Abstract:

This dissertation seeks to explain why large segments of the Jewish community, after working with blacks for decades, often quite radically towards expanding the boundaries of citizenship at City College, rejected the legitimacy of the 1970 Open Admissions policy? While succeeding in radically transforming the structure of City College and CUNY more broadly, the Black and Puerto Rican Student Community's late 1960's political mobilization failed as an act of citizenship because its claims went broadly unrecognized. Rather than being remembered as political action that expanded the structure and content of citizenship, the Open Admissions crisis and policy are remembered as having destroyed a once great college. The black and Puerto Rican students who claimed an equal right to higher education were seen as unworthy of the forms of inclusion they demanded, and the radical democracy of Open Admissions was short lived, being decisively reformed in the mid 70's in spite of what subsequent research has shown to be remarkable success in educating thousands who previously had no hope of pursuing a college degree. This dissertation places this question in historical context in three ways.

First, it historicizes the political culture at City College showing it to be an important incubator and index of the changing political imaginaries of the long civil rights movement by analyzing the shifting and evolving publics on the college's campus, tracing the rise and fall of different political imaginaries. Significantly, the shifting political imaginaries across time at City College sustained different kinds of ethical claims. For instance, in the period from the 1930 to 1950, Jewish and black City College students tended to recognize each other as suffering from parallel forms of systemic racism within U.S. society. Understanding each other to be similarly excluded from a social system that benefitted a largely white-Anglo-Saxon-Protestant elite, enabled Jewish and black City College students to position themselves and each other as the normative subjects of American democracy. However, in the 1960's, political imaginaries at City College had come to be anchored in more individualistic idioms, and ethical claims tended to be made within individualistic terms. Within such a context, when the BPRSC revived radically democratic idioms of political claims making, they tended to be understood by many whites as pathologically illiberal.

Second, it historicizes the ways in which City College constructed "the meritorious student" by analyzing the social, political and institutional forces that drove the college to continuously reformulate its admissions practices across its entire history. It shows that while many actors during the Open Admissions crisis invested City College's definitions of merit with sacred academic legitimacy, they were in fact rarely crafted for academic reasons or according to a purely academic logic. Regardless, many ignored the fact the admissions standards were arbitrarily based, instead believing such standards were the legitimate marker of academic ability and worthiness. By examining the institutional construction of the "meritorious" student the dissertation shows the production of educational

citizenship from above while also revealing how different actors and their standpoints were simultaneously constructed by how they were positioned by this institutional process.

Finally, the dissertation examines two significant historical events of student protest, the Knickerbocker-Davis Affair of the late 1940's and the Open Admissions Crisis of the late 1960's. In these events, City College students challenged the content of “educational citizenship.” These events were embedded in the shifting political culture at City College and were affected by the historically changing ways different groups, especially Jews and blacks, were positioned by the structure of educational citizenship.

While Jews had passed into whiteness by the late 1960’s in the U.S, there was no objective reason for many to claim the privileges of whiteness by rejecting a universal policy such as Open Admissions. Yet, many Jews interpreted Open Admissions as against their personal and group interests, and rejected the ethical claim to equality made by the BPRSC. By placing the Open Admissions crisis in deep historical and institutional context, and comparing the 1969 student mobilization to earlier student actions, the dissertation shows how actors sorted different political, institutional and symbolic currents to interpret their interests and construct their identities and lines of action.

Civic Struggles:
Jews, Blacks, and the Question of Inclusion at The City College of New York, 1930-1975

by

Daniel A. Sherwood

April 2015

Submitted to The New School for Social Research of The New School University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Dissertation Committee:
Dr. Eiko Ikegami
Dr. Carlos Forment
Dr. George Steinmetz

UMI Number: 3707753

All rights reserved

INFORMATION TO ALL USERS
The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript
and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if material had to be removed,
a note will indicate the deletion.

UMI 3707753

Published by ProQuest LLC (2015). Copyright in the Dissertation held by the Author.

Microform Edition © ProQuest LLC.
All rights reserved. This work is protected against
unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code

ProQuest LLC.
789 East Eisenhower Parkway
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106 - 1346

©

Acknowledgements:

I would like to thank my dissertation committee, Eiko Ikegami, Carlos Forment and George Steinmetz, for providing exemplary models of scholarly rigor and creativity. While each have provided the highest models of scholarship to strive towards, I also want to thank Eiko, Carlos and George for believing in me and my abilities. Their faith in me, and my abilities as a scholar fortified me in the many times of doubt. It is a faith I continue to strive to live up to. I would also like to thank Amy Stuart, Monica Brannon, Robin Wagner-Pacifici and Iddo Tavory, whose careful reading and comments on portions of the dissertation strengthened the project. A presentation at the International Conference on Global Racism at the University of Kentucky, Lexington, in February of 2013, helped me sharpen my arguments.

This dissertation would not have been possible without the archivists at Archives and Special Collections at the Cohen Library at The City College of New York. In addition to accommodating endless requests and providing an archival experience conducive to research, in particular, Professor Sydney Van Nort introduced me to the Knickerbocker-Davis Affair, which became a key event in the dissertation. This project would not have been possible without her knowledge and expertise. Office Assistant Samuel Sanchez also provided invaluable support in accessing archival materials.

The underlying themes of this dissertation have been inspired by my family, and I want to thank them for instilling in me a moral and ethical concern that has driven my scholarship. Samantha Friedman has opened up the world to me in ways that have placed my scholarship in the context of a life far more meaningful. The New School is a unique and dynamic intellectual environment; but it is not easy. I do not know what I would have done without the friends and colleagues I have made over the many years with fellow students at The New School for Social Research. Thank you!

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: iv

Chapter 1
Introduction 1

Chapter 2
The Long Civil Rights Movement at The City College of New York: Political Culture from 1930-1975 36

Chapter 3
Imagining American Democracy: The Knickerbocker-Davis Affair at The City College of New York 62

Chapter 4
Constructing the "Meritorious Student": The Non-Academic Origins of the Admissions Practices of The City College of New York, 1849-1970 117

Chapter 5
Racially Encoding the "Meritorious Student" 178

Chapter 6
The Circulation of Counterpublic Discourse and the Making of the Black and Puerto Rican Student Community at The City College of New York 247

Chapter 7
"From a Black Chair": Paul Simms and the Cultivation and Circulation of a Theory of Internal Colonialism Within the Anti-Racist Counterpublic 299

Chapter 8
The Onyx Society and the Making of the Black and Puerto Rican Student Community at The City College of New York 322

Chapter 9
Conclusion: The University of Harlem: The BPRSC's Claim to Equality and Its Aftermaths 343

References: 379

Chapter 1:Introduction

In the early hours of April 22, 1969, before the majority of The City College of New York students arrived for classes, a group of black and Puerto Rican students calling themselves The Black and Puerto Rican Student Community (BPRSC) locked and barricaded themselves inside the college's South Campus, closing it to the rest of the student body. The BPRSC's campus takeover lasted for two weeks, forcing Buell Gallagher, the liberal President of City College to cancel classes while ramping up a citywide crisis over race relations in higher education.[1] In closing the school, the BPRSC attempted to force the college administration to acquiesce to their "five demands," which they had originally put to Gallagher in February of that year. Of the five demands, the first, that there be established a separate school of Third World Studies, and fourth, that each entering class at City College proportionally reflect the black and Puerto Rican population of New York City high schools, proved to be most contentious because they threatened to radically alter the structure of higher education in New York City.

Indeed, the first ethno-racial census at City College released in December of 1967 showed that among the population of matriculated students, Whites made up 87.3%, Puerto Ricans 4.9%, Blacks 4.2%, with 5.8% marking other. A similar census

[1] Each unit of the massive City University of New York system experienced significant political events such as demonstrations, campus takeovers, office sit-ins, student boycotts, inter-student (often interracial) physical altercations, mass arrests as well as physical altercations between students and police during the turbulent spring semester of 1969.

of city high schools from 1966 showed that 32.6% of city high school students were black or Puerto Rican. Thus, at City College, black and Puerto Rican students were significantly under represented.[2] Negotiations over the demands between President Gallagher and other faculty and the student representatives from the BPRSC were interrupted by a court order forcing the school back open, an order with which the BPRSC complied, effectively ending the first round of negotiations and leading to Gallagher's resignation.[3] With the resumption of classes came a frightening cycle of violence, culminating in what the *New York Times* reported as "a bloody pitched battle between club-swinging black youths and white counterprotesters" on the City College campus.[4]

Finally, in the heat of that summer's mayoral race, the different stake-holders,[5] including the BPRSC, were able to resolve the fourth demand through a CUNY-wide policy of Open Admissions. Open Admissions guaranteed admission to a CUNY Junior or Senior College branch, for all high school graduates of the city school system. Prior to Open Admissions, admission to even the Junior Colleges in

---

[2] These numbers were published in a 1967 issue of *The Campus*, City College's longest and most prestigious student newspaper, "Study Indicates Non-White Ratio For City Colleges," *The Campus*, December 20, 1967, p. 1.

[3] Throughout the process, Gallagher remained sympathetic to the BPRSC demands. In more or less agreeing to the demands, he had ceased being an effective negotiator since he did not have the authority to unilaterally implement them. The Open Admissions policy ultimately was brokered between the BPRSC, the University Chancellor Albert Bowker, Mayor John Lindsey, and Governor Nelson Rockefeller.

[4] "C.C.N.Y. Shut Down, Then Racial Clash Injures 7 Whites." *The New York Times*, May 8, 1969, p. 1. White and black reporters, regardless of their professional status, perceived and reported on the events of the melee and surrounding violence differently, a phenomenon expertly reported on by the City College paper, *The Campus*. "Blacks on Press: Still Yellow." *The Campus*, May 16, 1969, p. 7.

[5] See note 3, above.

the CUNY system was often restricted to students with very strong academic records due to the under supply of positions relative to demand. In conjunction with the guaranteed admissions for all New York City high school graduates, Open Admissions was to create realistic pathways from the Junior Colleges to the Senior four year colleges. Open Admissions was to make a bachelors degree a possibility for all high school graduates, a policy of equalization made all the more remarkable by the fact that when instituted CUNY was still tuition free.[6] The particular way the Open Admissions policy was initially structured and implemented represented the most radical democratization of access to higher education in U.S. history, and made a four-year college degree a right of citizenship for all New York City students.[7]

The policy of Open Admissions, however, proved highly controversial as 53.8% of City College students opposed the admission policy, with 31.1% of those students being extremely unfavorable towards the policy.[8] Also, while garnering key support of some Jewish organizations when compared to initial solutions to the crisis built around set admissions quotas representative of New York's ethnic populations, Open Admissions was bitterly opposed by other Jewish groups such as the Jewish Defense League and the Queens Jewish Community Council.[9] In the years following the implementation of Open Admissions, as black and Puerto Rican enrollment

---

[6] On the structure and remarkable pedagogical achievements of the Open Admissions policy in its first few years of existence, see Lavin and Hyllegard (1996).

[7] As analyzed by David Lavin and colleagues, while Open Admissions remained the official policy at CUNY until the late 1990's, important changes were made to how it operated during the mid 70's New York City fiscal crisis that made it far more difficult for students to move from Junior Colleges to Senior Colleges, undermining the equalization of outcomes the initial policy achieved. (Lavin and Hyllegard 1996:209-244), (Attewell and Lavin 2007)

[8] "Poll: Students Oppose Open Admissions." *The Campus*, November 19, 1969, p. 1.

[9] See Karabel (1983:38-9).

skyrocketed throughout the university, a process of "white flight" hit City College and CUNY more broadly (Biondi 2012:139). Of the reaction to the Open Admissions policy, the historian Martha Biondi writes, "For their part, alumni saw open admissions as the death knell of a great university, and donations plunged" (ibid.:134). The immediate and enduring backlash against the policy undermined its legitimacy, as, without any real evidence supporting the judgment, a "discourse of failure" emerged around the idea of Open Admissions. (Biondi 2012:140) Along with the Ocean Hill-Brownsville teacher strike of 1968, the City College Open Admissions crisis represents, to many, the bitter end of the powerful civil rights coalition of blacks and Jews in New York City.[10]

In analyzing the social policies of the late 60's and early 70's War on Poverty, Skocpol argues for the political viability of universally structured programs, as opposed to "targeted" programs that shift resources from the rich to the poor (such as Food Stamps), or carve out what might be perceived as special privileges for categorical groups, such as Affirmative Action (Skocpol 1995; see also Wilson 1987). According to Skocpol, targeting particular categorical segments of society, whether by race, class, gender, etc., for redistributive social policies establishes zero-sum relations between citizens, creating disincentives for the middle and upper classes to support anti-poverty programs. She therefore argues that advocates of a more equal society should seek social programs that are structured according to a universalist logic so that the widest possible swath of the public may identify with them.

[10] On the Ocean Hill-Brownsville teacher strike, see Podair (2002).

However, when applying such an analytical and evaluative logic to the Open Admissions crisis, a puzzle emerges. In fact, in ending the zero-sum competition over access to coveted degrees amongst individuals and social groups in New York City, Open Admissions was structured according to a universalist logic. It was decidedly not an affirmative action policy; it did not give particular groups extra consideration in selection processes. Rather, *every* high school graduate of New York City would be granted access, not simply to CUNY, but access to CUNY with a full institutional commitment to necessary remedial instruction that would provide a reasonable expectation to all students of completing a prestigious four-year degree. Yet, there was an immediate and powerful backlash against the policy, including among City College's traditional Jewish constituents, many of whom understood the policy as going against their interests.

Ethnic competition analyses do not provide straightforward answers either. On the one hand, since Jewish students had overwhelmingly made up the student body of the Senior College branches of CUNY, such as its flagship campus The City College of New York, going back to the turn of the 20th century, Jewish reaction against Open Admissions policy could be understood as driven by an interest to protect the value of a scarce degree to which Jews as a social group had more or less monopolized access. However, as Karabel notes, as a social group, Jews were the second highest *beneficiary* of the Open Admissions policy, trailing behind only white-Catholics in

percentage of total number of students admitted through open standards who would have otherwise been rejected.[11] Karabel writes:

> Perhaps themselves susceptible to the myth of "Jewish intellectualism" leaders of those Jewish organizations most closely linked to the Jewish lower-middle and working class seem never to have considered the possibility that Jews, too, might benefit from open admissions. There is a certain irony in this, for enrollment figures during 1970… demonstrated that there were far more low-achieving Jewish students than anyone had imagined. Indeed Jews were the second largest beneficiaries of open admissions. False consciousness, it seems, knows the boundaries of neither class nor ethnicity. (Karabel 1983:53, n.34)[12]

Thus, Jewish opposition to Open Admissions could just as easily be interpreted as violating their objective material interests as an ethnic group.

That so many Jews would reject the legitimacy of the Open Admission policy is all the more peculiar when put within the longer history of Jewish-black alliance to expand the boundaries of equal citizenship in and around City College. For instance, just twenty years prior to the Open Admissions crisis, in April of 1949, 75% of the City College student body struck classes demanding the dismissal of two faculty members, William E. Knickerbocker, and William C. Davis, accused of anti-Semitic and Jim Crow practices respectively. The strike, which was the culminating event of what would become known as the "Knickerbocker-Davis Affair" (see Ch. 3, below), lasted until April 20, through the Easter and Passover Holiday. In picketing the Columbia Heights campus CCNY students carried signs that stated "Bigotry has no tenure at City"; "We Are United, Bigotry Must Go!!" "We Fight for Democracy in

---

[11] Table by Lavin et al. (1979) reproduced in Karabel (1983:37).

[12] Karabel's framing of "low-achieving" students may not be accurate, as he notes in his own essay admissions standards at City College were extraordinarily high, and as will be shown below, set for academically arbitrary reasons.

Education" and "Racism Has No Room At CCNY."[13] More than simply uniting against two distinct instances of prejudicial practices, Jewish and black City College students came to *equate* the anti-Semitic and Jim Crow practices, conceiving them as like and similar instances of *racial* discrimination.

While the Knickerbocker-Davis Affair and The Open Admissions Crisis were both student protests that temporarily closed City College in pursuit of student demands relating to race relations separated in time by a mere twenty years, there are many differences between the two events. These differences include patterns of intergroup organizing and coalition building, what groups were defined as racial minorities (blacks and Jews in 1949, blacks and Puerto Ricans, but not Jews in 1969), how race was conceptually defined, what political idioms students used to interpret the significance of racial controversies and whether these idioms were broadly shared by all students or exclusively corresponded to particular groups, the interpretive political frames used by students, and finally the extent to which the political actions were carried out, and or broadly supported, by the majority of the student body. Although only occurring after many months of intra-student conflict, the student strike culminating the Knickerbocker-Davis Affair significantly drew majority support and participation from the student body. On the other hand, the 1969 campus takeover occasioned deep rifts in the City College student body, with the Open

[13] Photographs viewed at, Archives and Special Collections, The City College of New York, New York.

Admissions policy itself leading many of the institution's historical constituents to declare the death of City College.[14]

Thus, the question emerges, if they did not have an objective interest in doing so, why did so many Jews interpret Open Admissions, a universalist provision for higher education that promised genuine access to a four-year college degree to all New Yorkers as a right of citizenship,[15] as against their interests? Indeed, the way many Jews interpreted Open Admissions as against their interests is all the more puzzling once placed in the longer institutional and political context of City College's history, in which Jews and blacks had acted in concert for many decades to expand the boundaries of educational citizenship. To answer these questions, we need to analyze how the City College of New York instantiated what I call educational citizenship, and compare how the relationship of Jews and blacks to educational citizenship, how they were objectively positioned by it, and how they acted and attempted to transform it, changed over time.

Theoretical Sketch of Educational Citizenship

This dissertation analyzes these questions within the framework of what I call *educational citizenship*. While earlier generations of historical analysts emphasized the importance of the development of national institutions of schooling in the construction of modern citizenship (Bendix 1964; Marshall 1963:81-81; Gellner

[14] See Heller (1973), Wagner (1976), Traub (1994).

[15] While open access to a four-year college degree articulated with a free primary and secondary educational system formally guarantees access to a four-year college degree as a right of citizenship, in reality, many students dropped out before completing high school. Thus, there are structural inequalities built into even the universalist seeming Open Admissions regime of educational opportunity.

1983; Weber 1976:303-338),[16] within the recent resurgence of theoretical and empirical interest in the concept of citizenship, especially amongst historical sociologists (Somers 2008:12-19), the interconnections between citizenship and institutions of schooling has received relatively little systematic attention. The relative inattention to the specific links between education and citizenship is especially unfortunate in the U.S. case as the American Common School was, and continues to be one of the most significant institutional underpinnings of citizenship.[17] Indeed, mass public schooling was institutionalized earlier and more broadly in the U.S. than comparable industrializing countries (Heidenheimer 1981).[18] Even less scholarly attention has been paid to the specific connections between institutions of *higher education* and citizenship.[19]

The concept of *educational citizenship* highlights the central role institutions of schooling, and in particular here, institutions of higher education, play in structuring the access and distribution of public goods that are bundled into the status

[16] Brubaker (1992) also discusses the significance of schooling in the inculcation of French civic identity, however the migration-naturalization nexus remains his central object in this work.
[17] However, see several important studies on the relationship between institutions of schooling, and U.S. nation and state formation, Katznelson and Weir (1985); Emirbayer (1992a, 1992b); Meyer et al. (1979). For a review of the politically contentious debates on the class origins and projects associated with the establishment and transformation of U.S. common schooling, see Katz (1987).
[18] Additionally, on the links between U.S. common schooling and U.S. nation and state formation, see Katznelson and Weir (1985); Emirbayer (1992a, 1992b); Meyer et al. (1979). For a review of the politically contentious debates on the origins and transformation of U.S. common schooling, see Katz (1987).
[19] For a path breaking exception, see Loss (2012). Also, the relationship between educational structures and citizenship has been a central concern of the New-Institutionlist research agenda of John Meyer and his associates, however these analyses are carried out at high levels of historical generality and abstraction. For recent reviews see Meyer et al. (2007) and Stevens et al. (2008 pp. 134-135).

of modern citizenship. As political philosopher Judith Shklar (1991) argues, modern citizenship has institutional, material and symbolic dimensions of standing along which processes of inclusion and exclusion, or in Weberian terms, social closure operate (on citizenship and social closure see Brubaker 1992:21-34). Indeed, the public goods to which educational citizenship structures access include symbolic goods, such as national identity and cultural belonging within an imagined community (Anderson 1991; Taylor 2003), as well as material goods, such as desired economic positions. Analysts from several different theoretical traditions, including neo-Marxist (Gramsci 1971), Foucauldian (Scott 1998; Hunter 1996), and New-Institutionalist sociology (Meyer 1977) have in similar ways foregrounded the role institutions of education play in constructing national subjects and subjectivities. Modern institutions of schooling also play a crucial role in knitting together the spheres of civil society, state, and economy within contemporary differentiated societies. For instance, Stevens et al. (2008) point to how institutions of higher education connect “the labor market and the larger economy, the professions and the sciences, the philanthropic sector, the family, and the nation-state” (128). Finally, educational citizenship refers to the ways institutions of education, in addition to selectively allocating cultural and symbolic capital to individuals and groups, also legitimate as “meritocratic” the hierarchical orders of wealth, status and standing thereby produced (Bourdieu 1996, 1998).[20]

---

[20] Indeed, the core insight of Bourdieu’s *The State Nobility* is that modern systems of higher education and education in general play a central role in legitimating various forms of

In regards to the sociology of higher education, Stevens et al. (2008) articulate four analytical metaphors all of which relate to how contemporary citizenship operates. They suggest institutions of higher education should be thought of as "sieves, incubators, temples and hubs" (128). Thus, colleges and universities act as "sieves for regulating the mobility processes underlying the allocation of privileged positions" in society (ibid.).[21] However, they also train individuals to be leaders, and thus act as "incubators" for developing competent or even ideal citizens. Institutions of higher education also function as "temples" for the production and legitimation of "official knowledge" (ibid.). In doing so, colleges and universities are a key site in the production of national cultures, as well as their material and symbolic archiving (Readings 1996), while also contributing to the construction of particular "stories of peoplehood" (Smith 2003). Finally, colleges and universities can be thought of as "hubs" where many nationally organized and organizing institutions intersect and connect (ibid.). Institutions of higher education provide a space that contributes to the coordination of national institutions while integrating elite national social networks; producing cultural capital while circulating social capital.

While Soysal (1994) notes that compulsory education on the level of primary schooling helps promote national communities of citizenship that are "culturally

---

inequality by symbolically transforming arbitrary distributions of symbolic and economic power into distributions that are misrecognized as reasonably based on differences of merit.

[21] Indeed, while many historical sociologists have explored Marshall's classic explication of social citizenship through analyses of the welfare state institutions, Marshall characterized educational institutions as a second pillar of social citizenship, and analyzed how they operated to stratify the social order (Marshall 1963, pp. 107-110). It should be additionally noted that institutions of higher education perform a sorting function, allocating access to desired positions while simultaneously legitimating such outcomes.

unified and sacred entities by creating boundaries around them" (17), educational institutions, and certainly institutions of higher education can contribute to the production of unequal citizenship. According to Goldberg (2008), the structuring effects of modern citizenship not only draw boundaries that set off national communities from other national communities, citizenship also draws boundaries *within* national communities. Goldberg writes, "if citizenship is understood as a gradated category rather than a status that one either wholly possesses or completely lacks, then citizenship may also be seen as a means of internal social closure" (86). As Bourdieu might say, modern citizenship is both a "structured structure," an institutional array patterned by the social forces in which it is embedded; but also a "structuring structure," an institutional array that systematically produces patterned inequality through its normal operation (Bourdieu 1991, ch. 7). Indeed, as plainly seen by T.H. Marshall, modern citizenship operates as an "'instrument of social stratification'" (Marshall as quoted by Goldberg 2008, p. 86).[22]

However, far from a fixed timeless status defined formally by hard and fast legal rules, citizenship, and the modes of inclusion and exclusion it makes possible, is dynamically constituted. Thus, citizenship has been appropriately defined by

---

[22] As noted above, Marshall characterized educational institutions as a mode of social citizenship and analyzed how they operated to stratify the social order (Marshall 1963, pp. 107-110). However, the increasingly decisive force educational institutions exert over access to economic well being in the 21st century needs to be properly historicized. While broadly available educational institutions, both on the primary level of the common school, as well as public colleges and universities, such as The City College of New York, have been important components of U.S. society dating back to the middle of the 19th century, it was only after WWII that higher educational credentials would become a broad pathway towards economic security, as will be analyzed closely in chapters four and five.

Margaret Somers as an "instituted process" (Somers 2008:35).[23] Institutions of schooling and higher education, as the institutional embodiment of educational citizenship, are key sites where the boundaries of citizenship (who is in, who is out, and who gets what?), as well as the imagined relational terms of citizenship (what is the meaning of "our" life in common, as citizens?) are constituted, negotiated, struggled over and potentially transformed. Furthermore, by conceiving of institutions of higher education as an important site where citizenship is struggled over, the concept educational citizenship highlights the importance of political agency.

The United States as Quintessentially Civic Nation?

Conceiving citizenship as an instituted process challenges two interrelated debates in historical sociology and the sociology of race and ethnicity: the utility of the civic/ethnic typology of forms of citizenship and national identity, and whether the United States is a quintessentially liberal society or one fundamentally rooted in and organized around a racially exclusive white identity.

The analytical distinction between civic and ethnic nations has long animated historical sociological research (for recent examples or discussions see, Greenfeld 1992; Brubaker 1992; Joppke 1999, Gerteis and Goolsby 2005; Calhoun 2007, pp. 41-45; Bloemraad et al. 2008:158-59). In spite of recent critiques of the empirical

[23] Somers writes, "I define citizenship as an 'instituted process' to capture its inherent temporality, as well as the constantly changing balance of power among its institutional sites. Citizenship is at heart a matrix of institutional relationships, technologies, political idioms, and rights-claiming practices that are always dynamic and contingent" (Somers 2008:35). Somers' formulation emphasizes that the content of the structurations citizenship performs are an ongoing object of political struggle, and not just the background condition of modern politics (ibid.:34-37).

utility and conceptual soundness of the distinction (Yack 1996; Brubaker 2004, ch. 6, Joppke 2005), Craig Calhoun suggests, "the contrast of civic to ethnic nationalism, liberal to organic, Western to Eastern is so habitual today that it is hard to recall that it was invented" (Calhoun 2005).

