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THE BLACK DEMANDS: FIFTEEN YEARS LATER
Tuesday Faculty Luncheon, March 5, 1985

by Provost *LOUIS Brakeman*

Let's go back to the Spring of 1968. Vietnam was in the news. So were civil rights. Student activism was alive and well.

In these remarks, I'll take us back to a series of events focused on Blacks at Denison. At Denison in 1967-68 there were 13 Black students on campus and the social climate was, according to Wally Chessman, "more agitated than ever before." The Phi Gammas pledged a Black freshman. Another Black Freshman, David McBride, in an article in the Denisonian called for 100 Black students and ten Black faculty as a goal for the college. During that same year the United States Office of Civil Rights notified President Knapp that a survey of the Great Lakes Colleges Association showed Denison at the very bottom in percentage of minority enrollment (.7%). In May, the faculty urged the Board of Trustees "to commit the necessary resources to recruit and support both academically and socially a significantly increased number of black students for 1969-70 and thereafter." The resolution also pledged faculty cooperation and urged the appointment of a faculty member as Director of Black Programs.

On almost the same day, student activists issued the results of a famous TC (Time for Change) Referendum. With over 1,000 students responding, the Referendum showed extensive student support for more black students, for money for tutorial programs, for summer programs for underprivileged students, for a Black Admissions staff person, for more black faculty and administrative personnel, and so on. That same month, Blair Knapp, President of Denison for some 15 years, died. The focus of the community's energy was diverted to the aftermath of Blair's death.

Even so, the Board of Trustees, on May 31, resolved: "The Board of Trustees agrees with the students, faculty and administration that Denison University should take affirmative steps to improve opportunities for larger numbers of Negro students to contribute to the life of the university."

We move to 1968-69. Parker Lichtenstein, who had been Dean of the College, became Acting President. Bill Nichols began work as Assistant Dean of the College with responsibilities for coordinating programs for black students. A tutorial service began. A new brochure pointed out opportunities for black students at Denison. The Reverend David Rice began work as Associate Dean of the Chapel and advisor to black students. A Black Culture course was offered. The Black Student Union was provided a car for student social use. Nineteen student recruiters visited 40 black high schools. A Black Student Lounge was opened in the Smith Hall basement and Acting President Lichtenstein authorized some \$50,000 from a reserve fund to support black freshmen scholarships.

Now to the fall of 1969. Paid student recruiters were at work. Twelve courses in Black Studies were offered. Bea Nivens began work as an advisor to black women. A new President came to town. Also in this same year new social regulations were in place, pressure mounted for getting ROTC off campus and serious attention was paid to major governance reforms--all these issues were on our agenda as a community.

Behind the scenes activity in support of black students picked up. In late October of that year a group of black students met with the Executive Committee of the Faculty and argued for several steps to be taken--more black faculty, more black students, more financial aid, and so on. On November 3, President Smith, responded to the black students in a letter. He made several points. I quote from his letter. (Incidentally, 74 of the faculty now at Denison were here in 1969-70.)

"In the recruitment of Black professors we must recognize that hiring the faculty is substantially a matter of departmental initiative. But before this academic year began I asked Dean Lichtenstein to do all that he could to encourage departments to seek Black colleagues and he has eagerly and enthusiastically accepted that responsibility. If any Black students want to discuss hiring procedures or nominate possible faculty members, I would appreciate it if they would contact the Dean."

"On the question of Afro-American Studies, I've asked Dean Lichtenstein to arrange a meeting with some department chairmen as soon as possible and I've also asked Dr. Chessman [Wally at that time was serving as Associate Dean of the College] to participate in the meeting. I would like you to refine your proposals in anticipation of that meeting."

On the matter of a quota, Joel said this: "I do not think it would be honest for me to pledge that we will have at least 100 Black students at the beginning of the 1970-71 academic year. Perhaps we will, but the number of Black students enrolled at that time will be a function of many things, including among others the number and quality of applications we're able to attract, as well as our capacity to provide financial aid."

The President had been asked by the leaders of the Black Student Union to issue a statement on racism. This was a part of the statement: "It must be said emphatically and without reservation that acts of racism are absolutely unacceptable at Denison University. However, it is not enough to deplore the possibility that such acts might occur. It is also necessary to insist that acts of racism shall not occur and to pledge that if they do they will be dealt with promptly and severely."

