/1969-01-23/ed-1/seq-3.pdf>

<sup>29</sup> Marge Cohen<sup>2</sup>.

and change that Penn State would make but lack the efforts for the immediate changes that black students were fighting for.

## **VII. Protest:**

Protests for all Penn State students occurred mainly on the front lawn of Old Main. This was because the president's office was there and students believed that by bringing their request directly to the administration, in protest and other forms of demonstration there would have to be some form of motion and action taken by the university. Black students' experience at the university at this time consisted of monthly protest and demonstrations because the university would not listen to the other direct methods of civil communication that they had presented in the beginning (thirteen demand report). The forms of protests that were used were in Old Main, the football stadium, in the Shields building, and using African American legislators of the state to back them causing the university's hands to be tied up until black students were heard and answered. The black students only protested in peace, never in any form of violence or rioting from, despite the depiction and articulation of black student activist on campus. The nonviolence approach worked for black students on campus to show a different narrative of the historical image of blacks being violent or militant in their approach of eradicating systematic racism.

The first of these Old Main protests would be following the thirteen-demand request. Douglass Association president Rick Collins would not be satisfied with the vague and general report of Walker, leaving him to take another method of action.

After almost two weeks of waiting for a response from President Walker, the Douglass Association leader Rick Collins and 100 black students filed the second floor of Old Main to deposit bricks on the outside of Walker's office. This was one of the first peaceful protests that black students aligned themselves to make known that they were serious about the demands.



Rick Collins who was the president of the Douglass Association at the time stated, “the wall represents a communication barrier between Walker and the university’s black students”.<sup>30</sup> This was a symbol that there is was an invisible line that divided blacks from whites in the accessibility to opportunities and success. The black brick on that was placed on top symbolized the black students would have no choice but to step over the line of division and do more than just present possibilities of eventual change. Collins would then express that Walker’s reply indicated that the blacks must choose another course of action. He declined to describe any new plan, but said many alternatives are open.<sup>31</sup> Students would take this as a form of mistrust of President walker, especially when the admissions of enrolling more black students was put to a halt .<sup>32</sup> Ted Thompson the vice president of student government told the Daily Collegian that Walker failed to respond to the thirteen-demands, but he also betrayed my trust and dissolved my confidence in him.<sup>33</sup>President Walker’s words of full commitment had become powerless once his commitment did not align with the black student cause. The responsibility would then fall to the black students again to construct their experience.

### **VIII. Black establishment and community on campus:**

By the spring 1968, the need for a celebration of black culture would follow a month after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. The event that would be showcased was “Montage: A Day in the Life”. This event was directed by Cynthia Cotten, who came up with the idea as a way for black students to join into for an event to celebrate black theater and talent. Montage would be the catalyst for the 1969 Black arts festival celebration. This event was

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<sup>30</sup> Paul Levine. “*Black Build Wall for Prexy.*” <https://panewsarchive.psu.edu/lccn/sn85054904/1969-01-22/ed-1/seq-1.pdf>

<sup>31</sup> Paul Levine. “*Black Build Wall for Prexy.*”

<sup>32</sup> Jim Doris. “*Admissions Halt Asked: Enroll More Black Students.*” <https://panewsarchive.psu.edu/lccn/sn85054904/1969-01-28/ed-1/seq-1.pdf>

<sup>33</sup> Marge Cohen<sup>2</sup>. “*Will do Everything in Power, Buy First Request ‘Practically Impossible’; Walker Betrayed Trust.*” \*Ted Thompson the only black student on USG (student government) serving as vice president\*

organized by the Black Student Union (former name Douglass Association) who directed the purpose of the festival as a means to educate whites about black culture and to draw campus blacks into closer community.<sup>34</sup> The event would run an entire week to celebrate and appreciate black culture, history, and to offer education on the history of black art, music, literature, and leaders. Since the university would not include black culture, black students would bring black culture to the university. The theme of this event was centered on, “It’s r THNG, We Dig Your Thing”.<sup>35</sup> The theme was an expression of taking what was not celebrated and bringing it to the light of essence it brings to the university. The festival is an educational experience, not an entertainment program presented for a profit.<sup>36</sup>For the weekly events appearances by James Brown, Rep. Adam Clayton Powell, and Rufus Harley to bring the excitement around black culture. The program received funding from Liberal Arts donated \$1400; College of Business administration \$550, Engineering \$750, which reflects the support and acceptance of black culture to learn and celebrate its history. BSU even created buttons in celebration of this event, to help cover the week-long expenses of the \$25,000. Since this was an event for the expansion of black student community, all profits made will be used for black scholarship development of an off-campus black student center . Black culture expresses the Black experience,” and is neither “inferior nor superior to another culture<sup>37</sup> and this is what the student wanted to share with white student and faculty. This form of celebration was also present on other campuses. University of