According to this understanding, civic nations manifest principles of commonality based on abstract political ideas seen as universal. Membership in civic nations may therefore be attained by anyone on a voluntary basis. Civic nationhood, and its concomitant regimes of citizenship, is understood as inclusive and politically liberal. On the other hand, according to the civic/ethnic analytical typology, ethnic nations establish membership along ascriptive principles of ethnic commonality, sometimes conceived as blood or racial ties. Membership is therefore defined in exclusive terms, limited to those who are perceived as having the proper ascribed characteristics. Ethnic nationhood, and its corresponding regimes of citizenship, is therefore seen as illiberal and undemocratic.

This habitual opposition has also informed the recent explosion in social scientific studies of citizenship (Somers 2008:12-19), perhaps most influentially in Brubaker's comparison of French and German patterns of naturalization laws (1992).

In reviving the civic/ethnic distinction, Brubaker's study analytically isolates the historically constructed national traditions within which legal processes of naturalization are embedded. He finds temporally enduring traditions of national identity, civically constituted in the French case and ethnically constituted in the German case, that continue to prescribe the terms within which debates about

citizenship occur. While Brubaker recognizes such traditions are constructed and become entrenched because of historical contingencies, he argues once in place they continue to structure political possibilities because they "embody and express deeply rooted habits of national self-understanding. They are understood and defended as legal traditions because of their consonance with political and cultural traditions" (ibid.:187). In this way, Brubaker importantly moves cultural meaning to the center of his analysis (ibid.:16), and in doing so, rightly historicizes the emergence of the national traditions he observes. However, in as much as he analyzes action against the backdrop of enduring cultural traditions that *prescribe* the meaningful universe within which politics occur, a drawback of his analytical strategy is the tendency to reify cases as either civic or ethnic *in nature*, subsequent to their emergence. The internal complexities of particular cases, as well as the agency of historical actors who promote alternatives to prevailing national identities can drop out of analytical view.[24] Theoretically, culture in action is conceived as creative, but only *within* the broader terms provided by a deeper cultural structure.

Brubaker's analytical strategy has proven highly influential, as several dynamic scholars have emulated its logic in moving culture to the center of historical

---

[24] Since his earliest work on citizenship, Brubaker has radically reoriented his analytical strategy through a persuasive critique of "substantialist" theories of social identities and social groups. For Brubaker, nations and ethnicities should not be thought of as substantial groups to be inductively observed out there in the real world and therefore we should not think of nations as deep-rooted identities that manifest themselves in the institutional arrangements of nation-states. Rather, "ethnicity" and "nation" are categories of social practice, nationhood is "an institutionalized cultural and political form, and nationess" is not so much a fundamental identity as "a contingent event or happening" (Brubaker 1996:21; on ethnicity see Brubaker 2004, and Brubaker et al. 2006). Joppke has also questioned the utility of the civic/ethnic constructs, noting the "proverbially 'civic' nations such as France, Britain, or the United States had ethnically selective immigration policies too" (Joppke 2005:17).

sociological analysis. For instance Lyn Spillman's comparative study of American and Australian national identity rituals analyzes symbolic repertoires within a larger context of underlying discursive fields (Spillman 1997); Dobbin's comparative study of industrial policy in the U.S., France and Great Britain (Dobbin 1994, 2001); Fourcade's comparative analysis of the economics profession (Fourcade 2009), and Lamont's (1995, 2002) comparative studies of the moral boundaries drawn by U.S. and French working class men, all locate political practices within a larger constraining culture that in important respects determine the dynamics and limits of those practices. Indeed, Swidler's influential theorizing of "cultural repertoires" as enacted to solve problems during "settled lives," during which culture acts more reproductively than its more creative potentialities during "unsettled lives," also follows this logic (Swidler 1986). While in each of these cases, the authors are attempting to revive culture and meaning centered analysis while avoiding essentialist national character arguments, the ways in which they confine practice within a prescribed universe of meaning, even if an analytically historicized universe, tends to reproduce the very essentialist logic of national character they seek to avoid.

Thus, in applying this analytical procedure to the U.S. case, Brubaker finds, "debates about immigration and citizenship continue to be informed by the distinctly inclusive American understanding of nationhood" (Brubaker 1989:12). Indeed, for scholars operating within the terms of the civic/ethnic typology, the United States has long served as the paradigmatic case of civic nationhood. Often understood in scholarly and popular terms alike as a nation of immigrants, "The United States is the

world's classic settler nation, where the experience of immigration has been a nation-founding myth" (Joppke 1999, p. 8).[25] For Joppke, at the center of American national identity exists an institutionally and symbolically secured "civic core" that acts as a kind of firewall against potential ethnic codings of national identity.[26] On this view, America's "civic core" has insured that the public goods of citizenship remain open and attainable to diverse newcomers, regardless of the forms of prejudice that may variously be present within civil society. As Philip Gleason famously put it in the Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups, "to be or to become an American, a person did not have to be of any particular national, linguistic, religious, or ethnic background. All he (sic) had to do was commit himself (sic) to the political ideology centered on the abstract ideals of liberty, equality, and republicanism" (Gleason 1980:32).[27] For those who view the U.S. in quintessentially civic terms, the boundary marking the difference between those formally and symbolically included from those excluded in the status of citizenship is fundamentally permeable. Moreover, because

---

[25] For other recent accounts that analyze the U.S. as a civic nation see (Brubaker 1989; Greenfeld 1992).

[26] As Joppke puts it, "it is important to stress that the ethnicization of American identity, to which cultural pluralists critically reacted, has been inconsistent with its civic core" (Joppke 1999, p. 148). However, note that in a later work, Joppke too calls into question the utility of the civic/ethnic distinction, see note above.

[27] The academic construction of the U.S. as a civic nation has many connections with The City College of New York. Hans Kohn, whom Calhoun (2005) credits in large measure with inventing the distinction between civic and ethnic nationalisms, was a professor at City College when he wrote his interpretive essay on *American Nationalism* (Kohn 1957). However, Calhoun notes the distinction was already developed in Kohn's seminal *The Idea of Nationalism*, written well before he arrived at City College. Several City College alumni influentially analyzed the U.S. as civic nation, including, (Lipset 1979),(Bell 2000),(Glazer 1978). For the seminal post-war iteration of this argument see, (Hartz 1955); for an influential critique see (Smith 1997).

the boundary is defined in abstract and universal terms, the crossing of the boundary is possible for anyone.

While influential amongst a long string of prominent scholars dating back to the post-war dominance of the consensus school of U.S. historiography,[28] the notion that politics and patterns of citizenship in the U.S. are defined by a fundamentally liberal creed or essence has been criticized by others for problematically affirming the myth of American exceptionalism.[29] Critics argue that rather than an idea rooted securely within comparative historical analysis, American exceptionalism is rather a *nationalist* myth and legitimating ideology that helps secure imperial relations abroad, and structures of racial exclusion within the U.S.[30]

However, if the line of scholars from Hofstadter to Brubaker have been criticized for affirming ideological notions of American exceptionalism that have cast the U.S. as ontologically liberal, critics have too often inversely essentialized the nature of the polity in the U.S. Indeed, in criticizing the myths the United States likes to tell itself, recent critical-race sociologists such as Feagin (2006, 2013) and Bonilla-Silva (1997, 2006) tend to locate an essential racism built into the core structures and

---

[28] Prominent examples of the consensus school that asserted an essential liberal creed defined U.S. institutions and political culture, fundamentally prescribing political possibilities within the terms of a liberal universe, include Hartz (1955); Hofstadter (1989); Glazer (1978); for a more recent example see Greenstone (1993).

[29] For critiques of the consensus school, and the primacy of a liberal political creed, see Rogin (1987, 1998); Smith (1997). For a critique and alternative analysis of U.S. citizenship see Takaki (1987), and from an intersectional analytical perspective, see Glenn (2002). For a critique of U.S. citizenship and political culture from the standpoint of a theory of internal colonialism, see Gutiérrez (2004); Blauner (1972); Ture and Hamilton (1992). For an alternative analysis that emphasizes the primacy not of liberal values, but the dynamics of settler colonialism, see Rana (2010); Glenn (2015).

[30] For a comparative analysis of the U.S. as empire, rooted in a critique of this nationalist myth of exceptionalism, see Go (2012).

institutions of U.S. society. For Bonilla-Silva, for instance, the persistence of forms of racial exclusion and inequality across periods and contexts within U.S. history can be accounted for by an enduring and unchanging deep structure of American racism, that gives rise to forms of racial domination (1997). If one line of scholarship conceives of the U.S. as ontologically liberal, the critical alternative often conceives of the U.S. as ontologically racist.

While the critique of ideologies of American exceptionalism are necessary to reflexively decouple nationalist myth from empirical analysis, the inverse alternative of conceiving of the United States as ontologically racist is also problematic. First, such a conceptualization has difficulty accounting for changes and variations in racial inequality and racial identities. While racial inequality has been an enduring reality throughout U.S. history, which groups suffer from racialized inequality, and the forms such inequality take, vary across time and space in ways that the notion of a singular underlying structure has difficulty grasping. In particular, in the case City College, the racialized status of Jews varied over time. As will be shown below, both Jews and blacks understood themselves a minority groups through the 1940's at City College. Furthermore, until the 1950's, Jews conceptualized their own difference in terms of "race" as often as they did in terms of religion, eliding two terms of eliding two terms of difference most often thought as conceptually distinct today. Indeed, until the 1950's Jews and blacks at City College were identified as, and understood themselves and each other as racial minority groups. However, following the

"Knickerbocker-Davis Affair" of 1949, officially tolerated anti-Semitism declined at City College and Jews decreasingly understood themselves as racial minorities.[31]

Additionally, conceiving of racism as the essential and eternal structural core of U.S. society preemptively strips actors on a theoretical level of the ability to contest those structures of domination. Instead of attempting to adjudicate the ontologically racist vs. ontologically liberal debate,[32] this dissertation examines citizenship as a social and institutional location where racial identities as well as inequalities are made, as well as a key site where racial identities and inequalities can be contested and transformed. Citizenship is a good way to study racial inequality because, as noted above, how a society structures citizenship formally defines who is included in society and who is excluded, and what those who are included are formally entitled to. Additionally, citizenship works on a symbolic level, in defining who is worthy of being recognized as a full member of society. The admissions practices of institutions of higher education are an increasingly important social location where the boundary between who is worthy of the material and symbolic benefits of full inclusion in society is being consequentially drawn. Indeed, the study of how the admissions practices of institutions of higher education produce particular

[31] The field of whiteness studies has historically examined shifts in racial categorization and identities over time in the U.S. Important contributions to whiteness studies include Roediger (1991, 2002, 2005); Jacobson (1998); Guglielmo (2003). As pertaining to Jews in particular, see Brodkin (1994, 1998); Goldstein (2008). For nuanced critical reviews of whiteness studies see Kolchin (2002) and Hattam (2001). For a dismissive critique see Arnesen (2001). For a review of the sociological literature related to the revisionist history of whiteness, see McDermott and Samson (2005). For an important challenge to the depth of this literature, see Fox and Guglielmo (2012).

[32] However productive such debates may be, for instance see the debate between Glazer (1975) and Takaki (1987).

forms of citizenship is important as under neoliberal dynamics, this boundary more and more doubles as the boundary governing access to social citizenship in the contemporary United States.

The City College of New York--The American Dream Factory

In stories of Jewish upward mobility and economic and symbolic inclusion within the United States, The City College of New York holds an outsized place in both popular memory and the scholarly imagination. Gorelick delineates the trope of Jewish upward mobility, particularly established in the 1950's and 1960's, thusly:

> Many people believe that the Jews have made a remarkable success of themselves in the United States, rising from rags to riches because of their 'passion' for education. The sojourn of the Jews in poverty was brief, people commonly believe, because of the opportunities America offered, and because Jewish culture uniquely prepared the Jews to take advantage of those opportunities. (Gorelick 1981:3)

Gorelick notes that the mythical trope of Jewish upward mobility found prominent voice amongst scholars. Quoting Milton Gordon, the highly influential mid-century scholar of immigration and assimilation in the U.S.:

> The Jews arrived in America with middle-class values already internalized…It is these cultural values which account for the rapid rise of the Jewish group in occupational status and economic affluence…The traditional stress and high evaluation placed upon Talmudic learning was easily transferred under new conditions to a desire for secular education. (Gordon, quoted in Gorelick 1981:6)

This telling of the story of the Jews in America secures two important mythical truths. First, that Jews have been a model minority, who through their positive cultural values and communal traits have been able to overcome prejudice and hardship in the

U.S. to achieve middle class standing.[33] However, the Jewish success story also secures a mythical truth about the U.S., that it is a basically open country, with liberal institutions that allow and even enable rewards for self-sacrifice and hard work.

In exploring how foreigners can function mythically as the ideal or normative citizen in U.S. political culture, Honig writes, "the myth of an immigrant America recuperates foreignness, en masse, for a national project" (Honig 2001:75). For Honig, the trope of the passage from immigrant to citizen, "shor(es) up the popular exceptionalist belief that America is a distinctively consent-based regime, based on choice, not on inheritance, on civic not ethnic ties" (ibid.) According to Honig, one particular iteration of the mythic trope of immigrant as normative citizen relies on that immigrant's upward mobility. She writes, "The capitalist immigrant helps keep the American Dream alive, upholding popular beliefs in a meritocratic economy in good times and bad. If he can do it, starting with nothing and not knowing the language, surely anyone can" (ibid.:80). Thus, as model minority, the myth of Jewish upward mobility does not simply hold out a template for other groups to follow, it secures a belief America likes to have of itself, as an extraordinarily and perhaps uniquely liberal country where success is open to all based completely on their own efforts and volition.

Indeed, The City College of New York (as well as its sister school, Hunter College, and in 1930 Brooklyn College, and 1937 Queens College) is remembered as a significant institution that made good, in the early 20th century, on America's

[33] Importantly, this myth erases class differences amongst Jews, denying the existence of working class and poor Jews.

promise of open opportunity. The anthropologist Karen Brodkin describes coming of age in suburban New York in the 1950's immersed in stories of how immigrant Jews "pulled themselves up by the bootstraps," becoming the group embodiment of the Horatio Alger tales of the 19th century. (Brodkin 1998) According to Brodkin, "part of my ethnic heritage was the belief that Jews were smart and that our success was due to our own efforts and abilities, reinforced by a culture that valued sticking together, hard work, education, and deferred gratification" (Brodkin 1998:26). For Brodkin's parents, the values of hard work, education and deferred graduation manifested at Brooklyn College, an autonomously established campus (in 1930) of Manhattan's City College. Brodkin identifies the trope that circulated amongst her parents and in her suburban community:

> My parents believe that Jewish success, like their own, was due to hard work and a high value placed on education. They attended Brooklyn College during the Depression. My mother worked days and went to school at night; my father went during the day. Both their families encouraged them. More accurately, their families expected it. Everyone they knew was in the same boat, and their world was made up of Jews who were advancing just as they were. (Brodkin 1998:32)

Indeed, in many ways, The City College of New York was exceptional. Established by popular referendum in 1847, it was a unique experiment in the common school movement in the U.S., and has been viewed by many in its own right as a significant feature of American civic nationhood for much of the 20th century.[34] Originally called The Free Academy, it was established to further "manhood and

---

[34] On the history of The City College of New York generally see, Rudy (1949); Neumann (1984); Gorelick (1982); Gordon (1975). On the history of Baruch College, which was officially a segment of City College until 1962, see Berrol (1989).

citizenship" (Neumann 1984:45, 68; Rudy 1949).[35] In hindsight, City College's early 20th century civic bona fides appear quite strong. It admitted students based entirely on their academic record, and not, as did other elite East Coast colleges and universities, based on their ethnic and class characteristics.[36] Furthermore, City College was tuition free, offering an exceptional opportunity to working class and immigrant New Yorkers.[37] These two factors combined to make City College a relative haven for working class immigrant Jews of east-European origin, who were becoming a majority of its student population as early as the 1890's (Rudy 1947:173).[38] Moreover, the college officially claimed a staunchly liberal and color-blind institutional identity throughout the 20th century. Indeed, it was during the first half of the 20th century that City College earned a legendary reputation as "the proletarian Harvard."

Thus, City College is mythically remembered as a factory for the American Dream in the way it offered exceptional opportunity to newcomers to the United States, assimilating them into the mainstream of American society while

---

[35] Today, The City College of New York is one of eleven senior colleges within the City University of New York, or CUNY. City College did not become officially co-educational until 1951. A sister college, Hunter College, was founded in 1870. Through much of the 20th century, they together formed the flagships of the Municipal College system, which officially integrated into CUNY in 1961.

[36] For the historical transformations of admissions systems at City College, see (Neumann 1984). On ethnically based admissions systems in U.S. higher education in the first half of the 20th century see (Karabel 1984, 2005; Steinberg 1974, 1989; Wechsler 1977; Synnott 1979; Levine 1986).

[37] Gorelick (1981) notes that while City College did not charge tuition, many working class families could not sacrifice a wage earner from the family income to a college education.

[38] City College did not keep data on the racial and ethnic characteristics of its student body until the late 1960's, however the Strayer Report (1944) carried out by the New York State Legislature estimated that in the late 30's and early 40's, "at least 80 per cent of the student population is Jewish or of Jewish background" (p. 413).

simultaneously integrating them as middle class. However, there are limits to the veracity of the myths of City College and the upward mobility of the Jews. While Jews, relative to other immigrant groups, disproportionately acquired high school and college degrees, the proportion of the total Jewish population who were able to pursue higher education was low until after World War II. In other words, while the majority of the student body at City College was Jewish, until after WWII only a small fraction of the Jewish population went to City College or any other institution of higher learning. According to Gorelick, in the early decades of the 20th century, the Jewish "passion for education" translated to the average Jewish youngster dropping out of school after the 7th grade rather than the 5th grade. (Gorelick 1975:99-103) In contrast to the myths of Jewish upward mobility through higher education, Foner asks the inverse question: why did *so few* Jews, especially recent immigrant Jews from Central and Eastern Europe, attended and graduated college in the first decades of the 20th century? She finds:

> For one thing, there weren't many high schools in the city at the turn of the century, and a diploma wasn't necessary for the jobs employing most New Yorkers. This was a period when few employers required their employees to be high school graduates and when job opportunities were abundant for young people with little schooling. (Foner 2000:191)

Indeed, until after WWII, the New York City economy was dominated by manufacturing (Freeman 2000), and large portion of New York Jews, like other immigrant groups, made a living working in factories. Even if Jewish youngsters had the academic abilities and desires to attend tuition-free City College, the responsibility to contribute an earned wage to the family finances often prohibited

educational pursuits. As a college education became more and more tied to middle class economic standing as the 20th century progressed, the admissions standards at City College became increasingly stringent, and a smaller and smaller fraction of those who desired a college education would be able to attain one at City College (as is studied in detail below). So, while City College was an exceptional avenue of opportunity, it was still the exceptional Jew who was able to pursue a college degree. Thus, educational attainment is unlikely the causal mechanism in Jewish upward mobility, which according to Brodkin did not actually occur in broad measures until after World War II (Brodkin 1998:34; Gorelick 1981; Foner 2000), and, in any event, also happened to other European immigrant groups who were not historically overrepresented in higher education over the middle two thirds of the 20th century.[39]

Moreover, while there were structural reasons why City College was a relative haven for Jewish working class immigrants, as will be analyzed below, these structural reasons had as much to do with processes of ethno-racial social closure against Jews, and other minorities, as open and equal opportunity. In other words, as a second class educational institution, one systematically kept at a distance from the ethnically exclusive elite schools, City College should be understood as an institutional instrument of structural racism that circumscribed the life chances of its students. Indeed, currents of ethno-racial domination affected City College and its

---

[39] Reporting on their analysis of the 1980 U.S. census data, Lieberson and Waters write, “for the most part socioeconomic inequalities among white ethnic groups are both relatively minor and unrelated to patterns of ethnic inequality found earlier in the century. The once major differences among specific white groups . . . in occupation and income are largely gone” (Lieberson and Waters 1988:155). See also, (Alba and Nee 2004).

students beyond its structurally dominated position within the field of higher education. Indeed, in contrast to the popular memory of City College as the institutional paragon of liberal citizenship in the U.S., as well as its staunchly liberal official institutional identity, in fact racist practices against Jews, blacks and others had a significant life at City College throughout the 20th century.

Whereas City College is remembered as a kind of machine producing the American Dream for hard working immigrants, in line with Honig's analysis, this memory in fact secures an exceptionalist mythic account of U.S. institutions and political culture (Honig 2001). Moreover, as Brodkin asserts, the myth of the Jewish model minority and her institutional platform of City College, has been used by "some mainstream Jewish organizations to adopt a racist attitude against African-Americans especially and to oppose affirmative action for people of color" (Brodkin 1998:26). Rather than succumb to the dual myths of City College, that it was the vehicle by which Jews made it in America and that it was ruined by the Open Admissions policy, this dissertation analyzes how The City College of New York, an important but contested institution of citizenship in the United States, has persistently served as stage and vehicle for transformative struggles over the structure and meaning of American citizenship, and the making and remaking of racial inequality.

Methodology

Combining structural, institutional and cultural analysis, this dissertation shows how City College, an important but contested institution of citizenship in the United States, has persistently served as stage and vehicle for transformative struggles

over the structure and meaning of American citizenship, and the making and remaking of racial inequality. It tackles these questions through discourse analysis of students, faculty, administrators, and the larger public, as they engaged with two important sites within the college: student politics and college admissions practices. Such discourse analysis has been carried out through the interpretive analysis of primary archival documents, including student newspapers, pamphlets, posters, photographs, and literary and social scientific journals. Additionally, the papers of college presidents and other administrators were examined.

The college's admissions practice was chosen as a research site because of the central importance of the Open Admissions controversy in the school's history, and in particular, the controversy's importance in the meaning of City College within the U.S. regime of citizenship. In order to grasp the historical meaning of Open Admissions, this dissertation traces the changing institutional practices in regards to admissions decisions and standards back to the college's founding in 1847. Of great aid in this pursuit were several existing dissertations on the admissions practices (Neumann 1984), and organizational history (Gordon 1975) of The City College of New York. These works are invaluable. Because of the existing quality and depth of research and analysis on City College's institutional history and history of admissions practices, this dissertation supplemented existing research with discourse analysis of student interaction and engagement with these sites.

This dissertation analyzes student political practices and discourse in two ways. First, it traces the shifting political cultural structures at City College over the

period from 1930-1975. Through inductive discourse analysis, the backbone of which was comprised of reading every edition of the most influential student newspaper *The Campus*, over the 45-year period, patterns of culture and practice emerged into view, and are reported on in Chapter 2 and passim. In addition to analyzing the discourse contained in the approximately 1,838 editions of *The Campus* newspaper, other student newspapers, such as the *Observation Post* and the *Tech News*, as well as *The New York Times* were examined when appropriate and available.

Second, this dissertation locates two significant events of student mobilization and political contention in the longer context of the college's shifting political culture. Extensive archival research revealed these two events as significant turning points in the college's history. Of the first, the Knickerbocker-Davis Affair of 1949, which culminated in the massive student strike, there are no scholarly treatments. Additionally, while the event significantly altered the college, it has largely faded from historical memory. The second event, however, remains prominently fixed in the historical memory of City College, the 1969 Open Admissions Crisis. Again, in regards to the unfolding of student political practices within the Open Admissions Crisis, the dissertation by Dyer (1990) is an invaluable aid. Expanding on Dyer's meticulous reconstruction of the process of organizational development, this dissertation contributes an analysis of the emergence and development of an anti-racist counterpublic that helped form the 1969 student occupation.

The heavy reliance on archived contemporary primary resources such as student newspapers allowed research to circumvent the mythologization of City

College within historical and collective memory. In any particular edition of a student newspaper, the individual biases and positionings of the particular students involved can limit the researcher's vision and scope. To ameliorate this danger, an exhaustive reading, over a 45-year period of this source was pursued. Additionally, in closely reading *The Campus* over time, the field of discourse within which it was enmeshed became apparent. The various perspectives with which it contended became apparent, and were pursued when appropriate and materials were available.

As a data source, student discourse also has strengths and weaknesses. Because students are not yet embedded in professional networks and adult careers, they are subject to different social forces than adults. Researching student discourse, then, cannot grasp the effects of such forces. However, in the study of political discourse, the diminution of professional ties can also be a strength, revealing the political imagination unencumbered by the narrow self-interest of established career, while capturing the imagination, hopes, desires and expectations of future careers. The greatest drawback of studying student discourse is all those who are not students are left out. Since this dissertation compares Jews and blacks, the choice of City College does well in isolating Jews, who historically predominated amongst the student body. However, while throughout the 20th century black students were always present within the colleges' student body, because they were a small minority until the late 1960's, and especially after the Open Admissions policy was implemented, the voices of black students are necessarily less represented. In general, this researcher was endlessly impressed and grateful for the eloquence, ambition and

seriousness of the student journalists at The City College of New York over several decades.

Preview of Argument and Chapters

This dissertation is a historical sociological analysis of the transformation of racial and ethnic exclusion in U.S. higher education in the 20th century. Through an in-depth historical case study of the experiences of Jews and blacks at The City College of New York, it reveals the mutually constitutive links between race, higher education and citizenship in the United States. More specifically, it places the acts of citizenship (Isin 2008), enacted by the BPRSC in their Five Demands and campus occupation of 1969, in historical and institutional context. For Isin, acts of citizenship are fundamentally dialogical, in making ethical claims, acts of citizenship can only be truly effective when the claims and meaningful world in which those claims would be sensible, are recognized by those who are constituted as the legitimating audience of such acts. In other words, for Isin, the transformation of citizenship on a formal *and symbolic* level requires the ethical recognition of the legitimacy of political claims by an on looking public.