Then the bombshell. On December 19, the day Christmas vacation began, the leaders of the BSU, led by Henry Durand, delivered to the Executive Committee of the Faculty a long typed document entitled "The Black Student Demands." The document was in several sections, each with background and rationale. I quote very selectively. From the Preface. Listen to the passion:

"The following are the specified demands and necessities of the Denison Black Student Union. These are the reworked and enumerated measures we feel an absolute must for the continued existence of a Black population at Denison University. We feel that each and every one of the demands are essential to the package that would make Denison a viable community for Black students. Therefore, the Black Student Union will accept only a commitment in writing for compliance with all the demands or the total rejection of all the demands. Let us make this clear, all or none--not one, not a few, not this and that one and maybe the other one, and not referral to various committees scattered across the community, a definite yes or no answer is demanded.

On the matter of Black Professors: "The University shall hire a minimum of five Black professors for the academic year 1970-71.

- a. Realizing that Black professors are in great demand throughout the country, this University must realize that in order to recruit and hire the minimum of five Black professors for the coming academic year, it must offer salaries comparable to those which other colleges and universities seeking the same men are offering.

No Black professor-recruit shall be hired without being interviewed and approved by a committee of the Black Student Union."

On the matter of the Black Studies Program:

"We demand the right of these professors to have total autonomy once the Black Studies program is in operation. These professors will also be able to hire and/or fire other professors in the department after consultation with the Black students."

On the quota:

"A minimum of 100 Black students on campus next year are essential if Denison is really not going to be tokenly integrated. This is a quota, but it is a starting point quota. This is the quota needed to start to diversify Denison. It is based on the logic and the emotion of the community. No one wants or likes to walk around without any sense of identity. Yet there is nothing at Denison which

creates identity for Blacks. To have a Black entity and sense of diversity, a significant number of Black people are necessary, needed and demanded."

There were several other demands: (1) a full time Black recruiter, again to be approved by a committee of Black students, (2) a specified recruitment effort, (3) two Black advisors, and (4) academic departmental commitments to advance the cause of integration of Black concerns into the curriculum.

Finally, "In conclusion, we are asking for a reply by January 9, 1970. We realize that concrete results in several areas cannot be seen by this date, and in these cases are asking for a written commitment by the school to do everything in its power to bring about these objectives by the allotted dates." (Incidentally, January Term was not in place. The first January Term was not until 1971. Classes began on January 5 and ended on January 23. Final exams were January 26-31 and comprehensive exams for all Seniors were February 2-4.)

Well, as you can imagine, there was extensive discussion around the campus. The President met with the Executive Committee on repeated occasions and with other faculty as well, both formally and informally. And, finally, on January 9, the President issued a long formal response. This is what he said. Again, in part:

"While I respect the sense of urgency represented by your demands, we simply cannot respond in the categorical manner you have insisted upon. Decisions on such important issues should not be made that way in an institution in which responsibility is shared. But I nevertheless want to respond in order to express some of my views on the underlying issues and to propose a way of moving ahead."

[and later]

"Denison's principal deficiency, as I understand your criticism, is that it lacks what might be called black understanding, which is to say that we have too little connection with the world of black people--their history, their culture, their scholarship. I think that criticism has considerable merit, and I am sure that we must move, as promptly as we can, to remedy the situation. That means, I believe, that we must have more black students, more black scholarship within our curriculum and, perhaps most importantly, more black faculty members."

President Smith later made what he called two points of central importance:

"1. As President of Denison, I am committed to building a community in which black students can receive a first-rate liberal education, and I know that means there must be significant changes in the College and its academic program; but

2. I put the emphasis on community and on quality because I am convinced that Denison should be an integrated community in which the controlling standard is the excellence of its academic program."

[and later]

"On the issue of black faculty members, I wish I could report more progress; but all I can report is effort and determination. Dean Lichtenstein is working with department chairmen, and black candidates are being sought for the openings we have. In addition, we have created an additional position in black studies for next year."