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<sup>34</sup> Mike Wolk<sup>2</sup>. “BSU Buttons Available: ‘It’s r Thng’, ‘We Dig Your Thing’.” <https://panewsarchive.psu.edu/lccn/sn85054904/1969-05-02/ed-1/seq-5.pdf>

<sup>35</sup> Wolk Mike<sup>1</sup>. “Black Arts Set for May 12-18 Features music, Drama, Speakers.” <https://panewsarchive.psu.edu/lccn/sn85054904/1969-05-08/ed-1/seq-1.pdf>

<sup>36</sup> Wolk Mike<sup>1</sup>. “Black Arts Set for May 12-18 Features music, Drama, Speakers.”

<sup>37</sup> Martha, Biondi, “The Black Revolution on Campus”. <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/pensu/detail.action?docID=928946>

Arkansas would host the Black Emphasis Week, which was a week-long celebration of black culture.<sup>38</sup>

Within Image 2,<sup>39</sup> David Waller and President Walker sharing in a moment during this week of activities. This image reflects the change in support by President Walker for the black student cause and experience. In this picture instead of holding hands to signify unity, they cross arms and they are both holding the black student union pin. The picture does not indicate nor make reference to the events that have transpired, but it echoes the slow changes and progress that black students have been making in reconstructing their experience as black Americans. Moreover, receiving the acceptance of a Black perspective by president Walker legitimize other marginalized perspectives. This was not just a moment for black students, but it would lead to the overall acceptance of diversity and inclusivity in white spaces on predominantly white institutions.

**a. Educational Opportunity Program:**

One of the major accomplishments that came out of the thirteen demands was the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP). This program was created to provide services such as financial aid, tutoring and counseling for student who may need extra assistance to succeed at Penn State. In its early years, the program was targeted to black students, because they were faced with the most disadvantages on campuses, which were mostly stemming from discrimination, prejudices, and socioeconomic status differences. By the 70s this program would be funded for all students who are faced with challenges. By 1971 three new services would be added to help aid and help EOP students. This included textbook service, provided students with

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<sup>38</sup> Charles F. Robinson II. and Lonnie R. Williams, 2010. "*Remembrances in Black: Personal Perspectives of the African American Experience at the University of Arkansas, 1940s–2000s*".

<https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/pensu/detail.action?docID=2007615>

<sup>39</sup> "*President Eric Walther and David Waller, publicity chairman in support of "Its R Thing, 1969*. Eberly Family Special Collections Library| Penn State University Libraries; Black Arts Festival.

dispensable necessities that they cannot receive from home, and WATS line, which was a way for students to make a long-distance call to their families back at home.<sup>40</sup> These additional services warranted for the continual success for all disadvantaged students.

With this program and Upward Bounds, academic departments at the university would use this as a method for more student recruitment at black high school students for the academic year of 1969-70.<sup>41</sup> This demand for an increase of black students was specifically within the college of science, which prepared a plan to include special aid to the disadvantaged students on the undergraduate and graduate levels. Programs such as this were common amongst predominantly white campuses, as a method to retain black students who faced disadvantages.<sup>42</sup>

**b. Black Cultural Center:**

In pursuit of more places of community for black students a student culture center was developed. These spaces would consist of a lounge and auditorium and several offices for administrators and would center all offices for the Educational Opportunity Program.<sup>43</sup> The purpose of a black student center was to conceptualize and provide the black community and the university, the significant role blacks have played in history in the country. This was not just a place for black students, but also for white students to come to learn more about black culture and black student experiences. Black students suggest that the center should provide a gathering place to allow black communication and creating a home atmosphere to supplying information to the white community about black affairs and information to blacks about jobs.<sup>44</sup> This center was run by thirteen black community members which were appointed by the black student union,

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<sup>40</sup> Barb, Synder. "Many changes made in EOP". <https://panewsarchive.psu.edu/lccn/sn85054904/1971-09-30/ed-1/seq-1.pdf>

<sup>41</sup> Ronda Blank. *College to Aid Blacks: To Recruit High School Students.* " <https://panewsarchive.psu.edu/lccn/sn85054904/1969-01-28/ed-1/seq-1.pdf>

<sup>42</sup> Dwoona Goldstone. "Integrating the 40 Acres: The Fifty-Year Struggle for Racial Equality at the University of Texas". <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/pensu/detail.action?docID=3039056>

<sup>43</sup> Max, Gillman. "Black plan center". <https://panewsarchive.psu.edu/lccn/sn85054904/1971-05-04/ed-1/seq-1.pdf>