This dissertation seeks to explain why large segments of the Jewish community, after working with blacks for decades, often quite radically towards expanding the boundaries of citizenship at City College, rejected the legitimacy of the 1970 Open Admissions policy? While succeeding in radically transforming the structure of City College and CUNY more broadly, the BPRSC's late 1960's political mobilization failed as an act of citizenship because its claims went broadly

unrecognized. Rather than being remembered as political action that expanded the structure and content of citizenship, the Open Admissions crisis and policy are remembered as having destroyed a once great college. The black and Puerto Rican students who claimed an equal right to higher education were seen as unworthy of the forms of inclusion they demanded, and the radical democracy of Open Admissions was short lived, being decisively reformed in the mid 70's in spite of what subsequent research has shown to be remarkable success in educating thousands who previously had no hope of pursuing a college degree.[40] I place this question in historical context in three ways.

First, in Chapter 2, I historicize the political culture at City College showing it to be an important incubator and index of the changing political imaginaries of what historians have called the long civil rights movement (Hall 2005). To do so, I analyze the shifting and evolving publics on the college's campus, tracing the rise and fall of different political imaginaries. Significantly, the shifting political imaginaries across time at City College sustained different kinds of ethical claims. For instance, in the period from the 1930 to 1950, Jewish and black City College students tended to recognize each other as suffering from parallel forms of systemic racism within U.S. society. Understanding each other to be similarly excluded from a social system that benefitted a largely white-Anglo-Saxon-Protestant elite, enabled Jewish and black

[40] While Open Admissions at CUNY was not formally ended until the late 1990's, important changes to remedial education in the wake of the mid 1970's New York City budget crisis reinstated dead end courses of study that had little chance of culminating in a four-year degree. On the pedagogical successes of the program, see Lavin and Hyllegard (1996); Attewell and Lavin (2007).

City College students to position themselves and each other as the normative subjects of American democracy. Thus, students tended to make claims in the idiom of democracy and positioned themselves and other minority communities in the U.S. as those genuinely capable of democratic practice. However, in the 1960's, political imaginaries at City College had come to be anchored in more individualistic idioms, and ethical claims tended to be made within individualistic terms. Within such a context, when the BPRSC revived radically democratic idioms of political claims making, they tended to be understood by many whites as pathologically illiberal.

Second, in chapters 4 and 5, I historicize the ways in which City College constructed "the meritorious student" by analyzing the social, political and institutional forces that drove the college to continuously reformulate its admissions practices across its entire history. My analysis shows that while many actors during the Open Admissions crisis invested City College's definitions of merit with sacred academic legitimacy, they were in fact rarely crafted for academic reasons or according to a purely academic logic. In fact, the most significant factor in determining admissions standards was not a determination of who could academically thrive, but a cut-off point determined purely by how many students City College could physically accommodate. Regardless, many ignored the fact the admissions standards were arbitrarily based on the number of students a building could safely hold, instead believing such standards were the legitimate marker of academic ability and worthiness. Thus, by examining the institutional construction of the "meritorious" student, I examine the production of educational citizenship from above, while also

revealing how different actors and their standpoints were simultaneously constructed by how they were positioned by this institutional process.

Finally, in Chapter 3, on the Knickerbocker-Davis Affair of the late 1940's, and Chapters 7, 8, 9, and the Conclusion, on the build up to and enactment of the 1969 campus occupation and takeover in support of the Five Demands, I examine two significant historical events of student protest. In these events, City College students challenged the content of what I call "educational citizenship," or the manner in which City College instantiated particular forms of U.S. citizenship. I show, how these events were embedded in the shifting political culture at City College and how they were affected by the historically changing ways different groups, especially Jews and blacks, were positioned by the structure of educational citizenship. Placing these events in this double context conceives of the relationship between discursive political practice and institutional structures in "dialectical" terms (Wedeen 2008:49). As Wedeen argues, such a dialectical conceptualization of instituted process (Somers 2008) maintains: "Discourses and institutions are defined and generated in reference to each other, and yet can come into conflict, both conceptually in their meanings and causally in the world" (ibid). Against New-Institutionalist theorizations of institutions, that do not distinguish between an ideational moment and a materialist moment of analysis, Wedeen argues, "to think dialectically about discourses and institutions is to be sensitive to the ways in which they are reciprocally determining, that is, mutually implicated in the changes that undergoes through time" (ibid). Thus, my analysis additionally shows how these events, the 1949 Knickerbocker-Davis

Affair and 1969 South Campus takeover by the BPRSC, were important turning points in the institution's history, altering both its structure and institutional and social meanings, in the case of the Open Admissions crisis in incongruent ways.

While Jews had passed into whiteness by the late 1960's in the U.S, there was no objective reason for many to claim the privileges of whiteness by rejecting a universal policy such as Open Admissions. Yet, many Jews interpreted Open Admissions as against their personal and group interests, and rejected the ethical claim to equality made by the BPRSC. By placing the Open Admissions crisis in deep historical and institutional context, and comparing the 1969 student mobilization to earlier student actions, I show how different actors sorted different political, institutional and symbolic currents to interpret their interests and construct their identities and lines of action.

Chapter 2

The Long Civil Rights Movement at The City College of New York: Political Culture from 1930-1975

While the Knickerbocker-Davis Affair and The Open Admissions Crises were both student protests that temporarily closed City College in pursuit of student demands relating to race relations separated in time by a mere twenty years, there are many differences between the two events. These differences include patterns of intergroup organizing and coalition building, what groups were defined as racial minorities (blacks and Jews in 1949, blacks and Puerto Ricans, but not Jews in 1969), how race was conceptually defined, what political idioms students used to interpret the significance of racial controversies and whether these idioms were broadly shared by all students or exclusively corresponded to particular groups, the interpretive political frames used by students, and finally the extent to which the political actions were carried out, and or broadly supported, by the majority of the student body. Although only occurring after many months of intra-student conflict, the student strike culminating the Knickerbocker-Davis Affair significantly drew majority support and participation from the student body. Moreover, the conflict between liberal and leftist student dispositions engulfed the balance of the campus in political controversy throughout the entire year. On the other hand, the campus takeover of 1969 was carried out by about 200-300 black and Puerto Rican students only.

Moreover, the student body remained deeply divided throughout the 1969 campus takeover, with the Open Admissions policy itself leading many of the institution's historical constituents to declare the death of City College.[41]

How can understand the disjuncture between two civil rights protests at the same institution separated by only twenty years, historically? The 1969 campus takeover and subsequent Open Admissions policy fits neatly within the once dominant tragic narrative of the rise and fall of liberal progressivism in 20th century U.S. that for several decades constituted the scholarly common sense concerning the trajectory of 20th century American politics.[42] This tragic narrative traces the ascendance of inclusionary liberalism in the 30's and 40's that increasingly incorporated European immigrant groups and African-Americans within the symbolic and economic mainstream of American life. Initiated by the multi-ethnic New Deal and consolidated in the universalist liberal nationalism in whose name World War II was fought, the inclusive thrust of American liberalism is thought to have reached its zenith with the mid 60's civil rights legislation ending Jim Crow segregation, and racially and ethnically exclusive immigration laws.[43] Lauding the culmination of America's liberal creed in the mid 60's, the educational sociologist and City College alumnus Nathan Glazer wrote, "for the past forty years, the pattern of American political development has been to ever widen the circle of those eligible for inclusion in the American polity with full access to political rights. The circle now embraces . .

---

[41] See Heller (1973); Wagner (1976).
[42] See the influential essays collected in Fraser and Gerstle (1989).
[43] In fact exclusive logics were still part of reformed immigration laws (Ngai 2004) and the South confronted Civil Rights legislation with "massive resistance" (Lassiter 2006).

. all humanity, without tests of race, color, national origin, religion, or language" (Glazer 1975:22).

However, as the story goes, just at the moment of the full realization of America's liberal ideals, and before their institutional effects could be fully felt, the postwar liberal consensus was shattered by ghetto violence, illiberal black separatism and anti-meritocratic black demands for preferential treatment in the guise of affirmative action policies. The supposed uncivil violence and illiberal separatism of the identity politics of the late 1960's is said to have shaken the commitment of an otherwise sympathetic white majority to the civil rights agenda, ultimately leading to a full backlash of the white majority against the previously popular project of American liberalism in both its civil rights and social democratic currents.[44] In supposedly breaking from America's fundamental liberal creed, radical identity politics of the late 60's killed the egalitarian dreams of the 1930's.

With Open Admission's politically confrontational and sometimes violent birth in black and Puerto Rican politics and its supposed failure as a pedagogical program, journalists and other commentators have easily turned City College's 20th century history into a powerful symbol of the dangers of straying from the liberal universalist path.[45] However, in recent years, historians of the civil rights movement in the United States have challenged the dominance of the backlash narrative. Nikhil

---

[44] For a scholarly analysis of how this narrative functions politically as collective memory, see Hall (2005). For examples of the "backlash" narrative and genre of analysis, see Rieder (1987); Fraser and Gerstle (1989); Edsall and Edsall (1991); Sleeper (1991); Gitlin (1993; 1996); Skrentny (1996).

[45] Traub (1995)

Pal Singh and Jacquelyn Dowd Hall have each described this revisionist history as "the long civil rights movement" (Singh 2004; Hall 2005). According to Hall, the "truer story," of race and politics in the 20th century U.S., is:

> --the story of a "long civil rights movement" that took root in the liberal and radical milieu of the late 1930s, was intimately tied the 'rise and fall of the New Deal Order,' accelerated during World War II, stretched far beyond the South, was continuously and ferociously contested, and in the 1960's and 1970's inspired a 'movement of movements'…

Taking a long view of the movement, stretching back in time to the 30's, and a geographically broad view in examining the movement outside the South and especially in the North (Theoharis and Woodard 2003) (Sugrue 2008), reveals a continuity of confrontational tactics and actions as well as the pillars of deep radicalism at the foundation of the civil rights movement. According to Hall, extending the lens back in time reveals a mass movement that emerges in the 30's, that "rose from the caldron of the Great depression and crested in the 1940's: a powerful social movement sparked by the alchemy of laborites, civil rights activists, progressive New Dealers, and black and white radicals, some of whom were associated with the Communist party" (Hall 2005:1245).

While critics of the long civil rights movement narrative of 20th century politics, such as Arnesen (2012a, 2012b), question the scholarly rehabilitation of the importance and normative desirability of the Communist Party of the USA. Indeed, at City College, the Communist Party, and other leftist parties, had a vibrant life and influence on student politics throughout the 30's and 40's. However, more than in organizational clout, the power of the left and the radical currents of the long civil

rights movement at City College in the 30's and 40's existed in its influence on the political culture. According to Hall, "the link between race and class lay at the heart of the movement's political imagination" (Hall 2005:1245), and, "neither class nor race trumped the other, and both were expansively understood" (ibid.:1246). The power of this political imagination fueled a movement characterized by its, "commitment to building coalitions, the expansiveness of its social democratic vision, and the importance of its black radical and laborite leadership" (1245).

Yet, according to Hall, beyond the ferocious battles of the 30's and 40's and out of WWII emerged the stifling power of the hegemonic cold war liberal state in the United States, which, through the effects of an anti-Communist campaign drastically narrowed the political cultural terrain. (ibid.:1248-50) However, as Hall further argues of the revisionist work, one advance of the long civil rights movement scholarship has been the ability of scholars to observe direct connections between the period of the 40's and that of the late 60's. Hall writes, "in recent years we have learned more and more about the continuities between the 1940's and the 1960's, especially about the civil rights activists who came to political consciousness in the earlier period and then groomed and guided the young men and women who stepped forward in later years" (ibid.:1253). However, Hall also notes, perhaps more significantly, the deep ruptures of historical memory and political culture between the two periods. Of the activists of the 60's she states: "They also suffered from a rupture in the narrative, a void at the center of the story of the modern civil rights struggle that is only now beginning to be filled. Many young activists of the 1960's saw their

efforts as a new departure and themselves as a unique generation, not as actors with much to learn from an earlier, labor-infused civil rights tradition" (ibid.). According to Hall, it was the Cold War period of the early and mid 50's that severed the historical memory of the 30's and 40's, "persecution, censorship, and self-censorship reinforced that generational divide by sidelining independent black radicals, thus whitening the memory and historiography of the Left and leaving later generations with an understanding of black politics that dichotomizes nationalism and integrationsim" (ibid.).

Indeed, rather than the steady ascent of liberal values and politics, my research covering the years from 1930-1975 at City College reveals the rise, fall, and re-emergence of the long civil rights movement on campus. This temporal movement can be represented in three distinct periods in the political culture of the institution. The period from 1930-1952 was characterized by a steady stream of robust political activity, as City College students challenged the forces of fascism they say rising around them. In this twenty-year period, large portions of the student body were routinely engulfed in political mobilization, controversy and action. To interpret understand events, City College students applied interpretive frames that drew fundamental links between local happenings and controversies and global processes, such as imperialism. Indeed, while the backlash narrative of the late 1960's suggests political violence was a pathologization of the liberal trajectory, student politics at City College in the 30's and 40's employed physical confrontation often erupting in violence.

Most importantly, throughout the period, both Jews and blacks identify as minorities, with Jews often figuring their minority status in racial terms as often as they did in religious (the concept of ethnicity was not used in this period). Thus, Jews and blacks often made common cause, identifying themselves and each other as similarly positioned by the structures and dynamics of American racism. The overlapping racial identities of Jews and blacks articulated with a broad political culture organized around the imagining of democracy. While most if not all students affirmed the absolute normative superiority of democracy as form of political life, throughout the period, students were driven by conflicting visions of what democracy ought to mean, and whether the United States could legitimately claim to be democratic. These conflicts manifested most forcefully in the Knickerbocker-Davis Affair, culminating in 1949, as analyzed in the subsequent chapter.

The second period, extending from 1952 until 1962, was marked by relative student apathy, following the Knickerbocker-Davis Affair, official and informal anti-Semitism would no longer be tolerated at City College, as a staunchly liberal regime, headed by the liberal President Buell Gallagher, began in 1952. Along with the ascent of liberal nationalism came a vigorous and effective anti-Communist, anti-leftist campaign that drastically curtailed and narrowed the once robust political culture at City College. Students were dubbed by the administration and themselves, “the silent generation,” and a major theme discussed amongst students was a pervasive apathy. Politics of all sorts declined.

Finally, the third period from 1962-1975 saw the re-emergence of radical student politics at City College, reaching its zenith in the campus takeover and Open Admissions crisis of 1969. The tragic narrative explains white backlash by emphasizing the crisis or even betrayal of America's liberal creed on the part of black political actors who embraced a separatist identity politics in the late 60's. However, a closer examination of the three periods shows that only during the middle period of apathy were liberal values hegemonic and more or less uncontested amongst City College students. The sometimes violence of the BPRSC's tactics also were not exceptional, as City College students of the 30's and 40's literally parried with administrators and engaged in a steady stream of confrontational sit-downs, office occupations and student strikes. Neither the objective interests of Jews passed into whiteness, nor the threatening illiberal tactics of black power can explain the backlash against the radical expansion of access to higher education in the City of New York that undermined the legitimacy of the Open Admissions policy. Legitimacy is indeed the key variable, but it cannot be conceptually thought of as emerging within a symbolic vacuum. What changed most significantly for City College students from the 30's to the 60's, was the space of political-cultural meaning within which students came to understand controversies and events, and within which they interpreted their own identities and interests. Compared to the 30's and 40's, the politics and tactics of the BPRSC were not so exceptional. However, what was transformed was the ability of both Jewish and black students to see a world in which the radical expansion of

educational access for everyone represented a democratic achievement of the highest order.

The rest of this chapter examines political discourse and their associated controversies in the first period as a prologue to Chapter 3's analysis of the Knickerbocker-Davis Affair.

1930-1952

According to historian Robert Cohen, throughout the 1930's, The City College of New York was the epicenter of the first great mass student social movement in U.S. history (Cohen 1993).[46] Indeed, City College politics partook of the larger popular front social movement and political alliance between liberals and leftists, which Michael Denning, in his rich account, dates from the summer of 1933 to 1950 (Denning 1997, 22-25). However, even back to the mid 20's, before the influence of the popular front social movement was felt, City College students had been battling their faculty and administration over academic freedom related to leftist political expression and compulsory military (Rudy 1949:404). The student strife common in the 20's targeted compulsory ROTC training from a pacifist standpoint that combined a critique of militarism with a critique of chauvinist American nationalism.[47] In the late 20's and early 30's, a second front opened, as leftist students and faculty increasingly were suppressed and persecuted by City College's

---

[46] Cohen emphasizes the anti-fascist and peace elements of the student movement.
[47] For instance, on Armistice Day in 1925, Felix S. Cohen, the Editor-in-Chief of *The Campus* student newspaper and son of the most prestigious City College professor Morris R. Cohen, published portions of the Military Science and Tactics textbook in order to disabuse people of the notion that ROTC courses were about anything other than training people to kill. He was suspended for this action (see Rudy 1949, pp. 405-411).

administration and larger governing structure. Under President Robinson in the 30's, all told 43 students were expelled, 38 suspended, and hundreds more forced to appear before faculty disciplinary boards (Cohen 1993:108). In addition, scores of faculty were fired due to communist links. (Cohen 1993; Schrecker 1986)

During the 1934/35 academic year, the two themes of freedom of leftist political and academic expression and anti-militarism were synthesized into anti-fascist activities. The anti-fascist orientation of the student body came into dramatic effect when Presdient Frederick Robinson, who had become infamous for attacking students with an umbrella during a riot that broke out during an anti-ROTC rally in May of 1933, had further antagonized the largely Jewish student body by holding a ceremony in honor of a student delegation of Italian Fascists at City College in October of 1934. Looking back over the turbulent events of the 1934/35 academic calendar, the editorial board of *The Campus* student newspaper marked it as a turning point for the paper and college's larger student body, stating, "we regard as our most constructive achievement our attempt to break down the false barriers separating the college from the world outside."[48] The protests sparked by the student fascist delegation convinced the editors of *The Campus* that the City College student's future was tied up with that of world events, that neither the U.S.'s isolation from Europe nor the artificially idyllic environment of college life provided a real boundary from global processes and political events. Again, addressing their shift in vision within the student newspaper they stated, "we have emphasized in a hitherto unthought of scale,

---

[48] *The Campus*, May 31, 1935. Located in Archives and Special Collections, Cohen Library, The City College of New York, New York.

the affairs of the world, believing as we do that the student cannot afford to ignore the world scene with which his destiny is so inseparably linked."[49]

The boundary separating City College students from the world was menaced by the rise of fascism. Thus, abandoning a parochial standpoint, City College students shifted in the mid 30's to applying an interpretive frame that linked the decade long activities at the college against R.O.T.C. and for academic freedom to a global struggle against fascism: "we have attempted, as best we could to combat the forces making for war and fascism. On our own campus that has meant fighting for the abolition of the R.O.T.C. and opposing restriction on academic freedom; in its wider aspect it has meant opposition to ruinous military preparations, constant watchfulness to ward off the encroachment of fascism."[50] The new global consciousness of the City College student body was far from empty rhetoric as 1,000 students filled Lewisohn Stadium the following October to "voice their vigorous protest against the Italian Fascist invasion of Ethiopia."[51] At the rally, Welford Wilson, the President of the City College Douglas Society (an almost exclusively black club, oriented towards the betterment of race relations on the CCNY campus) asserted that for the first time the Douglas Society and Student Council were united in their fight against fascism. He stated, "a movement that united black and white students in the College would go far toward erasing racial prejudice…"[52]

---

[49] Ibid.
[50] Ibid.
[51] *The Campus*, October 10, 1935. Located in Archives and Special Collections, Cohen Library, The City College of New York, New York.
[52] Ibid.

Indeed, concurrent with the protest against Italian imperialism, the Douglas Society led a campaign joined by the Student Council and other student groups to establish a course on "Negro History and Culture."[53] In the fall of 1937, the scholar and activist Max Yergan became the first African-American professor in the municipal college system.[54] Yergan himself exemplified the global vision City College students were practicing in the late 30's. Prominent in the National Negro Congress as well as the anti-colonial International Committee on African Affairs, the choice of The Douglas Society brought to CCNY the diasporic analytical and political outlook that historian Penny Von Eschen shows typified the "black popular front" scholars and activists of the pre-war period (Von Eschen 1997).[55] Along with English Professor Morris Schappes, Yergan became a favorite speaker amongst students.

In the spring of 1938, Schappes and Yergan addressed the college's Minority Rights Committee, producing a headline in *The Campus* newspaper that read, "Dr. Yergan, M. Schappes Hit Fascism; Say Problems of Jews and Negroes are Both Alike."[56] On the occasion Yergan argued, "the struggle of the Negro people is the struggle of the American people," further suggesting that because blacks in the U.S., "have already experienced fascist methods and fascist tendencies," that, "the cause of

---

[53] Ibid.
[54] See Anthony (2006:184-189).
[55] According to Yergan, the purpose of his course was to "disclose the culture of the Negro people and its place in world culture; to study those forces that account for the current status of the Negro population in America; to expose and correct the misrepresentation of the past of the Negro people; and to discuss how Negroes may continue their contributions to cultural progress and the strengthening of democracy in America," Max Yergan, "Letter for immediate release," President Harry Wright Papers, VFile 3.23, Archives and Special Collections, The City College of New York, New York.
[56] *The Campus*, April 1, 1938.

the Negro people is the cause of democracy."[57] The language of democracy increasingly became the idiom within which the globally envisioned opposition to the forces of fascist colonialism was expressed. For instance, in a March 1939 speech to the college's Marxist Cultural Society, Communist Party State Committee member Israel Amter argued that the plight of Jews under fascism, if unchecked, would logically come to inflict all minority groups. He predicted, "the powerful fascist attack and the call for a 'white Protestant America' is a direct attack against Jews, against Negroes and against Catholics."[58] He went on to warn, "unless these large minorities unite and struggle for their rights as American citizens within the democratic front, they will all be inevitably weakened."[59]

The City College student body ultimately won its battle with the repressive President Frederick Robinson, forcing him into retirement in 1938. However, a new repressive apparatus emerged in the form of the Rapp-Coudert Investigatory Committee assigned to investigate subversive activities in the municipal colleges by the state of New York. (Schrecker 1986) Beginning in the spring of 1941, scores of professors and other college staff members, including Schappes and Yergan, lost their jobs due to alleged connections with the Communist Party and other leftist groups. City College's decision not to renew Yergan, who had been the first black faculty appointment at CCNY, sparked a massive letter writing campaign of protest. Yergan himself framed the issue in racial terms, accusing the Board of Higher Education of

---

[57] Ibid.
[58] *The Campus*, March 3, 1939.
[59] Ibid.

barring Negroes from regular teaching positions and questioning CCNY's willingness to grant tenure to black professors.[60] In doing so, Yergan drew an opposition between the democratic forces at the College, represented by the students and teachers, and an administration he portrayed as protecting entrenched racism. Many of the hundreds of letters written to President Harry Wright argued that Yergan's discontinuance undercut any claim to represent democracy America might make in the face of fascism on the march in Europe. The Council for Pan American Democracy argued the "Negro, White and Indian peoples of Latin America and the Carribean" would identify Yergan's discontinuation as an act of Jim-Crow, political persecution and race-discrimination.[61] William H. Dinkins, President of Selma University, urged City College to reconsider Yergan's renewal, arguing, "colored people everywhere would be pleased to have this particular service of the City College continue."[62] Closer to home, the New York City teacher's union considered Yergan's termination politically motivated and argued for "the freedom of teachers to work for democracy in college

---

[60] Yergan's appointment as a visiting lecturer may have prohibited him from gaining tenure. Regardless, Yergan's academic department and the administration at large did not make an effort to protect him in spite of the popularity and success of his course. Nor did his department nor the administration seem to warn him that he was likely to be replaced by another visiting lecturer, suggesting that the dismissal was indeed politically motivated. CCNY hired the historian Lawrence D. Reddick as Yergan's replacement. The psychologist Kenneth B. Clark, famous for his expert testimony in the Brown vs. Board of Education Supreme Court case, would be the first African-American faculty member to earn tenure at CCNY.

[61] Letter from The Council for Pan American Democracy, President Harry Wright Papers, VFile 3.23, Archives and Special Collections, The City College of New York, New York.

[62] Letter from William H. Dinkins, President Harry Wright Papers, VFile 3.23, Archives and Special Collections, The City College of New York, New York.

and community."[63] The American Committee for Democracy, which counted many prominent intellectuals such as Franz Boas and Ruth Benedict as members, protested Yergan's fate as a matter of intellectual freedom.[64]

Perhaps the most representative of the letters was from The Italian Welfare Association, Local 118A who believed the firing of Yergan to be an example of discrimination based on "race, creed or color." In their letter, the Association drew a parallel between the Jewish and Negro races, questioning the legitimacy of CCNY's actions in the ominous shadow of the Nazi regime. In letter after letter addressed to President Wright, everyone from local private citizens in New York City to public organizations with a national profile, criticized CCNY for not living up to American principles of democracy. These letters equated Jewish and black experiences of discrimination in the United States.

The firing of Yergan came on the eve of the Second World War. Combined with the fraying of the national leftist student movement in the later 30's (Cohen 1993:278-321), the War produced a brief respite in the fever of student politics that had burned since the mid 20's. However, as Michael Denning has shown, contrary to conventional wisdom of earlier scholarship, the popular front social movement that generated a great common energy amongst liberals and the left continued after the war (Denning 1997).

---

[63] Letter from Teachers Union Committee for Defense of Public Education, President Harry Wright Papers, VFile 3.23, Archives and Special Collections, The City College of New York, New York.

[64] Letter from The American Committee for Democracy, President Harry Wright Papers, VFile 3.23, Archives and Special Collections, The City College of New York, New York.