[and later]

"Finally, I disagree with the view that black students should have the right 'to approve' the appointment of black faculty members. As with other appointments, I believe student participation in various ways is often appropriate. But the right to approve in any formal sense would deny the primary responsibility of the faculty to act on academic appointments."

[On Afro-American Studies Department, Joel said:] "I believe there are very serious questions about our capacity to finance such a department, as there are about our capacity to attract competent personnel. But the even more serious problem in my mind is the risk of separatism. A strong black identity which promotes separatism may be beneficial in some situations, but I find that prospect at Denison extremely troublesome. This kind of college and this kind of educational program depend upon this being a community where ideas and indeed lives are shared."

"On the question of a recruiter, I have had extensive conversations with a particular individual, and I hope we are close to working out an agreement."

"In conclusion, I want to make a proposal which I think will help us to move ahead more effectively, and it is that I shall ask the faculty at its next meeting, which is January 19, to establish a Task Force, which would include black student members, to develop recommendations on the purpose of the black student program at Denison. I shall ask that the Task Force be requested to proceed with a sense of priority and urgency so that we may anticipate a prompt report."

Well, if you remember anything about that period at all, you can imagine the reaction to President Smith's letter. In response Henry Durand, Chief Minister of the Black Student Union, said:

"Our general response to your individual, unilateral dismissal of our demands has been made. Both the notion of the Task Force, at this stage, and its proposed terms of reference are part of that dismissal, and we reject it completely."

In late January the faculty met three times and at some length. At the meeting of January 19, 1970, the Task Force was approved by the faculty. The charge to the Task Force was to develop a set of specific recommendations for submission to the faculty in March and to the Trustees in April. After a week or so, the President asked me to chair it. At this same meeting the faculty voted 120 to 24, in effect, to reject the demands.

An alternate resolution was debated at length on the evening of January 23. Many faculty wanted to do much better than to reject the demands outright. This alternate resolution failed. This time by a vote of 70-65. This meeting began at 7:30 p.m. and adjourned at 11:00 p.m. Then on January 26, the faculty approved by a vote of 100 to 28 this resolution proposed by the Executive Committee.

"RESOLVED, we hereby endorse the demands of the black students with the intention of implementation. It is understood that some specific points may be reformulated during the discussion which will be a part of the process of implementation. The details of particular major changes such as a revision of the financial aid policy or creation of an Afro-American Studies Department will be reported to the faculty for subsequent action."

Activity bubbled in February, but far from the boiling point. I can recall meeting with a number of administrators, with Parker Lichtenstein, with Frank Bailey in Financial Aid, and with Burt Dunfield in Admissions, to talk about possible steps that we might take for the next year in each of these areas. I also remember having a good deal of conversation about potential faculty openings with Parker and various Chairs.

The next major event occurred on February 20. The Board of Trustees met to consider the situation and adopted a resolution. Before that meeting Trustees Jef Wood and Bill Bowen met members of the Task Force and talked about the issues we were considering. In the preface the Board reported to the community that the special meeting was called to review the situation created by the demands, the manner in which they had been dealt with and some of the questions which we understand are currently being considered." The resolution adopted by the Board was a long one. These are some of the points they made:

"First, it does not seem to us that the issuance of demands, especially when they are strident in tone and extreme in substance, is the way to work toward change within an educational institution. Such procedure may have the effect of inhibiting careful consideration of important questions."

[and later]

"3. In view of the importance and complexity of the issues raised, the haste with which the demands were endorsed with a commitment to 'implementation' subject only to rather undefined reservations seems to have been more responsive to the emotions of the moment than to a careful analysis of the implications of all of the demands for the college as a whole."

"4. A danger presented by the resolution is that it may be read as making promises that cannot be kept without sacrificing the best interests of the college. Such a result would intensify rather than relieve polarization."

"5. A Task Force has been formed by the faculty to make recommendations for specific courses of action. We are encouraged to think that this group will deal with the issues before it in a careful and thoughtful way and will consider them in the best interests of the college as a whole. We look forward to receiving specific proposals as soon as they have been developed. The Board commits itself to prompt consideration of the recommendations."