<sup>44</sup> Max, Gillman. "Black plan center".

black fraternities and sororities, and black faculty on campus. This center would be given the name of the Paul Robeson Cultural Center by 1972. The student chose to rename the center after Paul Robeson, a man whose achievements, dedication, and commitment in the areas of intellectual development, physical excellence, humanitarian spirit and artistic accomplishments were to serve as a model for all college students.<sup>45</sup>

Today, minority students are on the boards and working in the office spaces within the PRCC. This is a place where people join to hangout, explore black history archives, and share a common place of unity. The PRCC is now located within the HUB which is a central place for all Penn State students on campus. This transcends to the legacy of the black student activism and experience during such a crucial time in history. This however was not the only establishment that was created by the black student leaders. Black studies program would be on the rise across campuses, and the university would incorporate new Afro-American studies programs within curriculum.

**c. Afro-American studies concentration (Black studies program):**

Following the many other demands there was the creation of a black studies program. Although the full creation of an African studies and African American Studies department would not appear as a major until the 1990s, the Afro-American concentration, would leave students satisfied. Black studies programs were being demanded by students from predominantly white institutions as well as historically black college universities<sup>46</sup>. The study of black culture and history is an attempt to return American intellectualism to its proper mission, namely, to conserve, to examine, to expand, and to communicate the scope of human experience as it exists

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<sup>45</sup> Penn State Student Affairs. "The House That Students Built." <https://studentaffairs.psu.edu/cultural/prcc-history>

<sup>46</sup> Henry Ibram Rogers. "The Black Campus Movement and the Institutionalization of Black Studies, 1965–1970". <https://link-springer-com.ezaccess.libraries.psu.edu/article/10.1007/s12111-011-9173-2#Bib1>

and has existed.<sup>47</sup> Without black history the understanding of American history is skewed and not complete because black history is a part of the foundation of American history. Associate Professor Daniel Walden of the American studies stated that American studies majors with the Afro-American studies concentration will be qualified for numerous positions in varied fields upon graduation; opening the door to teaching research industry, public service, and state and federal levels and government jobs.<sup>48</sup> The particular exclusions and indignities that blacks have been subjected to in American life were based, among other things, on the notion that they were in some specific and significant ways "inferior."<sup>49</sup> By incorporating black experience in the curriculum, it would remove the inferiority complex of black students, rather educate and enhance the lack of understanding that universities possessed.

#### **IX. Legacy of Penn State black student experience:**

Through the establishment of such programs as these, the black student experience would be forever changed for Penn State's campus. The problems that students faced from 1968-1971, would still find its place on campus in the late 1990s and 2000s<sup>50</sup>; however, the difference was that there was now an available community, organization, programs, course, faculty member, that black students could turn to because of the legacy of black student activism. The one thing that blacks in higher education at predominantly white institutions wanted was a space and identity, which Temple University black students would define as "The black room."<sup>52</sup> This black room consisted of black students, culture, literature, music, celebration, and space where blackness was

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<sup>47</sup> Martha Biondi. "The Black Revolution on Campus".

<sup>48</sup> Marge Cohen. "Afro-Studies Initiated." <https://panewsarchive.psu.edu/lccn/sn85054904/1969-01-08/ed-1/seq-4.pdf>

<sup>49</sup> Martha Biondi. "The Black Revolution on Campus".

<sup>50</sup> Darly Lang and Alex Weininger. "Student band together at rally". <https://panewsarchive.psu.edu/lccn/sn85054904/2001-04-23/ed-1/seq-4.pdf> \*In 1999, 60 black students received hate mail, including Black Caucus president Lakeisa Wolf, who received death threats\*

<sup>51</sup> Jeremy R. Cooke and Mona Khadr. "Protest halts unity march: Black Caucus takes control of rally to address its concerns". <https://panewsarchive.psu.edu/lccn/sn85054904/2001-04-25/ed-1/seq-1.pdf>

<sup>52</sup> "Temple Students Bar Whites from Lunch: Blacks Block Cafeteria" <https://panewsarchive.psu.edu/lccn/sn85054904/1970-03-07/ed-1/seq-1.pdf>

accepted. Black students at Penn State just wanted a seat (place) at the tables, which were present to whites, even if they had to create the chair (programs) on their own, this was the fight that civil rights movement leaders marched for. The black student experience from 1968-1971, was one of many challenges, but as Dr. Rankins stated, “I was determined to overcome all roadblocks”.<sup>53</sup>

From the legacy of the black student experience at Penn State in the late 1960s -early 70s, was the Black Caucus, black student population increase to 8%, employment of more black professors and faculty<sup>54</sup>, and the establishment of one of the best African American studies programs. These programs only exist because of the fight for what did not exist for black students at Penn State. Black students served in roles for improving the greater campus atmosphere for all students, while transforming the position and condition of black students.<sup>55</sup>