The period of the 30's and 40's saw a robust internationalist outlook on the part of students that indeed made fundamental connections between the social processes making racial groups and generalized social inequality. Remarkably, for City College students of the period, such issues were of a global importance. The idiom of democracy allowed students to conceptually connect, and bring into a common frame of meaning, student political issues, that might otherwise appear to be of simple local importance, with global events. Importantly, the interplay between the local and the global within this political culture also drove a consistent student investment in politics, as they *experienced* world happenings as directly bearing on their own lives. This further propelled students into consistent patterns of political action and civic/public engagement.

Indeed, the popular front politics of the long civil rights movement would continue at City College in the little remembered Knickerbocker-Davis Affair, which culminated in the spring of 1949. To be analyzed in the subsequent chapter. The Knickerbocker-Davis Affair would mark a turning point in City College's history, as anti-Semitism would no longer be tolerated. However, the 50's also saw a drastic narrowing of the political culture on the college's campus.

1952-1962

On September 30, 1957 *The Campus* newspaper published a history of the previous fifty years at City College, corresponding with the newspaper's Golden Jubilee. Marking the different periods at the college by the decade, the 1950's, according *The Campus* reporter, was characterized by the impressive physical

modernization of the college's plant, and by widespread student apathy. For many generations, City College students and administrators, comparing themselves to elite Ivy League schools, decried their own "subway school's" lack of student spirit. While City College students and administrators believed the student base to be as, or more intellectually capable than any school in the country, they nevertheless believed the college sorely lacked student pride, broad social standing, and status.[65] In the mid 50's, a new student center on the South Campus opened, equipped even with a lawn for student socializing. While the architecture and design of the new South Campus was meant to inspire the City College student to participate in the sorts of activities that build leadership qualities and engender elite camaraderie,[66] the new space was unable to counteract the mounting student apathy that dominated the 1950's.

According to Ronald Salzberg, writing in *The Campus*, the organizing principle of City College life in the 50's was the opposition between those who exclaimed "'down with apathy.' We replaced your old subway college with a new one, make use of it," and the larger mass of students who left school immediately following their classes, claiming, "I have no time to fool around . . . what do you think this school is—Yale?"[67] If "progress" was the motto of the 1950's at City College, it "remained mostly physical," according Salzberg, as only "a small group

[65] Before the 50's, many attributed the school's lack of social standing to the fact that it was majority Jewish, black and Catholic. Because the WASP elite was not one of the school's constituencies, regardless of the academic achievements of its students, City College could never be a socially elite institution. Rudy (1949) notes that Protestant students abandoned City College in the 1890's as the student body became increasingly Jewish. Weschler (1977) notes the same process at Columbia a few decades later.

[66] On the production of the spirit of an elite status group by the French educational system, see Bourdieu (1996:180-183).

[67] "The Seven-Year Itch," Ronald Salzberg, *The Campus*, September 30, 1957, p. 14.

managed to use the center as the hub of college life and held its dances, political debates and all extra-curricular activities there."[68]

While apathy became the true watchword in all spheres of City College life, including extracurricular clubs, dances and athletics, political science professor Stanley Feingold noted a more ominous trend. Asked to comment on the decade of the 50's by *The Campus* newspaper, Feingold singled out one trend: "what appears to be new is the indifference of the college student to the great political issues. The change in political spirit from the early forties to the late fifties is intangible but real. The extent of political participation by City College students was once greater, and the level of political debate higher."[69] Feingold believed the link between citizenship and higher education was in deep crisis, suggesting, "if citizenship training has a place in the liberal education which we strive to provide for the college student, his (sic) failure to confront public issues, to pose questions and propound answers, is at least in part the failure of the college, and for this I am sorry."[70]

If Feingold described the pacification of political action, and even consciousness amongst City College students of the 1950's, he did not offer an explanation for this transformation, discounting perhaps the most obvious in stating, "to hold McCarthyism responsible is undignified and untrue. The manifestations of a repressive spirit discouraging free political expression have been far fewer here than

---

[68] "The Seven-Year Itch," Ronald Salzberg, *The Campus*, September 30, 1957, p. 15.
[69] "Corruption and Communists," Stanley Feingold, *The Campus*, January 4, 1960.
[70] (ibid.)

at other institutions."[71] Feingold was fundamentally right. How, and why McCarthyism was successful in neutralizing the campus left in the 1950's is not entirely clear. Repression of student political thought and action was prevalent, and in many ways more aggressive and punitive throughout the 30's and 40's. The central difference between the 50's and the prior two decades is not the nature and extent of anti-leftist and general student repression, but the fact that students did not confront or actively resist their own political repression in the same manner. A very important question is why McCarthyism succeeded in neutralizing the campus left, when previous attempts had failed? However, I cannot answer that question here.[72]

To say, on the other hand, that the student body, or the student left was completely pacified, is inaccurate. There was a steady stream of student politics around questions of the left throughout the 50's. However, comparing the political patterns of the 50's and early 60's to the previous period reveals important differences. First of all, whereas the period of the popular front at City College witnessed protest after protest, many of which included half or more of the student body, students restricted their political actions to regular channels throughout the age

---

[71] (ibid.)

[72] I hypothesize that the massive reconstruction of nationalist ideologies and national identity in and following WWII in the United States around liberal conceptions of meritocracy, a) lowered social barriers for Jews, offering increased opportunity for upward mobility; b) while integrating them into an assimilated whiteness cum liberal national identity. In other words, I hypothesize that it was not the negative repression of the left and student politics that was more instrumentally effective after the war, but rather that students took on a new positive national identity rooted in liberalism such that the left no longer attracted the vast majority of City College students. To test this hypothesis I would have liked to track official discourse amongst the college presidents and Board of Higher Education members to trace how they constructed the meaning and purpose of City College as an institution. Unfortunately, I did not have the time to follow this research strategy.

of apathy at City College. Only a small, isolated fraction of students consistently participated in politics throughout the 50's and early 60's. While the Knickerbocker-Davis Affair was characterized by a bitter battle between liberals and leftists, a byproduct of the intra-student conflict was a broad based political energy amongst most students. The symbolic clash between liberal and leftist views on campus was intense because students struggled to define the very meaning of American democracy. By comparison, the political idiom within which student and administrative politics were carried throughout the 50's and early 60's was the idiom of freedom. Even during the darkest days of McCarthy's tyranny, the left continued to be a presence on the City College campus. However, by the beginning of Gallagher's presidency in 1952, the political question on the City College campus was not whether the left had a legitimate understanding of American democracy, but whether it was safe to tolerate communist oriented, or communist sympathetic speech and activity whatsoever.

Two issues in particular drove student politics in the 50's, the policy of the Student-Faculty Committee on Student Affairs to require all student clubs, many of which were political, to provide a full membership list to receive a charter. This issue produced a near constant wrangling between the faculty and the students with the question being bounced to different agencies, including the Student Council, the Faculty Senate and President Gallagher. The second issue driving student politics in the 50's was the right of student groups to invite left aligned speakers. Paul Robeson, the left oriented civil rights activist and world famous singer, was barred from

speaking on several occasions throughout the decade, as was Howard Fast, a communist writer jailed for refusing to cooperate with the House Committee on Un-American activities. Generally students were against the compulsory membership lists and speaker bans. Yet, unlike the 30's and 40's, students did not confront the administration with student strikes, protests, sit-downs, or other confrontational political tactics. President Gallagher played the part of tortured liberal, drawing a stark boundary against communists, stating he would never hire a known communist, and would think long and hard about rehabilitated former party members or fellow travelers. However, he decried the apathy of the student body and constantly attempted to draw them into the public sphere with rituals such as the re-occurring academic freedom week.

Most importantly, the idiom of freedom organized student politics around the idea of the individual and her rights. The focus on individualism did not facilitate public action as did the idiom of democracy and associated ideals of active citizenship. For example, in 1955 *The Campus* published an entire issue devoted to the theme of academic freedom, which they defined as, "the right of anybody in a College community, a community which must have a free interplay of ideas, to get the fact about matters affecting him (sic) and to form for himself (sic) an opinion on the basis of these facts. It is a man's (sic) right to formulate his (sic) views and

express them."[73] On this view, the individual is the normative unit of expression, not the democratic mass.

The occasional all college meetings on the problems of Academic Freedom became less and less well attended, as Gallagher could not overcome student apathy and draw students into the public sphere. Writing in the spring of 1958, Edward Kosner asserted that, in contrast to previous generations of CCNY students, the reason for student apathy in the 1950's was the benevolence of Buell Gallagher; "thanks in large measure to Buell Gallagher, there are no real threats to Academic Freedom here today."[74] Dubbing the period, "the era of good feelings," Kosner noted positively, "even a casual reader of the student press could not have helped but notice that the issues of the day are the quality of our education at the College and how it can be improved."[75] Running through a litany of potential improvements to the educational process at City College, such as requiring courses in the classics for liberal arts students, and integrating the social science curriculum into a coherent two- or three year package, Kosner admitted, "I'd rather be covering a riot and you'd probably rather be reading about one, but these are the real issues that confront us today."[76] In the most telling example of the narrowness of Kosner's political imagination, he described the technical aspects of the curriculum at City College as

---

[73] *The Campus: Academic Freedom Issue*, Wednesday, April 20, 1955. The issue was linked to an All College Conference on the theme of the Role of the Individual and Value Development, "Keynote AF Talks Note Role of Individual; 'Value Development' Is Theme of Conference," *The Campus*, April 22, 1955, p. 1.
[74] "The Era of Good Feelings," Edward Kosner, *The Campus*, May 1, 1958.
[75] (ibid.)
[76] (ibid.)

"the questions—perhaps the only questions—that students are qualified to discuss and to try to resolve."[77]

The conflict between liberals and leftists of the late 1940's, while often dividing students and inhibiting unified action, nevertheless created a great deal of political energy, compelling students to participate in public activity and debate. While effecting division, the conflict between liberals and leftists also encouraged the exercise of an expansive political imagination. Just one year prior to Kosner's column on the issues of the day, a controversy over whether the job placement office was discouraging African-American students from applying to teacher's positions on Long Island was coupled on the front page of *The Campus* with coverage of the "Brotherhood Forum" on civil rights. *The Campus* spent much of its copy on the forum noting that the large auditorium was only filled with 27 people.[78] Surely, the vast majority of City College students were staunch supporters of the Civil Rights movement and the struggle for formal black equality. However, the major shift from the 40's to the 50's is the fact that so few of the mostly Jewish student body remained *participants in the movement*.[79] The major effect of apathy in the 1950's amongst City College students was an inability to frame the world around them as politically pertinent to themselves. As students increasingly oriented towards their education as a means of upward mobility, their interest in the political waned.

---

[77] (ibid.)
[78] "Hicks Scores False Liberalism Before Small Forum Audience," Jack Brivic, *The Campus*, March 12, 1957.
[79] As interest and participation in the Civil Rights Movement slowly increased amongst white students at City College in the early 60's, they usually framed it as an issue of the South, and no longer engaged with it directly on campus, as they had in the 30's and 40's.

This chapter tracks changes over two of three overall periods that comprise this study of City College. Chapters 7, 8, and 9 will be comprised of a reconstruction of the emergence of an anti-racist counterpublic in the late 1960’s at City College. The conclusion of the dissertation will show how many Jews and whites in general responded to the claims to equal citizenship the BPRSC made in and through their Five Demands and campus occupation. This chapter has given cursory examination to the prevalent political frames and political idioms that were used by actors within the first two periods. While students of collective action generally analyze framing practices in strategic terms, that is the framing practices of already constituted groups and organizations who are trying to alter broader patterns of perception in order to expand their own ranks and alter prevailing societal understandings in a manner favorable to the group’s predefined interests; here, I examine frames and idioms as indexes of the underlying political culture within which groups and identities are made and unmade, and, additionally, within which such actors and groups interpret their own interests. Such an analytical strategy is necessary precisely because the meaning and definition of Jews and Blacks, amongst other potential groups, is fluid across the three periods. Tracking the political discourse of City College students shows a narrowing of the political culture from which the idioms and frames used by students arose, and within which Jewish and black students interpreted and understood their identities and interests.

Such an analytical strategy is necessary because Jewish individual and group interests in both the Knickerbocker-Davis Affair as well as the Open Admissions

Crisis, as well as black interests in both events, cannot be objectively discerned either from each group's objective position within social structures, nor as automatic reflections of their "experiences." Instead, by examining these events within the deeper context of the shifting political cultures at City College, I analyze how social actors engaged in interpretive practices that constructed their experiences in particular ways, imbued them with meaning, and thereby made themselves as political subjects in the process. As Joan Scott writes:

> …we need to attend to the historical processes that, through discourse, position subjects and produce their experiences. It is not individuals who have experience, but subjects who are constituted through experience. Experience in this definition then becomes not the origin of our explanation, not the authoritative (because seen or felt) evidence that grounds what is known, but rather that which we seek to explain, that about which knowledge is produced. (Scott 1991:780)

Black and Jewish actors in both the Knickerbocker-Davis Affair and the Open Admissions crisis interpreted their own social positionings and experiences, and constructed interests and their implied lines of action through these interpretations.

During the Knickerbocker-Davis Affair, Jews and blacks made common cause, lumping (Zerubavel 1997) the two cases of group-prejudice against Jews and blacks respectively, into equivalent cases of racism. This overlapping interpretation of experience made certain political identities possible, ones, that as we will see, held radically democratic potential. However, a critical mass of whites and Jews rejected the political claims to the experience of oppression made by blacks and Puerto Ricans during the 1969 campus occupation. While Open Admissions was a universal policy, many Jews saw it as undermining their individual and group interests as Jews. Instead

of making common cause with blacks and Puerto Ricans in the pursuit of a radical expansion of educational citizenship, many Jews rejected the legitimacy of the policy.

Scott argues we should treat the emergence of a new identity as a "discursive event" (ibid.:792). Doing so assumes "that the appearance of a new identity is not inevitable or determined, not something that was always there simply waiting to be expressed, not something that will always exist in the form it was given in a particular political movement or at a particular historical moment" (ibid.). Indeed, the way Jews and blacks interpreted their experiences, and generated interests out of them in the Knickerbocker-Davis Affair, was in no way an automatic reflection of their ethno-racial experiences. Rather, in the Knickerbocker-Davis Affair, Jewish and black City College students constructed their political identities through a complex entanglement (Dawson 2013) with, and practical pursuit of ideas of citizenship and the meaning(s) of American democracy. I turn now to that analysis.

Chapter 3

Imagining American Democracy: The Knickerbocker-Davis Affair at The City College of New York

"Jim Crowism to me is anti-Semitism." Richard Cohen, Student Representative on the Resident's Council of Army Hall[80]

On April 11, 1949, 75% of the student body of The City College of New York refused to attend classes. They were protesting the college administration's handling of accusations of racism against two faculty members. On the one hand, William E. Knickerbocker stood accused of administering the Romance Language Department according to an anti-Semitic agenda. Despite having been found guilty by New York's City Council of anti-Semitism amounting to "reprehensible and unworthy conduct," the college's administration lauded Knickerbocker's service to the school, refusing the possibility of any wrongful action on his part.[81] On the other hand, a faculty investigatory committee had found William C. Davis guilty of segregating a City College student dormitory by Jim-Crow principles. When Davis resigned as head administrator of the dormitory, Harry Wright, City College's President, reappointed Davis, a trained economist, to the Economics Department, even giving him a raise. The striking students picketed the school, carrying signs that read, "Bigotry has no tenure at City"; "We Are United, Bigotry Must Go!!" "Racism Has No Room At

[80] "Transcript of Hearings Before President's Committee To Investigate Complaints of Discrimination In Army Hall," p. 81, Archives and Special Collections, The City College of New York, New York.
[81] "City Council Asks Professor's Ouster," *The New York Times*, June 23, 1948.

CCNY," and "We Fight for Democracy in Education," and demanding the two professors be fired.[82] The strike, which made front-page news in *The New York Times*,[83] was the culminating act in what would become known as the Knickerbocker-Davis Affair (hereafter KDA). In striking, City College students, Jewish and Black alike, "lumped" together Knickerbocker's anti-Semitism and Davis' Jim-Crowism (Zerubavel 1996), coming to understand them as commensurate cases of American racism (Espeland and Stevens 1998). While the strike was an impressive enactment of student unity, it was only achieved after eight months of contentious *intra-student conflict*.

From an instrumentalist standpoint, the intra-student conflict is puzzling. Amongst students, the facts of the two cases were not in dispute, as students quickly came to view both Knickerbocker and Davis as guilty of *racist* practices. Furthermore, a consensus quickly emerged among students that both Knickerbocker and Davis should be dismissed from the college's faculty. Yet, despite their shared goal, students devoted all of their political energy for eight months to a bitter conflict over what *tactics* they ought to employ to challenge the school's governing structure.[84] Peculiarly however, the intra-student dispute over tactics eschewed any discussion of the hypothetical effectiveness of the potential courses of action,

---

[82] Photographs located in Archives and Special Collections, Cohen Library, The City College of New York, New York.
[83] "An Uproar on the Campus." *The New York Times*, April 12, 1949, p.1.
[84] New York City's Board of Higher Education (BHE) held direct jurisdiction over the municipal colleges.

disregarding means-ends calculations all together. In other words, while the question of tactics divided the student body, their dispute was not of a strategic nature.

Thus, a series of analytically challenging questions emerge around the process by which City College students constructed themselves as a collective actor. If students ignored the strategic implications of various tactical courses of action, what was at stake for them in their rift over tactics? Why did the student body surrender its collective power to engage in an internecine conflict? Considering their shared goal of having Knickerbocker and Davis fired, what accounts for the hostility of the intra-student struggle? Finally, how and why did they ultimately overcome their conflict to unite in collective action?

I argue the key to explaining *both* the emotionally charged intra-student conflict over tactics, as well as how students ultimately overcame their divisions to unite in collective action, is understanding “the meanings that collective action had for the actors” themselves (Sewell 1990:532). According to Polletta, the way social movement scholars have integrated culture into their analytical models has reproduced “a strategy/ideology divide whereby activists’ strategic considerations are by definition non-ideological” (2006:54). This false divide blinds analysts to the ways in which deeply meaningful normative questions are symbolically embedded in the problem of political tactics and cultural repertoires. Indeed, in the case of the KDA, underlying the student dispute over tactics, and contributing to its intensity, was a

deeper *normative* conflict *of interpretations* over the *nature and legitimacy of American democracy*, for which the question of tactics served as a symbolic proxy.[85]

The leading models integrating cultural meaning into social movement research, such as framing theory (Snow et al. 1986; Snow and Benford 1992; Benford and Snow 2000; Tarrow 1998) and political action repertoires (Tilly 1978, 2006; McAdam 1996; Taylor & Van Dyke 2004) cannot illuminate the Knickerbocker-Davis Affair because they tend to reduce cultural meanings to the instrumental imperatives of already constituted actors. Beyond understanding actors as *using* culture to achieve *pre-given ends*, framing and repertoire theories of culture do not conceive of actors as being *constituted and driven by cultural interests.* While New Social Movement (NSM) theory's focus on identity does conceive of action as motivated by cultural interests (Melucci 1985, 1994, 1995), in as much as NSM theorists understand identity movements as a "contemporary repertoire" (Polletta and Jasper 2001, p. 287) emerging from macro structural transformations to "post-industrial" (Touraine), or "informational" (Melucci) societies, they tend to reproduce the structuralist assumption that the class identities of the old labor movements were an *automatic reflection* of positions within the system of production (Cohen 1985; Calhoun 1991, 2012). NSM theory then tends to circumscribe the political importance of cultural interests within a politics of recognition,[86] in turn, suggesting that rather than central to all social action, identity and cultural meaning have only become

[85] In arguing for an interpretive social science, Taylor suggests that the "most bitter" social conflicts emerge at the fundamental level of "common meanings" and "intersubjective meanings" (1971:31).
[86] On processes of cultural recognition as a specific political register, see (Taylor 1994).

politically salient in the contemporary era because of deeper historical-structural transformations.

In this chapter, I argue by analytically integrating the concept of social imaginaries (Taylor 2004; Perrin 2006) into a practice-based theory (Bourdieu 1990; Crossley 2002) of collective actor formation, analysts can go beyond prevailing analytical models within the social movement literature that have limited the importance of culture to, on the one hand, a constraining symbolic environment, and on the other hand, tool(s) to achieve pre-given ends. In particular, the social imaginary's orientation towards the normative meanings underlying practices enables researchers to conceive of the distinctly cultural interests driving practices (Bourdieu 1998; Vaisey 2009), as well as isolate the processes by which cultural meaning can operate as a creative or productive force (Lee 1999), reconfiguring or producing new dispositions to act.

The Role of Cultural Meaning in Social Movement Processes and Collective Action Events

Scholars working within the Resource Mobilization/Political Process paradigm of collective action research have long been interested in the collective "repertoires" of political action (Tilly 1978, 2006; McAdam, Tarrow & Tilly 2001; Taylor &Van Dyke 2004). Such structuralists have understood changes in prevailing tactical repertoires over time as indices of macro-structural transformations tied to modern state formation. By insisting on the strategic intentionality of collective action tactics (Taylor & Van Dyke 2004, p. 269), even when analyzing their symbolic elements (McAdam 1996), such theorists have importantly corrected structural

functionalist understandings of collective behavior as irrational outbursts (McAdam 1982). However, the important effort to return instrumental rationality to collective actors has been made at the expense of other modes of rationality, minimizing the importance of culture within social movement processes (Cohen 1985; Calhoun 1991, 2012). Indeed, according to Armstrong and Bernstein, even as the Political Process model has been refined in the face of a generation of criticism (see for example, McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly 2001), it continues to conceive of state and economic structures as the primary structuring forces of society, relegating culture to secondary analytical importance (Armstrong and Bernstein 2008:74).

Responding to such concerns, sociologists since the 1980's have increasingly examined the importance of cultural meaning in social movement processes (Williams 2004; see also, Johnston and Klandermans 1995; Polletta 2008). Developed to complement the dominant structural theories of collective action, the framing perspective has been the most influential of these approaches (Snow et al. 1986; Snow and Benford 1992; Benford and Snow 2000; Tarrow 1998). In grounding itself in the symbolic interactionist tradition, the framing perspective portrays movements and their adversaries as engaged in a contest over the social construction of reality, and therefore retains a theoretical role for the *constitutive* power of cultural meaning. However, in as much as it's analytical models tend to assume pre-constituted actors strategically engaged in manipulating cultural meaning to achieve predefined ends, the framing perspective has been criticized for reproducing the culturally reductive and instrumentally biased logics of action it was meant to complement or supplant

(Goldberg 2003; Steinberg 1999; Oliver and Johnston 2000; for an exception see Ellingson 1995). According to Steinberg, the framing perspective's approach to culture is hampered by contradictory epistemologies, one constructivist, the other, rational-actor (Steinberg 1998, 1999). According to Oliver and Johnston, the framing perspective's instrumentalist understanding of culture reduces political action to a market model of the "entrepreneur" (2000), as it necessarily predicts movement actors will attempt to align their framing practices with already existing symbolic structures, rather than attempt to transform them. Thus, prevailing models of culture in collective action research cannot grasp two significant political facets of cultural meaning: culture as constitutive of actors and their interests; and the creative, productive and transformative power of cultural meaning within processes of political struggle.

Political Dispositions at City College

In order to isolate the productive force of cultural meaning within processes of group formation, Brubaker and colleagues (Brubaker 2004) have urged analysts to resist conflating their analytical categories with the categories of practice used by the actors being studied. Indeed, before unifying as a collective actor, two distinct and conflicting dispositions to act politically existed within the City College student body. One disposition, which I will call liberal, urged and argued for procedural remedies to the crisis, pressing the college's administration through formal channels. The other disposition to act politically, which I will call leftist, urged and argued for extraordinary confrontational tactics such as sit-down demonstrations, pickets and

strikes. The terms "liberal" and "leftist" are used here as categories of analysis rather than categories of practice. They were not identity terms used by discrete groups of students, nor did any group mobilize in their name. Rather, these two terms analytically describe the two distinct and durable political tendencies amongst students that more or less exhausted the field of student political discourse throughout the KDA.

Such an analytical procedure is important for making sense of the KDA because the conflicting political dispositions that divided the student body cannot be mapped onto traditional sociological variables such as class, race, political party or social network. The vast majority of City College students in the 1940's were from similar working class, Jewish families, and many were first or second generation immigrants (Strayer 1944). Thus, the City College student body had few class divisions upon which political conflict could be mapped. While ethnic boundaries did exist between Blacks and Jews, they were not politically salient because both groups saw themselves, and were seen by others, as *minority* groups. Furthermore, Jews figured their own difference in terms of "race" as often as they did in terms of religion, eliding two terms of difference most often thought of as conceptually distinct today. Indeed, while the majority of the City College student body in the late 1940's was Jewish, both Jews and Blacks alike understood Knickerbocker and Davis to be guilty of similar, or even equivalent acts of *racism,* and no student ever argued or suggested anti-Semitism and Jim-Crowism might be conceptually distinct. In the late 1940's, race was an important unifying political force amongst Black and Jewish

City College students compared to the principle of division it would become in subsequent decades.

The most compelling hypothesis to explain the conflict between the liberal and leftist political dispositions would tie those dispositions to distinct political networks and organizations based upon party affiliations (McAdam 1986). However, while many students who pursued confrontational tactics were members of the Communist Party, the majority of leftist students were not. In fact, four of the student leaders of the strike sued William Knickerbocker and *The New York Times* for labeling the strike "Communist-organized and Communist-led."[87] Knickerbocker settled with the four students out of court for $300.00 after an initial trial ended in a hung jury. *The Times* was exonerated of libel in a second trial, however they argued not that the students in question were in fact members of the Communist Party, but rather that their labeling of the strike as Communist led did not refer to the four students in particular who brought suit. These students, *The Times* admitted were not Communists.[88] Indeed, the *Times'* own original report on the strike noted the college administration's judgment that the strike was not Communist inspired or led.[89] While network connections and party affiliation may have been an important driving force for some students, it cannot explain the breadth of the leftist political disposition, nor can it explain why or how the larger student population, including those whose liberal

---

[87] "'Times' Suit Begins Today," *The Campus*, February 19, 1954, p. 1.
[88] "Jury Decides Libel Suit In Favor of NY Times," *The Campus*, February 25, 1954, p. 1.
[89] "City College Students Clash With Police in 'Bias' Strike," *The New York Times*, April 12, 1949. While it is possible the college's administration was attempting to protect the image of the college by denying the effective presence of Communist students, it generally did not shy away from criticizing Communist elements within the faculty and student body.

dispositions had most opposed confrontational tactics, ultimately unified behind the strike action.