They then go on to say that they think the Task Force's work will be eased by setting forth certain propositions or guidelines. Here are a couple of examples:

In regard to the appointment and compensation of faculty, after stating the importance of adding more black faculty to the college, they go on to say: "We believe that the President and the faculty must retain responsibility subject to final review by the Board of Trustees for evaluating the qualifications of all individuals proposed for appointment to the Denison faculty. Students can often contribute to faculty recruitment by helping determine how well the candidates for appointment are likely to relate to various groups within the college. We do not think it proper, however, for any group of students whether chosen on a racial basis or in some other manner, to have, either in fact or in name, the power to veto the appointment or advancement of any faculty member."

[and later]

On the matter of curriculum, they say: "We must express concern about a commitment to an Afro-American Studies Department in the absence of any plan as to the composition and structure of the department or the academic program it would be intended to present. It is not our responsibility to develop such a plan but we believe that detailed planning must precede a decision to create a department and should significantly affect the decision."

[and later]

Finally, they conclude with the following: "We wish to end this statement by emphasizing once again that we believe that the opportunities at Denison for black students to study and live can be and will be improved. This will only happen, however, if all of us who care about this college approach the task of developing a strong program for black students in a thoughtful and realistic, as well as a committed, spirit."

Well, there was little doubt that the tone of the Trustee resolution and the tone of the faculty resolution were at odds. As Bill Bowen said, "We did not expect to win a popularity contest." The task of the Task Force as I saw it was to wend a way between these two resolutions, to adopt a practical approach to implementing the demands within the context of the Board resolution. Even so things began to heat up on campus. Some members of the Task Force resigned thinking that they simply could not work within the context of the Trustee resolution.

The Task Force continued to work on a limited basis throughout the rest of the month of February. At a special faculty meeting on March 3, an extended resolution on the matter of recruitment and financial aid was accepted by the faculty. But student interest was waning. Already there had begun discussions among students and some faculty about what was going on and about the response of the Task Force and others to the situation. Finally, with the advice of a couple of recent alums, plans were made to expand the arena of concern and attention, not only in support of the black demands but also in protest to the statement of the Board.

I thought it might be interesting to share a brief chronology of some of the events following the January meetings of the faculty and the February meeting of the Board.

On Monday, March 16, at 8:30 a.m. a small group initiated a sit-in at Doane. At 1:30 p.m. that afternoon Doane was cleared because of a bomb scare. Those who had been at Doane, along with others, adjourned to Knapp Amphitheater and planned ways in which the black demands might be discussed in classes the next day. On that

next day a number of classes did discuss those demands and the faculty met that night, on March 17. At the same time a group of students were meeting in Knapp Amphitheater and after the faculty meeting had been going on for about an hour, a large group of students entered the auditorium, did not leave when asked to do so, and the meeting was adjourned. A new crisis was upon us.

The next day, March 18, there was a large meeting in Slayter on the main floor. It lasted five hours. Later that day a mass meeting of over 1,000 lasting about two hours took place in Huffman dining hall. On that occasion it was proposed that the faculty and students ought to end participation in all classes and immobilize business as usual at the college and ought to establish what was called an Alternate College to be maintained until such time as the black demands were satisfactorily accepted.

The strike began on March 19 and generally was effective. Doane Hall was not open for business and the Alternate College classes around campus met, however, only a few of the offerings seemed to capture student interest. On that same day the Executive Committee of the faculty issued a statement affirming that the teaching of classes shall be at the discretion of the individual faculty member and pointing out that any cancelled classes ought to be made up. On the next day, Friday, March 20, the strike continued and was still effective. Doane remained closed and the Alternate College courses, while numerous, were poorly attended. On that same day the Executive Committee issued another statement setting forth the expectation that faculty would meet all classes beginning on Monday, March 23, and that students would attend regularly scheduled classes.

That weekend two Trustees, Bill Bowen and Jef Wood, came to campus and met with the Administrators, officers of DCGA, the Denisonian editor and others. Mass meetings were held over the weekend. On Monday, March 23, while the strike continued, many regular classes began to meet and students were beginning to attend. Even more Alternate College courses were offered but attendance was small at most. That evening there was another mass meeting in Swasey. Many public statements were made including a statement by the President of DCGA reporting on the conversations he had had with the administration and with the two Trustees.