## **X. Conclusion:**

History can be remembered in so many different forms; whether it's in a newspaper archive, photograph, letter, or even through interviews the collection of history is important. History tells us about the past, but also explains some of the experiences, challenges, and provides solutions in the future. The history of the past allows people to remember and celebrate the legacy of individuals and groups of people that have opened the doors for change. In remembering the history of black student experience on Penn States campus, exploring the legacy of the events that transpired are central in understanding such a precedent time in history. In the efforts that were made to push for diversity which included Black student, Black student activism, the influence of Black student activism, and the legacy of Black students at Penn State,

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<sup>53</sup> Dr. Gwendolyn Rankin. “*Interview*”.

<sup>54</sup> Gary King and Darryl Thomas. “More Rivers to Cross: A Report on the Status of African American Professors at Penn State University (UP) Part 1.” [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1u\\_HWNtR9PgdbXFwwgHb5DJNTCvUgUZTF/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1u_HWNtR9PgdbXFwwgHb5DJNTCvUgUZTF/view)

<sup>55</sup> John A. Centra. Black Students at Predominantly White Colleges: A Research Description.” . [https://www-jstor-org.ezaccess.libraries.psu.edu/stable/2112070?seq=1#metadata\\_info\\_tab\\_contents](https://www-jstor-org.ezaccess.libraries.psu.edu/stable/2112070?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents)

the black student experience is a central piece in understanding the history of the university. Through exploration of methods and actions taken by black student activists, the narrative of the Black student experience at Penn State from 1969-1971 can be celebrated in its importance as university history, as well as acknowledge the legacy that has stemmed from the establishment of black identity at The Pennsylvania State University.

### Image 1: Douglass Association 13 Request

Klein, Marc. "College of Education Backs Black Request: Douglas Request." *The Daily Collegian*, January 18, 1969. Accessed 25 March, 2020, <https://panewsarchive.psu.edu/lccn/sn85054904/1969-01-18/ed-1/seq-1.pdf>

**Douglas Requests**

- by spring of 1969, 1,000 black students should be enrolled at University Park; also, there should be a proportionate increase of black students at Commonwealth Campuses.
- the University must establish a program to enable black students to make a successful adjustment to the school.
- the University must establish "black counseling"; specifically, black psychological and academic advisors.
- the University must provide a black recruiter and professional staff.
- the University must publish and advertise available financial aid to potential black students, and guarantee that students will receive the aid.
- the hiring of a recruiter should be subject to the approval of the black student body of the University and the black community of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.
- the University should give its commitment that the Upward-Bound program be made more relevant to students in the program, and also that Upward-Bound should guarantee admission to students and financial aid.
- a consortium program should be started with the College of Business Administration and other colleges to recruit black graduate students.
- the membership of future committees concerning black students should be subject to the approval of the black student body and the black community of Pennsylvania.
- black student courses and instructors must be subject to the approval of the black student body and the black community of Pennsylvania.
- each department of key colleges (i.e. The Liberal Arts, Human Development, Education), must establish pertinent black courses available to all students.
- the University must hire more black social scientists.
- student representatives in the Senate must have voting power.



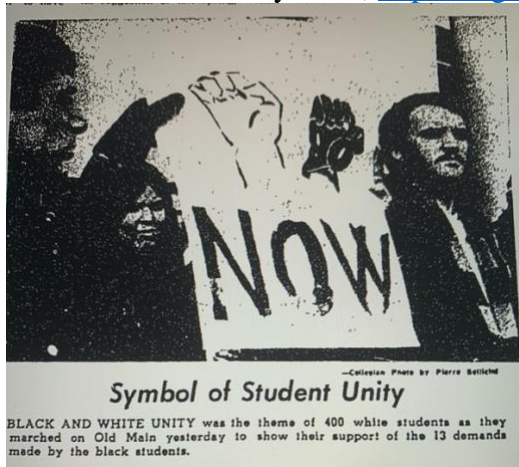
### Image 2: Black Arts Festival 1969

*“President Eric Walker and David Waller, publicity chairman in support of ‘Its R Thing, 1969. Eberly Family Special Collections Library| Penn State University Libraries; Black Arts Festival, call number 01190, Vertical File, Accessed 23 February 2020.*



### Image 3: La Vie 1969. V.79, Student activities: Douglass Association, Senior Class

*“La Vie 1969 v.79”. The Penn State Life 100+ Years of La Vie. Penn State University Libraries, Accessed 13 February 2020, <https://digital.libraries.psu.edu/digital/collection/lavie/id/50320>*



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