The Social Imaginary

Rather than a partisan battle over membership and organizational clout, what was at stake for City College students in their dispute over tactics were competing *normative* visions of American democracy. I refer to the level of culture that carries the inchoate theories about the nature of society as the *social imaginary*.[90] Taylor (2004) defines social imaginaries as "the ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations" (23). In contrast to elaborated social theories of elites, social imaginaries are carried by ordinary people, and, according to Taylor, hold "that common understanding that makes possible common practices and a widely shared sense of legitimacy" (ibid.). Crucially, the imaginary refers to a *shared background of ideas*, a tapestry of symbolic meanings *against which* social practices gain the sense and meaning that they carry (ibid.:25). Whereas Luker (1985) found the political practices of pro-life and pro-choice activists to be driven by their embeddings in conflicting world-views or ideologies organized around contrasting conceptions of the ultimate ends of existence, liberals and leftists at City College, in spite of their conflict over tactics, *shared a common space of meaning*. In fact, both

[90] Anderson's (1991) widely influential work on nationalism has been the most prominent analysis of the imaginary element of the social. However, the social imaginary concept has a broader lineage, see Zerilli (2005) and Moyn (2014).

liberals and leftists exclusively used the idiom of democracy to interpret the meaning of events and to raise political claims. Their conflict cannot be understood as between one group who wanted to protect democracy from another that wished to overthrow it.[91] Instead, both liberals and leftists saw democracy as the highest political good and the most just form of life, but struggled to impose the effective understanding of the nature and legitimacy of actually existing American democracy.

While, conceptually, the imaginary operates at the level of ideas, what makes the concept useful for explanatory accounts is the internal relationship it establishes between meanings and practices: "Because human practices are the kind of thing that makes sense, certain ideas are internal to them" (ibid.:32). According to Taylor, human practices are "material practices carried out by human beings in space and time . . . and at the same time, self-conceptions, modes of understanding" (ibid.:31). Thus, the social imaginary concept directs attention to both the background level of significance that provides the meaningful context of practices as well as the foreground significations embodied by those practices, the particular fusions of which accounts for the specific meanings of practices.[92] According to Taylor: "If the understanding makes the practice possible, it is also true that it is the practice that largely carries the understanding" (ibid).

---

[91] While perhaps some student members of the Communist Party may have embraced democracy cynically, most student leftists were not affiliated with the CP.
[92] This notion of fusion is similar to Alexander's (Alexander 2004). While Alexander offers a powerful theory of cultural performance, I remain committed to the concept of practice he is attempting to transcend because it asserts all human action is interested action, including interest in particular cultural meanings (Bourdieu 1998). See also Wedeen's conception of "semiotic practices" (Wedeen 2002).

In addition to grasping how normative investments can be the principles of practices, the social imaginary concept can also help grasp what Emirbayer and Mische have called the "creative reconstructive dimension of agency," that involves "an *imaginative* engagement of the future" (Emirbayer and Mische 1998:984). Indeed, students were able to unify as a collective actor in and through their collective re-imagining of education and democratic citizenship as public anti-racist political practice; a conception that, in turn, realized itself in the confrontational student strike. Thus, while students clashed over the legitimate interpretation of American democracy, they did so *within* a democratic social imaginary that provided students *a shared space of meaning* within which they could *creatively re-imagine* different images of social relations and project alternative meanings of democratic action and citizenship.[93] It was through such practices of collective re-imagining that City College students were able to unite as a collective actor. Thus, by attending to the role of the social imaginary in collective action processes, analysts can conceive how normative cultural structures function as the distinctly cultural interests driving practices (Bourdieu 1998; Vaisey 2009), while nevertheless being open to creative reconstruction in and through imaginative political practice.

The rest of this chapter proceeds in two sections. In the next section I analyze the structural location of City College within an early post-war institutional field of higher education organized according to ethnically exclusionary principles. While City College was seen as exceptionally meritocratic relative to the ethnically

---

[93] Perrin (2006) also emphasizes the creative aspect of the democratic imaginary.

exclusive Ivey League schools, I show how the exclusionary logic of higher education infiltrated even City College. Of central importance in the interpretive struggle between students over the legitimacy of American democracy was whether the symbolic boundaries drawn by Knickerbocker and Davis against Jews and Blacks were institutionalized boundaries of exclusion characteristic of the U.S. in general.[94] In the subsequent section I reconstruct the process of collective actor formation as a struggle between two distinct political dispositions to constitute the entire student body as a practical group. The struggle unfolded within and over the democratic social imaginary, but not as abstract discursive debate. In reality, the structuring effects of the democratic imaginary manifested themselves in the "semiotic practices" (Wedeen 2002:714) of students as they struggled against each other to constitute the larger student body as a collective actor. The student conflict over the underlying meaning of American democracy was finally resolved, not through conversion, but through an imaginative and creative engagement with American citizenship.

City College and the Exclusionary Logic of Higher Education

As Karabel has shown (2006), U.S. colleges and universities were driven by dual projects of knowledge production and ethnic social closure well into the 1950's. Leading institutions such as Harvard, Princeton and Yale were "wedded to a vision of the elite colleges as gentlemanly training grounds for future leaders who would embody the highest values of Christian—and especially Anglo-Saxon—civilization" (Karabel 1984:11). The project of social closure led elite schools to institute anti-

---

[94] On the relationship between symbolic boundaries and social boundaries, see (Lamont and Molnar 2002; Lamont 2000; Goldberg 2003).

Semitic quotas limiting Jewish enrollment. Such institutional practices in turn reproduced the WASP elite as privileged carrier and beneficiary of American nationhood.[95]

Compared to the socially elite schools, The City College of New York was in many ways exceptional. Established by popular referendum in 1847, City College's early 20th century liberal bona fides appear quite strong.[96] It admitted students based entirely on their academic record, rather than their ethnic and class characteristics. Furthermore, City College was tuition free, offering exceptional opportunity to working class and immigrant New Yorkers. These two factors combined to make City College a relative haven for working class immigrant Jews of east-European origin, who were becoming a majority of its student population as early as the 1890's (Rudy 1947:173),[97] earning the college a reputation as "the Harvard of the proletariat."

City College's official institutional identity was also staunchly liberal. This official identity was exemplified by the Dean of Students Morton Gottschall's response to the initial accusations of institutionalized anti-Semitism that emerged in conjunction with the Knickerbocker case:

---

[95] On pre-war Jewish quotas see also (Karabel 2006; Synnott 1979; Wechsler 1977). On racial definitions of American nationhood that excluded those who did not descend from white, Northern European antecedents see (Ngai 2004; Jacobson 1998, pp. 39-90; Roediger 2005).

[96] On the history of The City College of New York generally see, Rudy (1949); Gorelick (1982). Today, The City College of New York is one of eleven senior colleges within the City University of New York, or CUNY. City College did not become officially co-educational until 1951.

[97] City College did not keep data on the racial and ethnic characteristics of its student body until the late 1960's, however the Strayer Report (1944) of the New York State Legislature estimated that in the late 30's and early 40's "at least 80 per cent of the student population is Jewish or of Jewish background" (p. 413).

> No record is kept at the College of the religious affiliations or racial antecedents of members of the staff; no questions relating thereto are asked at the time of appointment or thereafter. We claim no special credit for this policy, fundamental as it is to the American heritage and the spirit of true democracy.[98]

The administration's faith in its own democratic liberalism was so strong that its initial reaction to the charges of institutionalized anti-Semitism at the college "was to reject such claims with the contempt that they deserved and not to stoop to a refutation of them."[99]

Despite it's official organizational identity, City College was affected by the broader logics governing the field of higher education, and in particular the regional institutional power exercised by Columbia University, who originated the anti-Semitic quotas later practiced by Harvard, Princeton and Yale (Wechsler 1977; Gorelick 1981; Karabel 2006). While Columbia's quotas funneled Jewish students towards City College, Columbia also used its political clout to stunt the growth of public higher education in New York City and New York State, especially in the areas of graduate and professional education, forestalling any rivalry in status and prestige that may have come from City College or a state university system (Wechsler 1977:131-211). Columbia's policies and political activities effectively structured the market for educational opportunity in New York around racist principles, ensuring Columbia would control the most desired positions, reserving them for the dominant WASP group. According to Gorelick, the dynamics of WASP social closure also

---

[98] See "Memorandum on Proportion of Jewish Appointments to The City College Instructional Staff", Archives and Special Collections, The City College of New York, New York.

[99] (ibid.)

pervaded City College's organizational culture, noting, "like most U.S. colleges and universities at the turn of the century, CCNY was secular in form and Protestant in culture," and that the College's "institutional structure remained a form of secularized Anglo-Protestantism for some time" (Gorelick 1981:138).

City College students were well aware of the structure of exclusion they faced. Following World War II, a Black-Jewish civil rights coalition pursued a Fair Educational Practices Bill, modeled on the "Fair Employment Practices Act," in New York State (Wechsler 1977:198).[100] The coalition also sought the creation of a state public university system, of which City College was proposed to be a key component, in order to break Columbia's hold over the regional market for higher credentials and its domination of the local field of higher education. This agenda gained steam when Dan Dodson, an N.Y.U. sociologist and executive director of The Mayor's Committee on Unity,[101] released a report confirming charges of anti-Semitic and other racially discriminatory admissions practices in elite private institutions of higher education. While blacks, Jews and other minorities faced discrimination at City College, by comparison, publicly funded and administered institutions such as City College, offered them the best hope for access to higher education. The monopolization of higher education by the WASP elite denied many minorities a college, graduate and professional education.[102]

---

[100] On New York State's Fair Employment Practices Act, see (Chen 2006).

[101] The Mayor's Committee on Unity was founded in 1943 to investigate the root causes of an anti-Negro riot in Harlem in the midst of World War II.).

[102] While structural functionalist theories of education understand institutional expansion as a functional response to a changing economy, in the early post-war period the expansion of

In spite of the official recognition of discrimination, City College's President Harry Wright came out against anti-discrimination and the bill ultimately failed, allowing private colleges and universities to continue to discriminate against Jews, Blacks and other minorities.[103] In arguing that "legislation in the whole area of human relations" should not be pursued until after a commission charged with establishing the need for a State University in New York made its report, Wright likely was hoping that minority educational needs could be met without disturbing the historical privilege and prerogatives that institutions such as Columbia had accrued.[104] Although Wright criticized discrimination in the abstract, student leaders from several different organizations understood his position on the anti-discrimination bill as deference towards the institutionalized racism characterizing higher education. Noting that students had been struggling for the bill for some years, opposition to Wright's delay tactics came from the college's Hillel chapter, the College Christian Association, the Douglas Society, and the Student Council. According to the then President of the Student Council, delay would directly harm "a great many of our students" whose "future success and well-being" would be dashed by discrimination. The Douglas Society, a student organization that pursued more positive inter-racial relations on and off campus, framed Wright's position as anti-democratic in stating

---

public higher education was centrally a civil rights issue, one that unified Jewish and black civil rights organizations; Biondi (2003), however emphasizes the increasing divergence of Jewish and black interests in this period (2003, pp. 98-111).

[103] *The Campus*, March 6, 1947, p. 1, Archives and Special Collections, The City College of New York, New York City.

[104] Wright is quoted in *The Campus*, March 6, 1947, p. 1, Archives and Special Collections, The City College of New York, New York City.

"the value of the bill providing for action (against academic discrimination) that is both prompt and comprehensive is far greater than that of a committee report proposing one democratic university for the future."[105]

It was in the context of this broader civil rights struggle that the charges against Knickerbocker and Davis emerged. First coming to light in the spring of 1945, there were three basic components to the charges against Knickerbocker. First, he was accused of discriminatory hiring and upgrading practices as chairperson of the Romance Language Department. Second, he was accused of falsely granting academic awards to gentiles over objectively more meritorious Jewish students. Finally, Knickerbocker was observed exhibiting a pattern of anti-Semitic statements and ideas. His official accusers, four professors from the Romance Language Department, argued Knickerbocker had created an anti-Semitic faction within the department to curtail the influence of Jewish faculty and students. One observer believed Knickerbocker's faction wished "that City College could have the same kind of pure, white, Anglo-Saxon faculty which they thought they saw in Cornell, Princeton, Williams, and even to a certain extent at Columbia and Harvard."[106] Hillel's 1947 investigation into accusations against Knickerbocker showed that at the time he became department chair, 12 out of 37 tenure eligible faculty members were Jewish. However, in the ten year period of Knickerbocker's chairmanship up to the

---

[105] *The Campus*, March 6, 1947, p. 1, Archives and Special Collections, The City College of New York, New York City. Note that predominantly Jewish, black, and Christian groups all took similar positions against Wright.
[106] *Hillel News*, March 13, 1947, p. 3, Hillel Box, Archives and Special Collections, The City College of New York, New York City.

1947 Hillel report, only two out of 23 new tenure eligible appointees were Jewish.[107]

While the college's administration rejected evidence that anti-Semtism factored into Knickerbocker's faculty assignments, they did retroactively award a Jewish student, who had been passed over by Knickerbocker in favor of a gentile student, with top academic honors, citing a clerical error as the reason for the change. Furthermore, the Administration's own investigations showed Knickerbocker to clearly exhibit a pattern of anti-Semtic statements, warning an incoming faculty member about City College, "these students are different," because "more than two-thirds of the students are Jewish. They are always trying to put something over; they have no respect for authority and you can't treat them like gentlemen."[108] Knickerbocker asked another incoming instructor if he had ever dealt with any "cheap Jews," and warned that such described the majority of City College students, repeating the notion, "they could not be treated as gentlemen."[109] During WWII, Knickerbocker joked, "the Battle Hymn of the Jews" is "onward, Christian soldiers, we'll make the uniforms."[110] Underneath its crassness, Knickerbocker's anti-

[107] Only appointees to City College's day session had their teaching service count towards tenure awards. Knickerbocker defended himself against the charges of anti-Semitism by pointing out that many of his appointees to the night session were Jewish.
[108] Report of Special Committee Investigating Charges in the Romance Language Department, Knickerbocker Case, Box 5, Archives and Special Collections, The City College of New York, New York.
[109] (ibid.)
[110] (ibid.)

Semitism is symbolically unified in depriving Jews of social honor, drawing a stark symbolic boundary against Jews, thereby effecting social closure against them.[111]

Emerging separately in the fall of 1947, the Davis case concerned his administration of the Army Hall student dormitory. A trained economist, Davis had served as a financial adviser to President Wright during the war years. It was students living in Army Hall who noticed that black students all seemed to be roomed together. After investigating, a coalition of black and non-black students brought charges of segregation in Army Hall to President Wright who immediately assigned an official faculty investigatory committee, including the soon to be famous Psychology Professor Kenneth Clark.[112] The faculty investigatory committee found Davis guilty of segregating Army Hall in March of 1948. Under oath, Davis had admitted he tended to room black students together. However, he claimed that the practice fit patterns of self-segregation he believed he observed on campus. Noting other colleges and universities also practiced paternalistic segregation, he argued that he was only promoting the happiness of black students, assuming that such segregation fit their own roommate preferences.[113]

---

[111] The interrelationship between the dynamics of social closure and ideas of social honor are fundamental to Weber's thinking about status groups in general, and ethnic and racial groups as subtypes of status groups in particular.

[112] Clark's expert testimony on the psychological damage caused to African-American children by segregation was an important factor in the 1954 Supreme Court ruling in Brown vs. Board of Education outlawing educational segregation. Clark became the first African-American faculty member at City College to be awarded tenure in 1942, and served on the faculty for several decades.

[113] The record of the hearings conducted by the faculty investigatory committee does not show any black student requesting to be roomed with other black students. "Transcript of Hearings Before President's Committee To Investigate Complaints of Discrimination In Army Hall," Archives and Special Collections, The City College of New York, New York.

The faculty investigatory committee forcefully rejected Davis' claims, stating, "this basis for instituting the practice of generally assigning Negroes to rooms with other Negroes seems to this committee to be very unsound indeed and to be contrary to all of the traditions of this College."[114] The Investigatory Committee strongly rejected Davis' discriminatory practices by eloquently framing them within City College's civic identity.

> It is inherent in our democracy and the goals of democratic education which City College pursues that involuntary segregation of individuals on the basis of irrelevant factors such as color or religious beliefs is detrimental not only to the individuals so segregated but to the institution as a whole.

Upon receiving the faculty committee's report, Davis resigned his position as head administrator of Army Hall. However, in spite of the faculty committee's strong condemnation of Davis' discriminatory practices, President Wright transferred Davis to the Economics Department assigning him the position of Instructor. Wright claimed Davis' financial advising prior to his discriminatory acts at Army Hall warranted his transfer.

While on an organizational level, the Knickerbocker-Davis Affair surfaced a legitimation crisis at City College, arising from the gap between its civically color-blind organizational identity, and its toleration of prejudice and discrimination on an everyday basis, it marked a crossroads for the College's student body as well. Throughout the 1930's, City College had been the epicenter of a nationally organized

---

[114] "Report to the President," with "Transcript of Hearings Before President's Committee To Investigate Complaints of Discrimination In Army Hall," Army Hall Box, Archives and Special Collections, The City College of New York, New York.

pro-peace, anti-fascist, student movement (Cohen 1993). Throughout the decade students had brawled (sometimes quite literally) with the then City College President, Frederick B. Robinson, over issues of free speech, academic freedom and compulsory military training (Rudy 1949:404; Cohen 1993:108-118).[115] Robinson also waged a campaign of suppression against leftist elements within the student body and faculty that was especially aimed at a perceived communist menace. All told, Robinson's campaigns in the 30's resulted in 43 students being expelled, 38 suspended and hundreds more forced to appear before faculty disciplinary boards (Cohen 1993:108). The perception of a communist menace reached beyond Robinson's administration. Pre-war anti-communist efforts reached their peak at City College when the New York State Legislature appointed a Sub-committee known as the Rapp-Coudert Committee, to investigate "subversive" activity within the New York City municipal higher education system (Rudy 1949:450).[116] Due to the high rates of dramatic student activism and its persecution by administrative and governmental forces, City College became known colloquially as "the little red schoolhouse."

City College students were well aware of their "bad reputation," but liberal and leftist students fought bitterly over the real source of their dishonor. Oscar Berland, member of American Youth for Democracy, a Communist youth group, eloquently stated the leftist position in a letter to the editor of *The Campus* from

---

[115] Robinson was famously reported to have attacked students protesting compulsory ROTC training with an umbrella, in May of 1933 (Rudy 1949:418). Robinson claimed he was acting in self-defense and that in any event, his violence in the altercation was overblown.

[116] The pre-war red scare at City College had many victims, including Max Yeargen, an anti-imperialist African-American intellectual, and the important labor historian Philip Foner, who both lost their jobs due to suspected connections to the Communist Party.

Novermber of 1946. In the letter Berland argued that political activism could not be the cause of the College's "bad reputation" because "'respectable'" schools like Columbia and Harvard exhibited more activism than did City College. Rather, Berland asserted City College had "a 'bad name' because over 90% of our students are either Negro, Jewish, or Catholic."[117] According to Berland, it was not their political activities that caused City College students to be seen as deficiently American, but the fact that the vast majority of students were not members of the WASP ethnic majority. Moreover, rather than a matter of individual prejudice, Berland understood the exclusion of Jews, Blacks and Catholics as a structural reality implanted deeply in political-economy: "the fight for jobs and for a 'good name' must be a united fight against discrimination and unemployment. They are the roots of the problem and not straw men under our beds."[118]

Campus liberals, on the other hand, argued the confrontational protest tactics of the college's student left created the popular perception that City College students were a band of un-American, communist, rabble-rousers. Yet, in spite of its bad reputation, postwar student liberals saw hopeful signs that City College might be entering the mainstream of elite liberal institutions of higher education. In a column from May of 1948, Anatole Shub, student editor of *The Campus*, argued the College's

---

[117] "Letters to the Editor," *The Campus*, November 21, 1946, Archives and Special Collections, The City College of New York, New York.

[118] (ibid.) Hall writes of the political imaginary of the early phase of the long civil rights movement, especially those who drew constitutive links between civil rights and labor struggles: "Proceeding from the assumption that, from the founding of the Republic, racism has been bound up with economic exploitation, civil rights unionists sought to combine protection from discrimination with universalistic social welfare policies and individual rights with labor rights" (Hall 2005:1245-6).

reputation would be greatly improved by "less crowding, co-education and continuation of the fine public relations program."[119] While Shub painfully recognized "students come" to City College "because they have to, not because they want to," he also pointed out that in the areas of sports, journalism and dramatic productions, the college enjoyed the same kind of school spirit thought to be integral to the elite reputations of the Ivey League schools. In contrast to their reputation as overly intellectual, Shub noted "the College consistently maintains winning records against top-notch competition in every sport," beyond its consistently dreadful football team.[120]

Shub explicitly rejected Berland's leftist analysis of City College's reputational problem. According to Shub, the idea that "political leftism and race are responsible for the College's 'bad reputation'" was overblown. While true "that Communist shennanigans (sic) have done the College great harm, and also true that Jewish students will be discriminated against, these are only minor factors."[121] Writing one year prior to the student strike that would culminate the Knickerbocker-Davis Affair, Shub's hopeful attitude was buoyed by his evaluation of how the college, both students and administration, had handled the initial charges of Jim-Crowism against Professor Davis. Under Shub's editorial leadership, *The Campus* lauded the peaceable manner in which both President Wright, and the majority of the

---

[119] *The Campus*, May 5, 1948, p. 4, Archives and Special Collections, The City College of New York, New York. *The Campus* was established in 1908 and was the oldest and most prestigious of the student newspapers at City College.
[120] (ibid.)
[121] (Ibid.) Note that Shub uses the category of "race" when describing discrimination against Jews.

student body accepted Davis' resignation and reassignment, noting only the "regularly irregular" registered discontent over the process and outcome.[122]

In an editorial entitled "Democracy In Action," *The Campus* presented the procedural argument at the core of the liberal position. They found that the process by which the college investigated the charges of segregation against Davis and the fair manner in which the administration found Davis guilty "dwarfed in importance" the actual cessation of segregation itself. To the liberal *Campus*, the orderliness of a "trial-by-jury," the due process that afforded Davis a real but unsuccessful self-defense, and the fact that Davis voluntarily "purified" the situation by resigning as administrator of Army Hall, all while being allowed to keep his position as Instructor, spoke to the manner to which "democracy can clean its own house effectively and quietly." According to the editorial, the entire episode represented the potential for a new "dignity and honesty" within City College's political culture. Remarkably, according to the liberal viewpoint, increased "dignity and honesty" in City College political culture was more important than any particular political issue, even racial segregation.[123]

According to Armstrong and Bernstein (2008), how actors interpret the forms of domination they are subject to is systematically connected to the forms of political action they take. At stake for City College students in the interpretive struggle over

---

[122] "Davis Resigns as AH Director As Committee Upholds Charges," *The Campus*, April 8, 1948, Archives and Special Collections, The City College of New York, New York. The phrase "regularly irregular" was intended to rhetorically marginalize the student left.
[123] "Democracy in Action," *The Campus*, April 8, 1948, Archives and Special Collections, The City College of New York, New York.

the meaning of the two cases was not the guilt or innocence of the two professors, nor whether their actions amounted to racist discrimination, but rather whether the symbolic boundaries drawn by the two professors were manifestations of *institutionalized social boundaries* (Lamont and Molnar 2002), or the isolated acts of individuals. Leftists were convinced that Knickerbocker and Davis' racism represented the true institutional character of City College, and American life generally. For liberals, the question of whether Jews suffered from discrimination was not in dispute, but rather they tended to believe that due to the openness of U.S. institutions, such discrimination was relatively insignificant in determining the life chances of minority City College students.

Because both liberal and leftists were united in a common set of grievances, their dispute reveals a deeper interpretive conflict over the legitimacy they invested in actually existing American democracy. The liberal disposition believed Knickerbocker and Davis were guilty of discrimination as individuals and that normal institutional channels would eventually yield the firing of the two professors. Leftist tendencies, however, viewed Knickerbocker's and Davis' actions as indicative of institutional or systemic racism corrupting American institutions to their core, undermining their claim to be democratic. Tactics became a flashpoint of intra-student conflict because they symbolized the conflicting symbolic interests students invested in the legitimacy of American democracy as embodied in the liberal and leftist political dispositions. It was just these conflicting interests that drove the

struggle to constitute the larger student body as a unified collective actor that played out as a struggle over tactics.

Constructing the Collective Actor

The Student Sit-down

It may have seemed to liberal students in May of 1948, that both the Knickerbocker and Davis cases at City College were settled and that a liberal consensus was emerging on campus. Liberal students had reason to hope that City College was leaving behind both its organizational tendency to tolerate faculty prejudice, as well as its days of confrontational student activism. However, over the summer months the City Council of New York issued a report finding evidence that Professor William Knickerbocker had practiced egregious forms of anti-Semitism. The Council recommended the demotion and potential dismissal of Knickerbocker for "reprehensible and unworthy conduct."[124] The Council's report contradicted the one released years earlier by City College's administration which had completely exonerated Knickerbocker from all charges. In September of 1948, the school year at City College was inaugurated by student protest that would set the tone for the entire academic year.

New York City's Board of Higher Education (BHE), not The City Council, which held jurisdiction over City College.[125] The BHE had a chance to head off student protest by reopening the Knickerbocker case to investigation, an action

[124] The report is quoted from "City Council Asks Professor's Ouster," *The New York Times*, June 23, 1948.
[125] The Board of Higher Education was the forerunner of the Board of Trustees, the current day governing body of CUNY.

perhaps warranted by the fact that the City's popular assembly had found serious practices of anti-Semitism. The BHE was stuck between a rock and a hard place having already accepted the college administration's complete exoneration of Knickerbocker in 1946. Scheduled to meet in late September the stakes for the Board's meeting were immediately made clear when most of Knickerbocker's Spanish Literature class walked out of the first session refusing to be taught by someone they deemed a "bigot."[126] Rabbi Arthur Zuckerman, the director of the college's chapter of the Hillel Foundation, further ratcheted up the pressure on the Board by announcing his support for the student boycott.