By Tuesday, March 24, the business of the college was running fairly normally. A mass meeting was held late in the afternoon in Huffman. President Smith spoke at a general meeting in Huffman and the general response was positive. While some were not satisfied, 115 faculty signed a statement supporting the President's urge for a return to the normal operation of the university. By the day or so before Spring Break, nearly everyone had resumed classes.

Classes resumed after Spring Break on April 6. The President announced that Carleton Trotman had been appointed as Director of Black Studies. On Tuesday the President announced that several Trustees would be on campus starting on Thursday to talk with students and faculty in several sorority houses. The Board met on April 10,

and on April 11 issued a statement on the subject of the black demands. The opening paragraph:

"The Board of Trustees recognizes that Denison has a clear obligation to provide an educational experience for black students that is comparable in all respects to our highest aspirations for the college in general. The attainment of this objective requires an increased number of black students, an increased effort to attract outstanding black faculty and the development of a strong program in Black Studies. More than that it requires a commitment on the part of all of us who care about this college, students both black and white, faculty, administration, alumni, parents and trustees, to provide a setting in which blacks can live and study with dignity and self-respect and requires an act of faith in the future of a Denison that can and will be more than just a white university with some black students. As all members of the college community recognize there are obstacles to be overcome and other important goals which must not be lost sight of. Nonetheless we declare our unqualified commitment to this objective."

They refer to the work of the Task Force and the recommendations of the President and then comment on virtually all of the original demands of the students. For example, in respect to black faculty they refer to some of the specific steps that have been taken and go on to say that in appointing black faculty members, Denison will attempt to offer salaries which are competitive with salaries paid to individuals in comparable positions in colleges similar to Denison. Black students should participate in the interviewing of black faculty candidates and their opinions should be given significant weight.

In respect to an Afro-American Studies Department they had this to say:

"The development of a Black Studies Program at Denison is an important objective and such a program should serve needs of white and black students. Black faculty members should participate in the formulating proposals for the program. With those objectives in mind a seminar will be held at Denison this summer with the participation of faculty members and students."

There was support for the hiring of a full-time professional admissions counselor who is black; approval of various specific financial aid funds, and so on. Accompanying the Board statement was a letter signed by the President and Chairman of the Board explaining that the resolution while indicating a commitment to the advancement of opportunities for black students at Denison did not in fact constitute an endorsement of the demands. The Black Student Union issued a statement indicating that it considered that the Trustees' resolution constitutes an unqualified commitment to our demands.

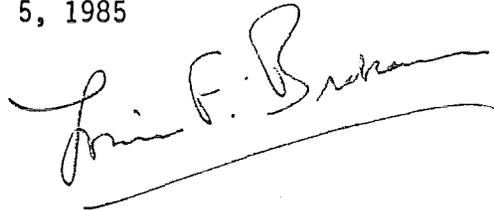
The crisis was over.

In conclusion, a few, very brief comments. From January until March, the campus was convulsed by controversy, exhausted by trauma. The faculty, in particular, wanted to be responsive to the Black students and yet to be honest. We found it hard to find a way to do that. The President's role was an exceptionally difficult one balanced between several constituencies and between two conflicting principles. One of them was this: "You cannot be humane unless you recognize the black demands." The other was this: "Quality educational structures are not governed by demand rhetoric." One way to look at the second semester is that the college tried to find a way between these two positions and to come out with some specific results. The effort has continued ever since.

In the years since 1970 we have moved. There are now seven Black faculty, two Black professional staff (and we are looking for a replacement for Artie Miller). We support a Black Studies Center, have a major in Black Studies and a G.E. requirement in Women's and Minority Studies. In 1972-73, we almost achieved 100 Black students. There were 97 at one point that year. In 1982-83 there were 109. This year there are 110. In 1969-70, we provided black students with \$84,000 in aid. In 1970-71 that figure jumped to \$143,000 and there were 63 black students on campus. In the current year the figure is over \$855,000 in total aid and nearly \$433,000 in Denison University and government grants.

I hope this look backward will help those who have come to Denison in the last 15 years understand something of the commitment many of us feel. We must be vigilant. The commitment deserves continual renewal.

Louis F. Brakeman
March 5, 1985

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Louis F. Brakeman". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned below the typed name and date. A horizontal line is drawn underneath the signature.