Grasping the import of the charges of systematic anti-Semitism at an institution with a civically liberal identity and majority Jewish student body, the BHE deliberated well into the morning hours in their late September meeting. Regardless of the political dynamite they were holding in their hands, the BHE refused to reopen the Knickerbocker case. In a 15-4 vote, the BHE affirmed the college's original full exoneration of Knickerbocker. Dr. Ordway Tead, the Board's Chairman, noted Knickerbocker's 41 years of service to City College, stating, "the board appraised the man on his total life career and the evidence was overwhelming."[127] In siding with the college's administration the Board refused the notion that racial or ethnic favoritism may have been systematically practiced at City College.

---

[126] "20 Students Quite City College Class," *The New York Times*, September 21, 1948.
[127] "Board Bars Action on Knickerbocker," *The New York Times*, September 28, 1948.

City College students judged differently. On September 29, 1948, just two days after the Board's decision, two leftist groups, Students for Wallace,[128] and the communist linked American Your for Democracy (AYD), led a group of students in the labor tactic of a "sit-down" outside President Harry Wright's office.[129] Students arriving on campus that morning were "greeted" by graffiti stating "Stop Bigotry", "Oust Knickerbocker and Davis", as well as graffiti that associated Knickerbocker and Davis with Nazi fascism.[130] Beginning in the morning, the sit-down, which grew to at least 600 students at one point, lasted all through the day and night, as a small group of evening session students were permitted to keep vigil while chaperoned by Rev. John W. Darr Jr.[131] The sit-down began when a dozen students, one carrying a sign reading, "Join Us, Oust Jim Crow and Anti-Semitism from CCNY," marched up to President Harry Wright's office and upon being instructed to leave the building by a school administrator sat on the floor of the Lincoln Corridor. The demonstrators "sang folk songs to the accompaniment of a guitarist," while "speakers kept up continuous speeches against Professor Knickerbocker and Mr. Davis."[132]

At the high point of the demonstration, Dr. John Theobald, Dean of Administration, attempted to dissuade the leftists from disruptive actions, asserting,

---

[128] Students for Wallace supported Henry Wallace, Progressive Party candidate for President in 1948, and former Vice President under FDR.
[129] "Students Stage Sit-Down Protest; BHE Bars New Knickerbocker Probe." *The Campus*, September 30, 1948; "'Sit-Down' Staged at City College Over Exoneration of Professor". *The New York Times*, September 30, 1948.
[130] "Students Stage Sit-Down Protest." *The Campus*, September 30, 1948.
[131] Rev. John W. Darr Jr. was a Congregational Minister and candidate for the State Assembly on the American Labor party ticket. "'Sit-down' Staged at City College Over Exoneration of Professor". *The New York Times*, September 30, 1948.
[132] "Students Stage Sit-Down Protest; BHE bars New Knickerbocker Probe." *The Campus*, September 30, 1948, p. 4.

"this procedure will not solve the problem."[133] Rather than threatening the students, Theobald urged the students to adopt all legal and orderly means of protest to express their position on the cases. Perhaps resigned to the protest, Theobald, acting as head administrator that particular day,[134] permitted the students to remain sitting down and was even said to have "carried on a warm exchange with various students" for half an hour.[135] However, upon exiting Lincoln Corridor Theobald announced he did not recognize the student gathering as official. Meeting with reporters, Theobald noted many students had complained about the disruption the protest was causing and attempted to portray the protest as unrepresentative and contrary to the true function of the college. In particular, he discredited the idea the protest had been a *spontaneous* expression of student discontent, instead hypothesizing that the AYD had planned the whole sit-down. In doing so, Theobald also undercut the idea that the extraordinary tactics of the student leftists represented the legitimate will of the student body.[136]

Polletta suggests the narrative theme of spontaneity symbolically conveys "the indefinable moment when a group of separate individuals became a collective actor" (2006:34). While Polletta emphasizes the moral meanings "spontaneity" narratives carry, "spontaneity's" symbolic efficacy also flows from its potential to be seen as an *authentic* political emergence as against a cynical grasp at power. By discounting the

---

[133] "Students Stage Sit-Down Protest." *The Campus*, September 30, 1948.
[134] President Wright happened to be absent.
[135] "'Sit-Down' Staged at City College Over Exoneration of Professor", *The New York Times*, September 30, 1948.
[136] (ibid.)

spontaneity of the sit-down action, Theobald symbolically separated the protesters from the rest of the student body, portraying the interests of the protestors as cynical rather than authentic, thereby undercutting the potential unity of the student body as a collective actor.

Liberal student leaders joined with college administrators in delegitimizing the extraordinary tactics of the leftist led sit-down. Student council officers repeatedly urged the sit-down protesters not to do anything that would discredit the name of City College, with the Student Council Vice President saying the demonstrators were "no better than a lynch mob."[137] Acting quickly, 18 student groups, including the Student Council Executive Committee, all four class Presidents, fraternity and sorority groups, liberal groups, a Republican group, and even two student newspapers, released a joint statement against the sit-down tactic, claiming the sit-down came from a "small" and unrepresentative "segment of the student body."[138]

In a blistering editorial that called on the student body to "fight" until the BHE removed Knickerbocker, "a man clearly guilty of anti-Semitic discrimination," *The Campus* saved its sharpest excoriations for the "reprehensible conduct" of the sit-down protesters.[139] Calling the sit-down the methods of "force and violence," *The Campus* stated: "tactics like those adopted by the leaders of yesterday's demonstrations destroy the force of the arguments for the retirement of Professor

---

[137] (ibid.)
[138] "Statement by Student Leaders." *The Campus*, September 30, 1948.
[139] "Reprehensible Conduct." *The Campus*, September 30, 1948.

Knickerbocker."[140] *The Campus* editorial evoked the highest ideals of democracy in attempting to draw a contrast with leftists. Calling for "only democratic action," they labeled the sit-down, by contrast, "mob action," in spite of its controlled manner. They suggested that extraordinary political tactics were *by definition* expressions of "force and violence," and would only "invalidate the very principles we invoke in asking Professor Knickerbocker's retirement." In calling on the student body to resist the theory that "'the ends justify the means,'" and calling on them not to "take the law into their own hands," the *Campus* accused those participating in the sit-down of being "as guilty of undemocratic conduct as Professor Knickerbocker."[141]

The Campus represented a liberal standpoint within the democratic imaginary. Accordingly, the unfettered functioning of normal legal procedures represented the highest form of democracy. However, in attempting to uphold a procedural notion of democracy the *Campus'* argument ran into contradictions. Two separate official municipal bodies, the Board of Higher Education and the City Council, had each independently reviewed the Knickerbocker case and come to *opposite* conclusions. The liberal *Campus* nevertheless attempted to uphold the authority of each investigation.

> Professor Knickerbocker was cleared of the charges in a democratic fashion. Whether or not we like the decision, we must uphold the method. Councilman Hart's investigating committee examined the same testimony and came to an opposite conclusion. But the Council possesses only recommendatory power. Its decision was a result of honest, unbiased study and vindicated growing student resentment against Professor Knickerbocker.

[140] (ibid.)
[141] (ibid.)

In their next breath *The Campus* called for Knickerbocker's ouster, claiming, "the overwhelming majority of the students apparently feel the same way."[142] Furthermore, *The New York Times* noted, while the sit-down was organized by leftist groups, it "also drew a number of students unaffiliated with the groups in charge."[143] *The Campus'* tortured defense of procedural politics reveals beyond strategic considerations a deeper concern for the *normative meanings* of normal and extraordinary political tactics as symbolic actions.

An editorial appearing in the *Observation Post*, the more left leaning student newspaper at City College, responded to *The Campus'* editorial by also framing the "real essence" and "meaning of the sit-down strike" within the idiom of democracy.

> In our opinion, the student body of our college attempted to translate into action the democratic principles which they have been taught and in which they believe. They attempted to use in desperation the very tactics by which the economic and political progress of our country has been achieved. They attempted through mass action to bring about the changes that legal procedures eventually must. They forgot in the heat of the battle of ideals the formal dignity that the democratic process requires. They forgot the formal dignity, but they never lost the higher dignity of free men fighting for the basic principles of democracy.[144]

While the *Observation Post* recognized the sit-down action violated a formalist conception of democracy, they asserted the confrontational tactic was the essence of a *higher* conception of democracy. Furthermore, they argued "mass action" was the

---

[142] (ibid.)
[143] "'Sit-Down' Staged at City College Over Exoneration of Professor", *The New York Times*, September 30, 1948.
[144] "A Word on the Sitdown. . ." *The Observation Post*, October 6, 1948, p. 4, Archives and Special Collections, The City College of New York, New York.

means by which progress could be achieved and the most basic principles of democracy fought. According to the leftist political disposition, confrontational tactics expressed the urgency of Knickerbocker and Davis' crimes and connected them to something higher than institutional procedures, democratic justice: "this battle is the battle to affirm publicly that bigotry and hate have no place here and must be cleaned out. It is a democratic battle that will see and will abide by the laws of justice."[145]

The Great Hall Student Meeting

The liberal forces on the Student Council moved to gain control over the direction and tenor of student action in the two cases. Intending to fold student action back within the confines of normal political channels, they immediately called for an officially sanctioned all-student meeting to be held in the Great Hall. The administration approved the request. The liberal Council members intended the meeting to be purely informational, hoping that by airing the facts of the Knickerbocker case general student sentiment would turn away from extraordinary tactics towards more formal approaches for seeking Knickerbocker's removal.

The Great Hall meeting was an extraordinary scene. As many as 2,500 students packed the 2,175 seat auditorium, and the picture appearing in the *Times* showed City College faculty and administrators sitting forward in their seats intently observing the student proceedings.[146] In fact, Dean Theobald announced the administration would leniently enforce policy towards "cuts," as at one point during

---

[145] (ibid.)

[146] "2,000 Seek Ouster of Knickerbocker". *The New York Times*, October 1, 1948.

the proceedings the Assistant Dean of Student Life sent a note to all instructors requesting they "suspend (their) respective classes immediately and urge all students to go to the Great hall. Matters are being discussed which reflect on everyone connected with City College."[147] Ordway Tead and several politicians, including Walter R. Hart, the Democratic City Council member who had issued the report condemning Knickerbocker, also attended.

The Great Hall meeting was a collective political ritual of great emotional energy (Collins 2004), and students grasped it held the potential to constitute the student body as a collective actor. The volatile divide between liberals and leftists was on stark display as they struggled to steer the student body towards procedural or extraordinary tactics throughout the "stormy five-hour meeting" that *The New York Times* reported consisted of "shouting" and "near fist fights."[148] In spite of the intentions of liberals, and reflecting the social energy unleashed by the ritual, the informational meeting quickly moved towards adopting resolutions. According to the *Times* report, the adopted resolutions proved "that a representative group of students backed the ouster of (Knickerbocker) the teacher who has been twice exonerated by the Board of Higher Education."[149] While the Great Hall meeting revealed a student consensus supporting Knickerbocker's removal, the combustibility of the meeting revolved around attempts by leftist students to "lump" the Knickerbocker and Davis

---

[147] (ibid.)
[148] (ibid.)
[149] (ibid.)

cases together,[150] representing both as manifestations of a deep underlying structure of racism that undermined the reality of American democracy. Liberals resisted such efforts, not because they viewed the two cases as categorically different, but because they believed conflating the two cases in practice violated the due process rights of each professor.

The student body split the difference between the two positions, coupling a resolution to petition the state Commissioner of Education to intervene by dismissing both Knickerbocker and Davis with a threat of future "mass-action."[151] However, during the Student Council session held two days after the Great Hall meeting, liberal students again denied the legitimacy of the spontaneous democracy exercised in the Great Hall meeting by questioning its representativeness. Most liberals on the student council would not budge on the issues of lumping the two cases together in practice or on the potential use of "mass action" tactics. The two student factions deadlocked for over eleven hours, deliberating until 4 a.m., finally agreeing to put the five resolutions passed by students at the Great Hall Meeting before the entire student body in a referendum scheduled for the following Wednesday.[152]

The Student Referendum

The events that led up to the student referendum displayed a violent rift between liberal and leftist students on the City College campus. Clearly, a large portion of the City College student body was expending great energy on the politics

---

[150] On "lumping" see Zerubavel (1996).
[151] "2,000 Seek Ouster of Knickerbocker". *The New York Times*, October 1, 1948.
[152] "Group Joins Drive on Knickerbocker." *The New York Times*, October 3, 1948.

of the Knickerbocker and Davis cases. While liberals and leftists substantially agreed on common goals, both sides wanted Knickerbocker and Davis removed from the faculty and pledged to press the cases until they were, they could not agree on a common course to achieve these ends. The intra-student conflict revolved around what both sides understood to be the *social meaning* of particular tactics, i.e. extraordinary mass action versus formal channels. The problem of tactics was so fraught because they symbolized deeper interpretations of the normative meanings of "democracy," and the legitimacy of actually existing American democracy in particular. Liberal and leftist students asserted these deeper meanings on the morning of the student referendum, with *The Campus*, organ of liberal student sentiment at City College, publishing a "Referendum Extra!" Of the five resolutions put to the student body *The Campus* favored four, including recommendations to petition the State Commissioner of Education to dismiss Knickerbocker *and* Davis, however in separate petitions, formally upholding the due process rights of each as individuals.[153] The only resolution they urged students to reject was for a "sit-down" strike should President Wright fail to grant transfers out of Knickerbocker's class. In contrast, leftist oriented students released the first issue of a short-lived newspaper named *Free and Equal*, which urged students to vote for all five resolutions, echoing exactly the liberals on each question except for that of "mass action."[154]

---

[153] "We Recommend," *The Campus*, October 6, 1948, Archives and Special Collections, The City College of New York, New York.
[154] *Free and Equal*, Vol. 1, No. 1. Archives and Special Collections, The City College of New York, New York.

In urging students to reject confrontational "mass action" by arguing such tactics would "discard the principle of democratic procedure," *The Campus* showed that above all else the theory of democracy the liberal political disposition pursued was procedural.[155] However, much like Armstrong and Bernstein (2008) would predict, the proceduralism of the liberal standpoint was systematically related to its interpretation of the U.S. social structure. The liberal disposition had faith that the proper institutional authorities would be ultimately persuaded that Knickerbocker and Davis were guilty of acts warranting their dismissal. Liberal City College students believed that the U.S.' civic institutions had to be protected from the direct assault of mass action because it was those very institutions that protected American minorities, including Jews and Blacks; therefore, the cases could not be settled through student mass action because "a demonstration cannot 'prove' Knickerbocker's discrimination."[156] Liberals may have shared the leftist goal of ousting the two professors, but they expended greater energy defending the legitimacy of U.S. institutions from leftist mass action because liberals believed those very institutions were the epitome of democracy itself. Therefore, extraordinary politics were *un-democratic* precisely because they were confrontational, "disorderly," and emotional. Further, *The Campus* claimed that leftist tactics "presented the student body to the public as a riotous, self-righteous mob,"[157] thereby lending credibility to the

[155] "We Recommend," *The Campus*, October 6, 1948, Archives and Special Collections, The City College of New York, New York.
[156] (ibid.)
[157] (ibid.)

widespread view that City College students were outside the American mainstream.[158]

In *Free and Equal,* leftists also ignored instrumental questions regarding mass action tactics, instead arguing normatively that such tactics embody the highest form of democracy and represents the essence of democratic practice. An editorial addressing the meaning of "mass action" titled "Is It Democratic?" argued, "The Boston Tea Party, the American Revolution and the emancipation of the slaves are examples of mass action." In suggesting that such examples of "mass action" were "the only possible action to have been taken by a freedom loving people," leftists implied faith in proceduralism was politically hollow and empty. Having drawn an equivalence between mass and democratic action, they drew on the popularity of the labor movement amongst City College students to argue for the legitimacy of extraordinary tactics: "The American trade union movement was and is the essence of democratic action—despite the fact that it took one hundred and fifty years of struggle to be legally recognized."[159] Thus, for leftists, a tactic's legality was in no way the measure of its democratic validity.

To support the idea of mass action as the epitome of democratic practice, leftists offered a counter-narrative of the events leading to the referendum (Polletta 2006). While liberals saw the importance of the Knickerbocker case as having crystallized in the official City Council report, according to *Free and Equal,* "years of

---

[158] On the notion of an integrating "mainstream" culture in the U.S. of which immigrants seek to be a part, see (Alba and Nee 2005).
[159] "Is it Democratic?" *Free and Equal*, Vol. 1, No. 1. Archives and Special Collections, The City College of New York, New York.

legislation and years of top level bickerings culminated in last week's B.H.E. meeting," resulting in "no action on the case of Knickerbocker and to ignore the case of Davis, the Jim Crowist" completely.[160] For the leftists, proceduralism had only enabled official "whitewashing" of Knickerbocker and Davis' discriminatory practices, suggesting institutions worked to protect practices of bigotry rather than bar them. In contrast to the years of perceived institutional stonewalling, the leftist narrative portrayed both the Lincoln Corridor sit-down and the Great Hall assembly as *spontaneous democratic actions*, and therefore the *authentic* expression of the student will.[161] Furthermore, according to the leftist narrative, all political gains made by the students toward the goal of ousting the two professors could be traced directly to the sit-down action and Great Hall assembly: "a smattering of mass action, a democratic discussion held on the floor of Lincoln Corridor for 25 hours, re-opened the Knickerbocker-Davis case. It brought the issue to the public and forced President Wright to start talks again."[162] The *Observation Post* echoed this interpretation of the internal link between the sit-down and the Great Hall meeting:

> This is the true essence of the sit-down. This is its true meaning. That has been proven by the student assembly. Never in our days has the Great Hall resounded with a more clear and direct verdict from the student body. The sit-down dramatized as nothing else could do the truth of the situation. The Great Hall democratically affirmed student opinion.[163]

---

[160] (ibid.)
[161] See above on Polletta and spontaneity narratives (Polletta 2006).
[162] "Is it Democratic?" *Free and Equal*, Vol. 1, No. 1. Archives and Special Collections, The City College of New York, New York.
[163] "A Word on the Sit-Down…" *The Observation Post*, October 6, 1948, p. 4, Archives and Special Collections, The City College of New York, New York.

Because, according to the leftist view, as public rituals, the student sit-down and mass assembly expressed the student will in an *authentically democratic mode*, they carried the symbolic force to alter the political impasse imposed by the college's recalcitrant administration. Therefore, when on the eve of the referendum President Wright granted a transfer to the 18 students boycotting Knickerbocker's Spanish class, leftists argued the victory was "a direct result of the demonstrations in Lincoln Corridor and Great Hall."[164]

The contrasting student interpretations of the meaning of U.S. democracy also played out over whether the two cases should be conflated in political practice. Liberals demanded the formal due process rights of each professor as individuals be respected because, for them, the failure of the college's administration to take student demands seriously was merely an isolated failure of democratic institutional practices in the U.S; a failure that should be redressed by appealing up the formal chain of authority. Leftists, on the other hand, believed Knickerbocker and Davis' racist practices were representative of U.S. institutions as a whole, and therefore viewed the college's refusal to dismiss Knickerbocker and Davis as yet another example of the gap between the U.S.' democratic identity and it's institutional practices: "when the lawyers, politicians, and college administrators become corrupt, when they fail to protect the right of students to be free from racial and religious persecution . . . it is up

[164] "Extra," *Free and Equal*, Vol. 1, No. 1. Archives and Special Collections, The City College of New York, New York.

to the students to fight back to protect themselves."[165] Leftists insisted on "lumping" the two cases together because they saw them as equally representative of the pervasive racism that undermined the realization of true democracy in America.

Leftists evoked the social boundaries they saw at the core of U.S. society in headlines in *Free and Equal* that screamed "Student Vote Can Oust Two Racists," and "Anti-Semitism and Jimcrow—Twin Threats to Democracy!"[166] According to the leftist view, the Knickerbocker and Davis cases had to be lumped together because as *equivalent modes of racism*, they represented the anti-democratic forces in American life: "Jim Crow and anti-Semitism are twin examples of dangerous racism, and the Davis case and the Knickerbocker case are irrevocably intertwined. It is necessary to fight bigotry wherever it appears—not only because it revolts our sense of decency, but because when minority rights are destroyed, majority rights are soon to follow."[167] According to the leftists, City College's administration was more concerned with Knickerbocker and Davis' rights than with the rights of students to pursue their education free from discrimination: "the administration holds that these men have the right to teach in a 'free, democratically run" institution. For leftists, what was at stake was real vs. sham democracy, "anyone who practices it (discrimination) in any capacity is therefore contravening the professed policy of the

---

[165] "Is It Democratic?" *Free and Equal*, Vol. 1, No. 1. Archives and Special Collections, The City College of New York, New York.
[166] *Free and Equal*, Vol. 1, No. 1. Archives and Special Collections, The City College of New York, New York.
[167] (ibid.)

college, aside from the fact that he is criminally contradicting the cornerstone of American democracy—equality."[168]

Leftists understood the political significance of the Knickerbocker-Davis Affair as a single episode in a much larger struggle to achieve real democracy in the United States. *Free and Equal* achieved this by publishing a smattering of letters representative of anti-democratic currents. One anonymous letter extolled Knickerbocker's perceived anti-Semitism stating, "there will be a day when the American people will rise up against Jewish aggression . . . If I were president I would place every one of you on Staten Island." Another letter stated, "Obnoxious sheenies (sic) like you should keep your mouth shut. City College is run for Americans, not kikes (sic)."[169]

The liberal perspective won the day, as voting on the student referendum sided with *The Campus*, affirming all measures except the call for the sit-down strike. While the democratic imaginary clearly afforded student conflict throughout the KDA, these dueling understandings of American democracy nevertheless show that both student factions made their interpretations from *within a common space of meaning*. While they struggled to define the true meaning of democracy, and how American institutional structures signified against that background understanding, all students nevertheless affirmed democracy as the highest political good. In spite of the contentiousness of the struggle between liberals and leftists, the conflict played out in

---

[168] "Anti-Semitism and Jimcrow," *Free and Equal*, Vol. 1, No. 1. Archives and Special Collections, The City College of New York, New York.
[169] "As Others See it…" *Free and Equal*, vol. 1, no. 1. Archives and Special Collections, The City College of New York, New York.

an overlapping interpretive space that also served as the condition of possibility of both camps jointly *imagining* an alternative vision of normative citizenship. It was this collective imagining that would, in turn, serve as the symbolic vehicle through which the student body constructed themselves as a collective actor.

The Strike

The back and forth position takings over tactics between the liberal and leftist political dispositions continued throughout the fall and early spring semesters, becoming a central issue in the Student Council election as well as erupting over a student protest during a City College basketball game at Madison Square Garden. Divided for eight months over the question of tactics, students may never have united as a collective actor if not for the revelations by Judge Hubert Delany, a broadly respected African-American civil rights leader and a 1923 graduate of City College. In resigning from the Alumni Association's investigatory committee into the Knickerbocker and Davis cases he had been chairing, Delany cited his belief that President Wright had "no real determination to end discrimination" at the college.[170] Following Delaney's revelation, even *The Campus* called for a strike action, stating, "it seems our faith" in the college's good will "has been misplaced."[171] While the liberal acquiescence to the strike action on the heels of Delaney's intervention may appear as if the student's interpretive conflict could only be resolved through exogenous factors (Kaufman 2004), liberal students were not "converted" to the leftist viewpoint. Rather, the space of meaning provided by the shared imaginary and

---

[170] Archives and Special Collections, *Hillel Box*. The City College of New York, New York.
[171] "Given Enough Rope," *The Campus*, March 29, 1949.

idiom of democracy allowed both liberal and leftist students to creatively imagine new conceptions of democratic citizenship (Emirbayer and Mische 1998:984).

Again, the Student Council decided to put a prospective strike to a student-wide vote. Students produced flyers, leaflets, and an open letter attempting to unify support behind the strike action. Student arguments converged on a common set of themes asserting the interconnected nature of democracy, education and citizenship, all of which stood in opposition, in the student conception, to racism in American life. For instance, contrary to an individualist conception of higher-education as a means to a professional career, strike leaders argued that should students fail to take action they would prove "that CCNY is not a student community interested in education thru (sic) democracy, but simply a degree."[172] Through a series of oppositions between, on the one hand, *active, public, democratic practice*, and on the other, passive, apathetic individualism, the Open Letter conceived of an internal link between democracy and education arguing, "should you (the student body) fail to vote yes on strike action you will have proven to all that you deserve nothing better in the future then (sic) you have received in the past. Should you vote no on the strike action, you will never have call for recourse on this issue."[173] According to the letter, for the largely minority (meaning Jewish, black and Catholic) student body, democratic citizenship meant acting in public against "racism and discrimination."[174] However, failing to strike was

---

[172] Knickerbocker-Davis Box, Archives and Special Collections, City College of New York.
[173] (ibid.)
[174] (ibid.)

akin to surrendering one's right to speak against racism more generally in American life.

By striking, then, City College students understood themselves to be challenging the institutionalized social boundaries that limited the life chances of minorities in all spheres of American life. Indeed, one flyer argued individual merit and talent could not overcome institutionalized racism, stating: "we must realize that ousting Davis and Knickerbocker will do more to insure no job and graduate school discrimination against us than all the A's . . . we can muster."[175] Another insisted, "discrimination in the engineering field is aimed at us, Jews, Negroes and Women . . . we can now grab an opportunity to strike a blow against discrimination by fighting for the ouster of Davis and Knickerbocker."[176] If solidaristic action was necessary, the flyer further argued that only picketing and boycotting could leverage firms into reforming their discriminatory cultures, asserting, "there is no real job security in hoping the employer will overlook the fact that you are a Negro, Jew, Catholic or a member of any other minority, in considering you for employment."[177]

Contrary to a view of American democracy as offering equal treatment to individuals regardless of their race, creed or color, City College students united through a conception of citizenship that forged fundamental links between anti-racism, public political action, and democracy, meant to symbolically confront prevailing forms of social exclusion. In their Open Letter, the new liberal-leftist

---

[175] (ibid.)
[176] (ibid.)
[177] (ibid.)

coalition argued that individualistic views of higher education severed any connection between education and democratic political activity, asserting, "should you vote no . . . you will have proven forever that you are an education, psych or tech major, and not a student citizen."[178] Furthermore, they asserted, "if after four years of having every possible cooperative action blocked and ridiculed you can still remain apathetic and calmly vote 'no', then you will have proven that you are not a *citizen or a student*, and do not deserve democracy in any form."[179]

Epilogue and Conclusion

The intra-student conflict was not aimed at gaining more material resources, greater access to a polity from which they were excluded, or at equal recognition for Jews and Blacks as social identities. Rather, it was aimed at the background of normative meanings and assumptions about American democracy against which Knickerbocker's anti-Semitism and Davis' Jim-Crowism gained their significance. Through much of the KDA the liberal and leftist political dispositions that embedded students within contrasting normative background understandings of the legitimacy of actually existing American democracy drove students to pursue divergent courses of action in spite of a consensus that Knickerbocker and Davis should be dismissed from the City College faculty. The contrasting investments of the liberal and leftist dispositions were deep and durable, as evidenced by the deep emotions and even physical violence the conflict unleashed. While a deep normative clash over the

---

[178] (ibid.)
[179] (ibid.)

meaning and reality of American democracy, the student conflict nevertheless unfolded within a shared symbolic space. In essence, the student conflict over tactics should be understood as having taken place within, but also over a common space of meaning, the democratic social imaginary.

It was in and through their common location in the democratic social imaginary that students were able to creatively *re-imagine* the demands of democratic citizenship. The practical solidarity students enacted in their strike was based on an idea of citizenship as active anti-racist public practice. While being located within a common space of meaning allowed liberal and leftist students to imagine new conceptions of democratic citizenship, that both Jews and blacks understood themselves as racial minorities allowed City College students to build practical solidarity by positioning racial minorities as the ideal subjects of democracy. Against liberal individualistic idioms of democracy, City College students united within solidaristic idioms that defined those, such as Jews and blacks, who suffer from systemic forms of oppression, as the highest interpreters of the meaning and practice of democracy. Indeed, such anti-racist solidaristic idioms of democracy were performatively effective, as a large majority of the City College student body would risk their futures as individuals by voting for and joining in the strike.

Theoretically, when analysts subordinate cultural meaning to what they assume are the anterior instrumental interests of actors, they risk missing that "culture is often not just a medium of individual or collective action, it is very much what is at stake in both the means and the ends" of social practice (Friedland and Mohr

2004:12). The divide between the liberal and leftist political dispositions at City College cannot be mapped onto traditional explanatory variables, such as divisions of class, ethnicity, or underlying network connections. Rather, the case of the Knickerbocker-Daivs Affair at City College reveals the ways actors are driven by their normative investments. While the conflict between the liberal and leftist political dispositions was significant, consuming the student body and resulting in near fistfights and other forms of violence, it was ultimately overcome through the collective practice of the creative imagination (Zerilli 2005). In striking, students did not unify around a class, ethnic, party, or political identity or ideology. Rather, they unified through their imagining of democratic citizenship as active anti-racist practice, a practice embodied in their massive strike.

Not quite the paragon of civically minded liberalism that it is often remembered as, The City College of New York officially tolerated anti-black and anti-Semitic racism into the 1950's. From a purely instrumental standpoint, the student strike of April 1949 was a failure. The Davis case was never re-opened, and he remained on faculty until voluntarily leaving for another academic position in the early 1950's. Knickerbocker stepped down as chairperson of the Romance Language Department in 1950, but never admitted guilt of any sort, and he remained on faculty until he reached the mandatory retirement age several years later.[180] While the college's administration did not acquiesce to the specific demands of the impressive

[180] The alumni investigatory committee from which Delaney resigned ultimately found inconclusive evidence in the Knickerbocker case, stating, "it cannot be said with any degree of certainty that Professor Knickerbocker was anti-Semitic (but) by the same token it cannot be said that he was not," *The Campus*, September 25, 1950, p. 1.

student strike, the Knickerbocker-Davis Affair did contribute to a new era at City College, exemplified by the hiring of Buell Gallagher as President Wright's replacement, in 1952.

Not since 1904 had City College looked beyond its own ranks for an educator of national, or even international prominence, to fill the position of President. Ralph Bunche, the world famous African-American scholar, liberal activist, and 1950 recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize, was City College's first choice to replace Wright. However, when he opted to stay at The United Nations, City College turned to Buell Gallagher, the former President of the traditionally Black Talladega College, and author of, among other works on race relations, the bestselling "Color and Conscience." The transition to Gallagher's administration, on the heels of the Knickerbocker-Davis Affair, spelled the end of officially tolerated anti-Semitism at City College.[181] Throughout the 50's and 60's, Gallagher would become the outsized champion of liberalism at City College. The politically assertive Gallagher would eliminate the gap between civic identity and organizational practice at the college, measured in part by a previously unthinkable fact, that of Gallagher's broad popularity and even adoration amongst the City College student body.

While the student activism of the Knickerbocker-Davis Affair cannot fully account for why City College moved to consolidate its liberal regime in the early 1950's by anointing Buell Gallagher President, in taking City College as their

[181] The question of official racism in how color-blind admissions practices operated to exclude black and Puerto Rican students in New York City would be dramatically raised by the Open Admissions crisis of 1969.

institutional site of struggle, students challenged the reality of liberal citizenship patterns in an institutional field of higher education clefted by ethnically exclusionary principles. The democratic imaginary provided a space of meaning within which students were able to challenge the deepest assumptions of American citizenship, and imagine radical alternatives. Students overcame their internal divisions in constructing a vision of educational citizenship that actively sought solidarity and social equality as the active realization of democracy itself. Central to the unifying power of the idiom of democracy was the fact that the majority of City College students, Black and Jewish alike, saw themselves, and each other, as racial minorities. In contrast to the majority of whiteness studies that show the powerful incentive for the majority of racialized immigrants to seek the status and privileges of whiteness, Jewish and Black City College students of the late 1940's understood themselves and each other to be the most authentic democratic subjects because of their similar histories and experiences of systematic exclusion in the world in general, and the U.S. in particular.

As a machine for the American Dream, City College is usually remembered as exemplary of liberal patterns of citizenship in the United States. The Knickerbocker-Davis Affair occasioned a crisis of legitimacy at City College, arising from the gap between its civically color-blind organizational identity, and its practical toleration of prejudice and discrimination on an everyday basis. Importantly, when City College students confronted the gap between organizational identity and everyday practices, their symbolic repertoires were not constrained by the deep background assumptions

of political liberalism, so much as they made the terms of that deep culture the very object of their political struggle.

The shared systems of exclusion underlying the experiences of City College students led to robust visions of deeper and more significant forms of anti-racist democracy, forms that threatened to radically alter the privileges accrued by the WASP elite. City College students were not successful in ousting Knickerbocker and Davis, however, their challenge to the fundaments of American citizenship shook the ground of meanings and taken for granted assumptions by which City College was administered. Through his activist Presidency, Buell Gallagher would successfully usher in a liberal era at the college during which its institutional practices aligned with its civic identity.

While the Knickerbocker-Davis Affair emerged out of a broad political culture in which actors enmeshed in a wide array of meanings attempted to interpret the fundamental meaning of democracy. While the leftist political disposition was far from dominant at City College throughout the 30's and 40's, politics, in part, were driven forward by a continuous clash over the nature of American society and the meaning of democracy. This active political culture sustained broad interpretations, in which quite radical critiques of U.S. society circulating freely within the college's public sphere. Whether liberals liked it or not, they were compelled to publicly contended with leftist imaginings of democratic citizenship and solidarity. In some cases, as in the Knickerbocker-Davis Affair, radical imaginings of democracy constituted the entire student body in solidaristic action.

However, as the repression of the left carried out by the U.S. state as part of the enforcement of cold war liberal nationalism manifested at City College, the political culture on campus drastically narrowed. In the same period of the 1950's, as official and informal anti-Semitism was no longer tolerated at City College, and a larger regime of meritocratic citizenship was instituted nationally in which academic achievement was valorized over ethno-racial characteristics, Jews at City College ceased to identify as racial minorities, instead identifying simply as white. Indeed, the radical, anti-racist, social democratic phase of the long civil rights movement at City College came to an end with the ascendance of Buell Gallagher.

It should be noted that in the first phase of the long civil rights movement at CCNY, *sometimes* Jews and blacks, and liberals and leftists made common cause, but not always. The point is not that there was once a powerful unitary anti-racist, social democratic mass movement on the City College campus that was snuffed out by anti-Communist repression in the 50's. However, mainstream liberal politics were "entangled" with anti-racist black and Jewish politics, as well as radical social democratic and communist politics. Focusing on the relationship between leftist politics and the civil rights movement, Dawson writes, "I contend that as long as black radicalism was entangled with numerous other social and political forces, any given political moment contained a number of different futures (or states)" (Dawson 2013:68).[182]

---

[182] Dawson does not, however, name Jewish civil rights politics as one of the most important forces with which black radicalism was entangled at the time of the Knickerbocker-Davis Affair: "Circa 1948 the key entanglements of black radical movements in the United States

For Dawson, the entanglement of movements has its most powerful force and latent potentiality in the productivity of the political imagination they make possible. To isolate a movement from parallel political imaginings narrows everyone's field of vision. Dawson writes, "by having these separate movements articulated with black radical movements, there existed many different potential democratic futures that were more unrealizable and, just as important, unimaginable if black radicalism became isolated" (ibid.:69). Thus, also for Dawson, in disentangling various movements, the demobilization of the left during the cold war drastically curtailed the political cultural space for imagining alternative futures. "An effect of the sundering was to collapse these futures, as political cooperation between multiple movements ended and democratic futures faded from the imagination and were assigned to the realm of the 'impossible' (ibid.).

The ascent to hegemony of liberal nationalism at City College would significantly narrow the political culture of students. The robust, expansive, and creative political imagination amongst City College students, driven to political praxis by an obsession with the meaning of democracy in the United States, would settle down towards mundane objects and affairs. In the late 1950's, political controversies were as likely to revolve around the dearth of student parking spaces on campus, rather than the grand significance of faculty racism in a global project of democracy. At the same time, the place of The City College of New York within the

---

were with the civil rights movement; the labor movement, particularly the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO); political movements of the black Atlantic, particularly anticolonial movements; and a sprinkling of other international radical movements" (Dawson 2013:69).

larger institutional field of higher education was transforming after WWII, as was the meaning of membership within its student body. These processes manifested institutionally in the way the college constructed the "meritorious student" through its admissions practices. It is to this history, and its significance for City College's particular production of educational citizenship, that I now turn.

Chapter 4

Constructing the "Meritorious Student": The Non-Academic Origins of the Admissions Practices of The City College of New York, 1849-1970

In the introduction, I sketched in broad and abstract terms several institutional and structural intersections between the structure of citizenship and institutions of schooling in modern societies. This chapter, and the next, focuses on the place of higher education in the structure of what T.H. Marshall called *social citizenship*. Marshall's influential essay "Citizenship and Social Class," delivered as the Alfred Marshall lectures at Cambridge shortly after the Second World War in 1949, famously traced the development of three prongs of modern citizenship, civil, political and social, through the 18th, 19th and first half of the 20th centuries of British history (Marshall 1964). According to Marshall, civil citizenship refers to the rights to individual freedoms that establishes the rule of law over a national space and enable market exchange and the growth of capitalism (Marshall 1964:71). Political citizenship refers to the rights to participation in political decision making, or the right to participate in the making of the laws to which one will be subject (Marshall 1964:71-72). Finally, social citizenship refers to a range of rights from "a modicum of economic welfare and security to the right to share to the full in the social heritage

and to live the life of a civilized being according to the standards prevailing in the society" (Marshall 1964:72).[183]

Writing at the dawn of the brief golden age of the modern welfare state, Marshall carried out his investigation into the historical development of modern citizenship in order to explore the tensions between the ideals of equality upon which modern citizenship is based and modern class systems. Marshall wondered, in the face of what he saw as the fundamental post-war commitment of British society to a robust welfare state, "Is it still true that basic equality, when enriched in substance and embodied in the formal rights of citizenship, is consistent with the inequalities of social class?" (ibid.:70). Because industrialized societies mixed socialist and market economic principles, Marshall believes that social class, or systemic economic inequality, is still compatible with modern egalitarian forms of citizenship. However, far from existing independent of one another, Marshall argues that the particular ways in which modern societies structure citizenship in turn decisively structures economic inequality: "citizenship has itself become, in certain respects, the architect of legitimate social inequality" (ibid.:70). For Marshall, the particular ways societies structure citizenship goes a long way towards determining both the forms of systematic inequality as well as their legitimacy.

In his historical analysis, Marshall links the three subtypes of citizenship he traces to particular institutional domains. Civil citizenship, with its orientation to the

---

[183] Marshall's theorization of social citizenship seems to not only root membership to a national space, but his emphasis on "the social heritage" and use of civilizational discourses might imply a grounding in nationalism.

rule of law and the freedoms of the individual, is realized through the courts. Political citizenship, with its orientation towards participation in collective decision-making, is manifest in local and national parliamentary bodies. Social citizenship, in slight contrast, corresponds to two different institutions whose relationship to each other in Marshall's explication is not entirely clear: "The institutions most closely connected with (social citizenship) are the educational system and the social services" (ibid.). While a bevy of contemporary analysts have used Marshall's now classic essay as a foundation from which to analyze the rise and fall of modern welfare states,[184] the internal relationship between institutions of schooling and social citizenship has not received the same kind of sustained attention from historical sociologists.

If on the one hand the institutional links between citizenship and education have rarely been made explicit by recent historical sociologists,[185] it is not correct to suggest they have been ignored. Indeed, the articulation of citizenship and educational institutions underlies the normative and analytical assumptions of the

---

[184] For instance, Somers suggests the explosion of interest in Marshall's theorization of modern citizenship in the 1990's and 2000's, as manifest in the explosion of citations and canonization of "Citizenship and Social Class," is an ironic result of the late 20th century crisis and decline of social citizenship as embodied in the effective functioning of welfare state institutions that were meant to guarantee a minimum of material security (Somers 2008: 147-170). However, she does not mention the second institutional prong Marshall places at the foundation of social citizenship, education.

[185] For an important exception, see the path-breaking theorization of the legitimating effects of education as an institution explicitly framed by the conceptualization of citizenship in Meyer (1977). This essay is one of the founding works of the new-institutional school in sociological analysis that has consistently analyzed the interrelationship of institutions of schooling and citizenship.

robust field of the sociology of status attainment.[186] In measuring the effects of ascribed and achieved characteristics in status careers, and the links between educational attainment and the occupational structure, the field of status attainment studies assumes a particular notion of social citizenship in which the equality of citizens is an equality of opportunity (not of outcome), and the function of the educational system is to sort students into positions according the abstract principles of merit. Again, in 1948, observing the increasing interrelationship between schooling outcomes and occupational achievement (Marshall 1964:108), Marshall understood the modes of articulation between educational institutions and the occupational system instantiated particular forms of social citizenship: “The conclusion of importance to my argument is that, through education in its relations with occupational structure, citizenship operates as an instrument of social stratification” (ibid.: 110). Indeed, sociologists have since Sorokin understood schools to function as “sieves,” sorting individuals into social-occupational positions (Stevens et al. 2008). Just how schools function in this regard, whether they sort based on the genuine application of abstract definitions of merit or rather based on subtle judgments rooted in racial, class, gender, or other ascribed characteristics of the student, has been a central concern of sociologists because the answer to such questions bear directly upon *the legitimacy* of the inequality thereby produced. Studies of status attainment

---

[186] The classic in the field is (Blau and Duncan 1967). For an interesting analysis of the missing or implicit “image of society” which the status attainment research requires in order to be sensible but that is never reflexively expressed, see (Knottnerus 1987).

and schooling are studies of the very legitimacy of modern regimes of citizenship organized as meritocracies.

However, the importance of education, and in particular higher education, in relation to social citizenship can be examined from a different angle. Today, the acquisition of a four-year college degree more frequently marks the boundary between economic security and insecurity, or one's ability to attain a middle class standard of living (Lavin and Hyllegard 1996; Stevens et al. 2008:130-1). Moreover, this secular trend has been greatly exacerbated by the Great Recession of 2008 (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2013).[187] As Brubaker argues, the structuration of citizenship is a powerful instrument of social closure (Brubaker 1992:21-34), the boundaries of which govern access to valued resources. Indeed, theorists of social closure, all the way back to Weber, the original source, have analyzed how educational institutions operate as instruments of social closure, restricting access to valued resources, such as well rewarded occupational positions, to those upon whom they bestow the proper credentials (Collins 1979; Parkin 1979; Murphy 1988; Karabel 1984, 2005). While most social closure theorists have examined such closure processes as mechanisms of reproduction of class, status and ethnic *elites*, few have explicitly explored the fact that, in the U.S. access to higher educational credentials more and more determine not just elite status, but access to the "modicum of

---

[187] Bureau of Labor Statistics. 2013. "Earnings and Unemployment Rates by Education Attainment," Washington D.C.: United States Department of Labor, retrieved on January 7, 2014, (http://www.bls.gov/emp/ep_chart_001.htm).

economic welfare" that, according to Marshall (1964:72), encompass the rights of social citizenship.

In underdeveloped welfare states such as the U.S., where economic well being is strongly correlated with achievement of a four-year college degree, the boundary governing access to higher education credentials doubles as the mark dividing those included from those excluded from full social citizenship. Thus, when institutions of higher education select for admission from among a pool of prospective students they are defining the select as "meritorious," and thereby *worthy* of the full rights of social citizenship.[188] However, as David Karen argues, "abstracted from particular historical and sociological contexts, [merit] is a purely formal criterion . . . Thus, it is not merit as such, but the particular content of what is defined as meritorious and how it came to be defined that way that is at issue'' (as quoted in Tsay et al. 2003: 25). Indeed, merit can be defined in any number of ways such as achieved grade point average, scores on standardized intelligence tests, perceived or projected intellectual ability, character, athletic abilities, leadership qualities, artistic talent, emotional intelligence, the list is perhaps infinite. Adding to the conceptual fluidity of the category "merit" is that even if consensus could be reached as to what qualities should count as meritorious, any system of measurement of such qualities would likely be eminently contestable. In making their admissions decisions, then, institutions of higher education, with significant consequences, fix in practice what is in fact entirely fuzzy.

---

[188] On the symbolic logic of the worthy vs. unworthy underlying the historical development and ongoing structure of social citizenship in regards to the welfare state, see (Katz 1990). On the "rites of institution" performed by higher education in assimilating individuals across a boundary and into a privileged status, see (Bourdieu 1996:102-115).

Furthermore, symbolic boundaries separating the fully meritorious student from the partially meritorious may be drawn not at the border of the educational institution, but internally. For instance, from the 1909 on, City College had an Evening Session whose students were categorized as a different class of students, not entitled to the same rights as day Session students. In the 1930's the college began charging Evening Session students tuition while Day Session students were legally entitled to pursue their degrees tuition free. By the 1950's, many Evening Session students were only admitted as associate's degree seeking students rather than bachelor's degree students. Such differences are significant because research shows wide differences in lifetime earnings when comparing holders of the A.A. and B.A. degrees (Lavin and Hyllegard 1996; Stevens et al. 2008:130-1). In this way, admission into the institution was not the only relevant boundary governing full inclusion within the relevant status of educational citizenship, City College also marked significant and consequential boundaries within its admitted student population.[189]

Since social closure theorists have generally been concerned with the reproduction of elite groups who monopolize the very top positions within modern societies, they have ignored broader questions embedded in how institutions of higher education define merit. If economic wellbeing is so strongly correlated with attainment of a four-year college degree, should access to such degrees be thought of as an earned privilege or a right? Do the principles of meritocracy in higher education

---

[189] On the robustly consequential markings of internal boundaries within organizations in larger processes of categorical inequality, see (Tilly 1998), and below.

require societies to set a finite number of positions over which individuals compete with equal opportunities to achieve? Or do the principles of meritocracy require a societies to make a college degree available to everyone willing and capable of pursuing it? Should the educational rights embedded in social citizenship be conceived as a matter of equal opportunity or equal outcome?[190] In other words, how merit is defined instantiates a particular logic or regime of citizenship, defining the status as either ascribed or achieved, determining whether opportunities or outcomes will be equalized, and whether the relevant social and symbolic boundaries of inclusion/exclusion will be drawn at the edge of formal citizenship, or also internally, manifesting in unequal symbolic hierarchies within a formally equal status. In defining the "meritorious" student, institutions of higher education literally define who is *worthy* of full inclusion in contemporary social citizenship.[191]

Indeed, just these questions are raised by the Open Admissions crisis at City College and CUNY more broadly. Open Admissions entitled every high school graduate of the City of New York the right to attend some branch of the CUNY system, including the Community Colleges. While citizens of the State of California already had the right to attend a college, the California model of higher education split students into three tiers and did not necessarily facilitate the movement of

---

[190] I would hasten to add the question of whether the status of social citizenship should be linked with educational attainment whatsoever? Does the tight articulation of institutions of education and labor markets impoverish both our ability to imagine the forms equality can and should take, as well as the larger purpose of education? For a historical analysis and contemporary meditation on the forms and modes of imagining modern equality, see (Rosanvallon 2013).

[191] On the relationship between ascribed symbolic boundaries of moral worthiness and citizenship, see Katz (1989); Goldberg (2008).

students admitted to associate's degree programs into the bachelor's degree programs. Open Admissions at CUNY, on the other hand, both assumed that all students, with proper remedial attention for those whom required it, could complete the more prestigious and economically valuable bachelor's degree, and took the achievement of a four-year degree as the institutional goal for all students. Thus, the most radical component of the 1970 Open Admissions policy at CUNY transformed the distributional logic of higher educational credentials from equal opportunity to equal outcome (Attewell and Lavin 2007:16-7).

Thus, the Open Admissions policy was intended to *universalize* access to the credentials attached to a four-year college degree.[192] In analyzing the social policies of the late 60's and early 70's War on Poverty, Skocpol argues for the political viability of just such universally structured programs, as opposed to "targeted" programs that shift resources from the rich to the poor (such as Food Stamps) or carve out what might be perceived as special privileges for categorical groups, such as Affirmative Action (Skocpol 1990; see also Wilson 1987). According to Skocpol, targeting particular categorical segments of society, whether by race, class, gender, etc., for redistributive social policies establishes zero-sum relations between citizens, creating disincentives for the middle and upper classes to support anti-poverty programs. She therefore argues that advocates of a more equal society should seek social programs that are structured according to a universalist logic so that the widest possible swath of the public may identify with them.

[192] For all high school graduates of New York City, that is.

However, while the Open Admissions policy was *in fact* structured in plainly universalist terms (*every* high school graduate was entitled by right to be admitted to CUNY with a reasonable expectation that the university would labor towards everyone's graduation from a four-year program), critics did not view the policy as such. Instead, critics argued the policy violated what they believed had made City College a shining exemplar of America's liberal creed, that being the school's ancient tradition of meritocratic academic standards and admissions practices. In the words of then Vice President Spiro Agnew in 1970, open admissions would transform CUNY into a "four-year community college" (as quoted in Karabel 1972:38). Karabel has trenchantly delineated the critical response to the policy of universalization of access:

> Open admissions has been criticized on the grounds that it was not an outgrowth of purely educational considerations . . . Implicit (in the criticisms) is the belief that open admissions represents an unwonted intrusion of politics into the educational process. The underlying image is of the academic institution as an ivory tower, consecrated to intellectual excellence and suddenly defiled by the crude political demands of people unfit to pass through the gate." (Karabel 1972:38).

To those who viewed Open Admissions as a fundamental challenge to the principles of meritocracy, such as City College alumnus Irving Kristol, the policy had "precious little to do with education itself, and almost everything to do with ethnic and racial politics" (as quoted in Karabel 1972:38). In arguing that Open Admissions was implemented to appease the narrow *political* demands of militant racial minority groups, Kristol and other critics of the policy paradoxically portrayed the universalization of access as a particularistic hand out to racial minority groups that undermined the sacred principles of the American liberal creed.

However, Kristol's argument that open admissions replaced a concept of student merit based on educational principles with one based on academically superfluous political principles relies on an incorrect view of City College's actual historical admissions practices. On the one hand, critics were correct, after an initial period in which the college's admissions criteria were explicitly designed to favor Protestants over Catholics, City College practiced essentially "color blind" admissions throughout the 20th century. While admissions standards tended to be quite high, they were applied without prejudice, and therefore from a certain perspective, did instantiate an open, liberal logic of citizenship. Because it was free and admitted students without ethnic prejudice, City College (and its sister school Hunter College) made higher education available to anyone able cross the threshold of the meritorious. However, in contrast to the sanguine memories of open admissions' critics, for most of its history City College had not constructed the threshold of the meritorious according to expert judgments of academic worthiness and ability. While the *content* of the boundary between the admitted and the excluded student was drawn according to academic principles, *where* City College placed the boundary, how low or how high the academic standards would be, was generally driven by non-academic concerns.

In this and the next chapter I examine the intersecting forces that combined in the process by which The City College of New York defined "the meritorious" student, as determined by whom they admitted and whom they excluded from the college, across 120 plus years from the college's founding to the eve of the open

admissions crisis. The critics of Open Admissions invested City College's admissions practices and with a kind of sacredness, believing them to be based purely on academic principles and therefore constituting the college as an exemplar of America's liberal creed. However, in the next two chapters I show that far from a purely academic definition of ability established by pedagogical experts, City College's admissions practices were shaped by local politics in New York, organizational expediencies (Tilly 1998), social movement actors (Karen 1991), and the college's institutional interests (Karabel 1983, 1984, 2005) as it negotiated its subordinate position within the field of higher education (Bourdieu 1996).

1847-1896

"The Children of the Whole People"?

The City College of New York was born The Free Academy in 1847. Like many institutions of higher learning in the U.S. in the mid 19th century, The Free Academy was for the first several decades of its existence a hybrid of secondary and tertiary education.[193] At its formal opening ceremonies in 1849, Horace Webster, the school's first head administrator declared:

> The experiment is to be tried, whether the highest education can be given to the masses; whether the children of the people, the children of the whole people, can be educated; and whether an institution of learning, of the highest grade, can be successfully controlled by the popular will, not by the privileged few, but by the privileged many."[194]

---

[193] There was not clear and consistent institutional differentiation between "high school" and "college," or secondary and higher education, in the U.S. until the 20th century (Thelin 2004:97; Weschsler 1977; Gorelick 1981).
[194] Quoted in, (Rudy 1949:29).

In Webster's vision, the school that would become The City College of New York would be an institutional instantiation of open, universally democratic citizenship, granting the right to the "highest grade" of education to anyone by virtue of their membership among the people. Indeed, City College's requirement, as established in its legal charter, to offer higher education free of tuition became an important symbol of economic opportunity in New York City, as well as within collective memory. However, in contrast to its remarkable history of tuition free higher education, in regards to admissions practices, Webster's oft-quoted institutional vision of "the people's college" is misleading.

From its inception City College institutionalized exclusionary admissions practices. In place from 1849-1882, the original admissions requirements set a minimal age of 12, passage of an entrance exam in seven subject areas, and at least one year in the City's common schools (Neumann 1984:37-38). While reliance on entrance exams can be understood as a meritocratic boundary governing admission, young women were completely excluded from City College,[195] as were non-U.S. citizens and non-New York City residents. Furthermore, the rule limiting admission to those who had attended the City's common schools for at least one year excluded all prospective students who attended private and parochial schools only, effectively excluding the children of the elite who were likely to attend private academies, as well as much of the city's sizable Catholic minority. While formally an open

---

[195] A Normal College for teacher training, that would eventually become City College's sister school Hunter College, was established in 1870. However, gender exclusion would continue to be an important institutional practice on the part of City College through the 1950's.

institution with an impressive commitment to tuition free higher education, in practice the college's admissions policy favored middle-class Protestants, excluding most of the City's largest minority ethnic population, Irish Catholics.

In 1852, the Free Academy's Board of Trustee's compounded the ethnically exclusionary logic of its admissions rules. In contemplating a potential organizational problem, that of greater demand for a City College education than the school was capable of meeting (a problem they had not yet faced but would with great consequence in the 20th century), The Board of Trustees instituted a policy stating, "if the number qualified for admission shall be more than can be admitted, the preference shall be given to those who have attended the Common Schools the greatest period" (quoted in Neumann 1984:38). Thus, faced with the organizational problem of how to select between qualified applicants when demand outstripped supply, City College compounded the exclusionary logic of its admissions rules by reinforcing a categorical distinction prejudicial towards Catholics. The College circumvented a potential organizational crisis by "matching" its organizational routines with prevailing patterns of ethnic exclusion in 19th century New York (Tilly 1998).[196]

These admissions requirements gave the City College student population, in its first few decades, a particular character. The sons of upper class high status

---

[196] With the concept of "matching" Tilly points to organizational practices of importing established unequal categorical pairings from the general social environment outside the organization, such as Protestant/Catholic or white/black, to inside the organization. By assimilating such categorical pairings into organizational routines, Tilly argues organizations find low cost solutions to problems in as much as organizational members can adapt easily to routines that are rooted in familiar already established categorical meanings. According to Tilly, such matching is one of the prime mechanisms by which categorical inequality is perpetuated, maintained and diffused, as organizations find low cost solutions to their problems (Tilly 1998:74-82, 105-6).

Protestants attended elite schools that charged tuition, such as Columbia and Harvard (Gorelick 1981:67). However, The Free Academy still drew a largely prosperous student body. According to Rudy, the vast majority of the college's students in its first several decades were of Anglo-Saxon, Dutch or Huguenot descent. Few recently arrived Irish Catholic or German immigrants attended, and "even fewer Jews, mostly from old New York families" (Rudy 1947:68). City College's 19th century student body came neither from the elite upper class, nor from the immigrant working class, but from the privileged sectors of the "native" laboring classes.

Thus, in contrast to the universalism of Webster's rhetoric, City College established substantively exclusive definitions of "the people" through its early admissions practices. Indeed, the substantive definition of who counted as a member of the people, as defined by who was eligible to be admitted to City College, was defended on normative grounds when challenged by proponents of an "open college" in the late 1860's.[197] According to Rudy, those who defended City College's exclusionary admissions practices, "argued that the college had been expressly established to provide higher education for the pupils of the common schools, that un-democratic, aristocratic, and sectarian influences should be kept out of (the school)" (Rudy 1947:124). Proponents of liberalization of admissions practices on the other hand argued abolishing the requirement that City College students graduate from the Common Schools might improve the college's disturbingly high drop out rates by permitting upper class boys admission. Defenders of the exclusivity of City College's

---

[197] On the political debates occasioned by the open college movement see, Rudy (1947:124-127) and Neumann (1984:52-57).

admissions argued, "that while originally designed for all and for free instruction, (the history of many colleges has shown) they have been appropriated almost exclusively by the rich," and that the city should fight the "tendency to appropriate what is common and meant for all, to the use of benefit of the few."[198] However, it was not ultimately the interests of the Protestant elite that drove city Aldermen to propose the end of the common school pre-requisite with the Open College Bill, but the resentment of the increasingly politically influential Catholic community. The Open College Bill finally passed the New York State Legislature after several years of legislative neglect in January of 1882.[199]

1896-1924

An Open Door, But No Ladder

The move to the "Open College" established an abstract standard of merit that admitted all male applicants who were capable, as measured by the entrance exams, of undertaking a college course of study. From 1896-1901, in addition to the college's existing entrance exams, the college expanded its avenues for admission by accepting students who passed the College Entrance Examination Board exam while be able to present a principal's certificate of graduation from an accredited city high school. Thus, many observers have understood the college's openness to admission to all high school graduates in New York City from 1896 to 1924 as a precursor to the Open Admissions policy of 1970. However, as a component of social citizenship, the

[198] City College Trustees, Minutes, March 17, 1874, as quoted in Neumann 1984:54-5.
[199] While originally receiving legislative support in 1878, the four-year lag between the initial consensus support behind the Open College bill and the actual passing of the bill reflects how few people were actually affected by college admissions practices in this period.

relatively open admission procedures of the first quarter of the 20th century at City College were limited by several factors. First, there were, in fact, no independent public high schools in the New York City public school system until 1897. If the democratically open education system was to function as a "ladder" of opportunity, it would do so with a yawning gap in the middle rungs (Gorelick 1981:47-59).

Secondly, the public school system did not prepare students to pass the rigorous admissions examinations rooted deeply in classical Greek and Latin, which served as the gatekeeper for entrance into City College. While admission to City College was formally open to any student who demonstrated the ability to undertake the course of study, there were few if any regularly institutionalized routes for youths to learn the pre-requisite knowledge to pass the admissions examinations. To exercise one's right to a free higher education required young men to pursue exceptional extramural efforts entirely apart from the then normal trajectories into adulthood. Few chose to do so, as in the first several decades of the 20th century, when the bulk of available work in New York City was in manufacturing, a college education appeared to most as a peculiar, impractical, gratuitous pursuit.

Today, when the institutionalized temporal trajectories determining our conceptualizations of a "normal life course," and entrance into adult careers have become decisively structured by the social organization of schooling in countries like the U.S., the lack of institutional integration of the New York City schooling system

at the turn of the 20th century seems quite peculiar.[200] However, in the 19th and early 20th centuries, occupational markets were not tightly articulated with college nor even high school credentials.[201] For instance, access to the law profession was not governed by the educational system, as according to Wechsler, "most lawyers . . . read the law in a law office and applied for bar membership after a specified time in apprenticeship" (Wechsler 1977:74). While a college degree could certainly burnish the resume of prospective lawyers and teachers, it did not become a pre-requisite to such white-collar professional careers until later in the 20th century. Furthermore, demand for skilled, white-collar labor remained modest until the 20th century. While City College earned its reputation as the "Harvard of the Proletariat" by educating the children of New York City's robust immigrant population, since most of the children of working class immigrant New Yorkers in the 19th and early 20th centuries were destined for careers in industrial labor, few even bothered with secondary and tertiary schooling. Furthermore, even if a family hoped to send their child along an exceptional route, the cost in deferred income that a working class family would have to sacrifice by allowing a working aged youngster to remain in school was often

---

[200] In analyzing the revolutionary possibilities that emerged from the disruption of the "normal temporal trajectory" of French students in the May 1968 crisis, Bourdieu points to the important role institutions of schooling, by analyzing a case of its failure, perform in inculcating a sense of one's rightful place along one's own life course (Bourdieu 1988). Institutions of schooling set individuals on a temporal trajectory on which the actor intuitively grasps where she should be at a given moment of her life because each successive step she takes has been decisively pre-structured by the school in the broadest institutional sense. The temporal structure of schooling, with its seasonal rhythms and successive graduations installs a structure of expectations of what ought to come next for individuals whose fates are governed by it. For an important theoretical elaboration on the social organization of futures and temporal trajectories, see Tavory and Eliasoph (2013).

[201] See, Trow (2010:53-85), Collins (1979), Gorelick (1981), Abbott (1988:195-211).

much too high to afford even a tuition free institution like City College (Gorelick 1981).

These factors combined to make attending City College or Hunter a highly unusual path for the vast majority of New Yorkers. By 1911, there were 19 high schools in New York City, yet only 60% of elementary school graduates (while technically illegal, many elementary school students dropped out prior to graduation to join the work force, as enforcement of mandatory schooling laws was lax) entered their freshman year of high school. According to estimates, amongst the entering pool, a further 74% likely failed to graduate high school. In all, only 8% of New York public school students graduated high school in the early years of the 20th century, and only around 1% of public high school freshman were likely to have entered a freshman class of college.[202] While open and tuition free higher education was a remarkable right of citizenship for early 20th century New Yorkers, it should be understood and remembered as symbolic, as very few were in a position to exercise it.

The Unequal Institutionalization of the Field of Higher Education in New York

Nevertheless, over the first few decades of the 20th century, an integrated system of credentials more tightly articulated with occupational markets began to develop, and the societal demand for college degrees greatly increased. In the 19th century, the most significant problem even the most prestigious institutions of higher education faced, such as Harvard, Yale or Columbia, was finding enough students who could pass entrance exams to enroll; or as Karabel puts it, their biggest

---

[202] See Gorelick (1975:99-103) and Neuman (1984:81, 100 n.9).

organizational problem was how to generate a sufficient number of paying customers (Karabel 2005; Wechsler 1977; Thelin 2011). However, as the demand for higher education rose during the early decades of the 20th century, colleges and universities encountered a new problem: applicants deemed qualified under existing categorizations of merit, mainly established by a battery of entrance exams, in excess of the school's capacity to educate. Colleges and universities solved this organizational problem by moving towards "selective" admissions. Rather than accepting all applicants who were able to pass entrance exams and, importantly, pay tuition, colleges and universities would select from among a pool of applicants who under previous definitions of merit would have all been deemed capable and worthy (Wechsler 1977).[203]

While the tightening link between schooling and work precipitated increasing demand for college education in the early decades of the 20th century, the specific forms the institutional integration of systems of schooling and their increasing articulation with occupational markets took were not the direct result, as functionalist theories of social change would suggest, of the rising need for skilled labor in an ever more complex capitalist economy (i.e. Trow 2010:53-85). Rather, these forces were decisively refracted through the local dynamics of the field of higher education in

[203] Wechsler notes, one important shift that would come to organize the larger institutional field of higher education that was occasioned by the rapid increase of demand for higher education in relation to existing supply, was that how colleges and universities measured their own prestige in the early 20th century. In the 19th century, colleges based their prestige on the size of their student-body, giving prestigious schools an incentive towards steady expansion. However, as demand skyrocketed in the early 20th century, to such an extent that colleges struggled to keep up, prestige more and more became based on who was admitted and how many were turned away. Thus, colleges came to mark their distinction by the quantity and quality of their selectivity (Wechsler 1977: 237-258).

New York, and such field relations, in turn, structured the competing definitions of academic merit, and their concomitant meanings for the structuring of citizenship different colleges and universities constructed.[204] In elite regions of the academic field highly prestigious schools such as Columbia, Harvard, and other Ivey and "Little Iveys" would construct ethnically coded definitions of academic merit, based on classist and ethnically discriminatory conceptualizations of worthy "character." Such elite schools had established their prestige through a tightly coupled relationship with the dominant Protestant elite status group, and selectivity based on academic or intellectual ability would have undermined such ethnic exclusivity[205] (Synnott 1979; Steinberg 1977, 1981; Wechsler 1977, Levine 1986). Thus, such selective admissions practices effected social closure against outsiders, specifically Jews of Eastern-European descent, who were increasingly seeking entrance to elite colleges and universities (Karabel 1984, 2005). On the other hand, as a public institution, City College retained a definition of merit based exclusively on academic criteria. Yet, City College's admissions standards were not based on a consistent, stable, definition of academic merit. Rather, due to how it negotiated its organizational interests

---

[204] For the structure of the field of higher education in France, see Bourdieu (1996). To be sure, the analysis here does not reconstruct the emergence and structure of the *national* field of higher education across the 20th century, rather focusing on local dynamics in New York City and New York State. Indeed, a national field of higher education as a relatively integrated institutional space did not emerge in the U.S. until after World War II, and the pertinent institutional struggles over academic institutional power and prestige largely unfolded on a local level until that time (Wechsler 1977; Thelin 2004; Jenks and Riesman 1977).
[205] Of course, it should be noted that no such thing as "pure academic criteria" exist, as any definition of academic or intellectual talent and achievement would necessarily emphasize some attributes at the expense of others and would necessarily function to translate socially embedded subjective judgments into "objective metrics."

through a series of historical crises (including the Great Depression and World War II), and its subordinate position within the field of higher education, the college was constantly driven to redraw *where* it placed the line separating the academically worthy from the unworthy. Importantly, such re-drawings would drastically limit the value a City College education could have within an otherwise open regime of social citizenship. Moreover, as standards of academic merit constructed for non-academic reasons became institutionally entrenches, these standards nevertheless came to be seen with as academically legitimate, with significant consequences.

City College's institutional history was significantly structured by its geographical proximity to a powerful neighbor, Columbia. Beginning with the post-Civil War presidency of Frederick Barnard, Columbia had struggled to preserve its elite position within the city's field of higher education by curbing the growth of its close geographical neighbors, The City College of New York and New York University (then known as The College of the City of New York and The University of the City of New York respectively). When The Free Academy won legislative approval to offer college credit, it ruffled the feathers of its local competitors by renaming itself *The* College of the City of New York. More than its upstart attitude, Columbia was threatened by several of City College's institutional innovations designed to make admission to a higher course of study more accessible. In response to its burgeoning public rival, President Barnard of Columbia asserted City College offered, "a sham education at a low price in labor and time."[206] In particular, Barnard

[206] Frederick Barnard, quoted in Wechsler (1977:68).

assailed City College's 19th century policy of permitting entrance to students to a college course of study directly from grammar school, requiring them to pass a series of entrance exams after only a single year of preparatory study. In contrast, Columbia required its students to complete an entire high school course. However, as City College's affiliated high school was the only public high school in existence until the 20th century, students who wished to attend Columbia were required to complete a costly course of study at a private high school or academy. By allowing students to bypass high school by passing requisite entrance exams, City College threatened to undercut the integrated relationship Columbia had established between itself and elite private high schools.[207] This, of course, threatened to undermine the relative monopoly the wealthy elite held over higher educational degrees.

More than its ongoing policy of free tuition, Barnard saw City College's expedited course of study as a threat to Columbia's dominant position within the local institutional field of higher education that encompassed New York City. However, rather than matching its competitors' innovation by making its own course of study more accessible to more citizens, Barnard attempted to distinguish Columbia from its rivals by following the academically innovative Elective System of Harvard, the programs in advanced graduate study of Johns Hopkins, and by aggressively recruiting prominent scholars to establish the credentials of Columbia's graduate programs.[208] Seth Low and Nicholas Murray Butler, Barnard's successors as

---

[207] (Weschler 1977:68-69)

[208] Prime amongst the academic stars Columbia recruited was the pioneering Political Scientist John Burgess.

Columbia's president, furthered these academic reforms such that by 1890 Columbia was the only institution in New York City to have transformed itself into a "multiversity," with a robust program of advanced scientific research as the distinguishing jewel in its crown (Wechsler 1977:70).

Rather than replicate City College's democratic innovations, Columbia responded to its rival by establishing an alternative institutional organization of academic excellence along the lines of its own internal developments. To retain its dominant position, however, Columbia could not simply offer an alternative organizational model; it had to establish its own institutional structure as *the legitimate* form, and the standard by which competitors would be judged. One factor legitimating Columbia's position was its historic ties to the Protestant Elite, who had used it, like other Ivey League institutions, as a finishing school to refine the next generation of national political and business leaders while also building the requisite social connections, or social capital, they would need to transition to positions of political and economic power (Wechsler 1977; Gorelick 1981). Yet, Columbia was able to legitimize its dominance in ways beyond mere reputation. A succession of Columbia's presidents, Barnard, Low and Butler, all were quite prominent within Republican Party circles and were able to exercise considerable political clout in both New York City and in Albany, New York's state capital.[209]

---

[209] Low served as both the Mayor of Brooklyn, prior to New York City's consolidation and his service as Columbia's president, and then as the Mayor of New York City, subsequent to the city's consolidation. Butler also was floated as a Mayoral candidate in New York City in the early 20th century, in addition to Wechsler (1977), see Bender (1987:265-293).

Columbia's influence over regional politics allowed the institution to legally construct the local institutional field of higher education according to its own organizational interests. For instance, in the early 20th century, Butler used his significant political clout to legally establish a prerequisite course of college study for professional training in areas such as the law (Wechsler 1977:74). As noted above, the routes into professional careers were not standardized in the 19th century and individuals could gain access to professional careers without attending college. Butler, on the other hand, envisioned an integrated educational institution in which each institutional step formally served as the pre-requisite to the next. Thus, in Butler's vision, a high school degree would be a pre-requisite for entrance to college, and a four-year college degree would be a pre-requisite for entrance to professional degree programs (see Wechsler 1977:65-211). On the one hand, Butler labored politically to make higher education the training ground of the elite because he believed that the nation would be better served by ensuring that all of its leaders would *necessarily* experience the liberal and moral training of modern higher education (Wechsler 1977:72-76). It should also be noted, that by making a four-year college degree the legal pre-requisite to access to professional credentials, Butler's political maneuverings ensured that institutions of higher education would serve as the necessary gateway to various sorts of professional careers, securing for institutions of higher education the legalized authority to sort individuals into occupational careers.[210]

---

[210] Thus, we can see how Bourdieu's formula that the state successfully claims a monopoly of

However, Butler did not simply labor politically to establish the gatekeeping functions of higher education as a general institution. Rather, as he insured that America's future elite would necessarily have to pass through a four-year college course to achieve elite status, he simultaneously used his political power to retard the growth of all manners of higher education in the New York City region other than Columbia. For instance in 1906, residents of the borough of Brooklyn called for the establishment of an independent public college, much like City College, to serve the millions of its residents desiring undergraduate as well as graduate and professional degrees. Supporters were successful in gaining legislative support in Albany in 1906 and 1907, but were denied both years by a Governor's veto at Butler's behest (Gordon 1975:19-20; Wechsler 1977:191-194). In 1906, Butler wrote a private letter to the President of City College John Finley, asserting the idea of an independent public university in Brooklyn was "preposterous" (Rudy 1949:382). Instead, Butler urged City College to establish a smaller extension of itself in Brooklyn. From Columbia's organizational standpoint, Butler's plan for a modest extension of City College in Brooklyn would satisfy some portion of the demand for higher education in New York's most populous borough without creating a new *public* rival to Columbia's dominance. Butler's efforts were wildly effective as Brooklyn would not

---

symbolic violence can still operate in a decentralized "weak state" such as the U.S. (Bourdieu 1998:40). While it is easy to see how this formula works in the statist traditions of French republicanism, with a highly integrated national school system that is an important arm of the central state, in the U.S., where the most powerful institutions of higher education are private and formally independent of the state, the state nevertheless still holds ultimate symbolic authority through its power to legally construct systems of credentialization. In other words, Columbia's private prestige was not enough to establish its public authority; it still sought legal codification of its preferred structure of institutionalized educational space in order to objectify its elite position.

get its own Senior College until 1930, despite, as will be shown below, rapidly increasing demand for higher education in the borough and city at large. Furthermore, City College itself did not even attempt to create graduate and professional schools beyond those that trained the city's public school teachers, for fear of offending Columbia (Rudy 1949:224).[211]

As Columbia effectively retarded the growth of public higher education in New York City, it also worked to forestall the development of a public state school system on the model of Mid-Western land grant schools. In the 1920's, cries rose up for the establishment of a New York State system of higher education, partially motivated by the semi-covert anti-Semitism practiced in the long established network of private institutions of higher education such as Columbia and Cornell that were dominant in the Northeast. While the populations of New York City and State were rapidly growing in the early 20th century, a rising number of its residents found themselves seeking credentials from a system that was in many ways designed explicitly to monopolize symbolic resources for the Protestant elite. In the face of rising demands for radically expanded public higher education, Butler, Columbia, and other private colleges again worked successfully to undermine such efforts, turning back several decades of civil rights agitation on the part of a discrimination free public university. SUNY, the State University system for New York, would not be legislatively established until 1948, after World War II had transformed the nation's

[211] The municipal higher education system in New York would not establish the Graduate Center until the 1960's, although a few higher degree granting scientific research centers did develop in the individual branches before that time.

relationship to higher education, and Butler himself had retired from Columbia with his political clout only recently having faded (Wechsler 1977:189-204).

Columbia's political efforts inhibiting the development of rival public graduate and professional schools secured its monopoly over the supply of the highest degrees, including legal and medical degrees. Combined with its strategy of institutionalizing the four-year baccalaureate degree as a legal prerequisite to graduate and professional study, Columbia effectively relegated its local rivals to second-class feeder schools for Columbia's graduate and professional degree programs from the standpoint of anyone seeking an advanced degree. Indeed, City College did succumb to Columbia's institutional control, matching Columbia's structure by scrapping their expedited course of study and making a high school diploma a pre-requisite of entrance to the college (Gorelick 1981:77-78; Neumann 1984:78-83). Pushed by rulings that continuously threatened to take away City College's legal right to grant degrees made by a State Board of Regents dominated by Columbia trustees, City College was compelled to match the educational sequencing preferred by its powerful neighbor (Gorelick 1981:77-78, 211 n. 40). Columbia, however, did not just establish control over the upper regions of academic institutional space in the early 20th century, gaining effective command over the resource of the highest credentials (Tilly 1998:130). It used its position to establish a leading definition of "merit" that favored the Protestant elite and thereby drawing boundaries of social closure against others.

As Karabel has shown, definitions of student "merit" based on academic entrance exams at elite Northeastern institutions of higher education allowed for the

admission of increasing numbers of Jews, threatening the institutional alignment between elites schools and their Protestant elite clientele (Karabel 1984, 2005). In response to the rising number of Jewish students, Columbia and other similar schools turned to "selective admissions" to exclude Jews, regardless of their academic achievements, thus maintaining their institutional identities as bastions of the white-Protestant elite. In general this entailed a shift of the definition of merit from one established by entrance exams, to one rooted in practical judgments of a student's character. The definitions of character used to select students for admission were based on the attributes believed to reside in, and therefore likely to be perceived in, the existing WASP elite. Whereas Jews were seen as excessively intellectual, or colloquially as "greasy grinds," the lineages of the WASP elite were seen as embodying the social grace and manly Christian gentlemanliness of true leaders (Karabel 1984, 2005:132-134). In order for Harvard, Princeton, Yale, Columbia, and others to detect the carriers of superior character, they required of their applicants information regarding their "Religious Preference," "Maiden Name of Mother," "Birthplace of Father," and "What change, if any, has been made since your birth in your own name or that of your father?" They also sought out high school principles to confirm, to the best of their knowledge, the ethno-religious origins of their prospective students. Finally, elite schools used photographs and face-to-face interviews to try and discern if applicants were from undesirable backgrounds (Karabel 1984:15-16).[212]

---

[212] While Karabel's studies focus most extensively on "the big three" of Harvard, Princeton

If definitions of student merit aligned with ideas of the putatively superior ethnic qualities of the WASP elite reigned in the upper regions of academic space in the early 20th century, City College, in a more subordinate position, maintained more purely academic definitions of merit. Interestingly, the increasingly elite *intellectual* reputation of City College's student body did not threaten Columbia, because the anti-intellectual conceptualization of student merit based on gentlemanly character was dominant. In fact, the latter were happy to funnel many of the Jewish students seeking entrance into Columbia towards City College, while broadening its own recruitment strategies to search for "socially desirable" (meaning upper-class white Protestant) candidates beyond the New York City region.

Importantly, the institutionalization of an ethnically based conception of the meritorious student severely limited the breadth and depth of opportunity City College could make possible. Indeed, before the 1950's, City College students, most of whom were Jewish, encountered great difficulty gaining admission to existing graduate programs, especially medical schools.[213] Many talented City College students were essentially shut out of the opportunity to pursue graduate and professional degrees due to anti-Semitic quotas. Even more New York City students were inhibited from attending college in the first place.[214]

---

and Yale, he suggests that Columbia, having faced the most acute "Jewish problem" due to its location in New York City, innovated the use of Jewish quotas in the early 20th century.
[213] Through the early 1950's, City College's main student newspaper, *The Campus*, ran yearly stories enumerating the percentage of City College students who gained admission to medical schools in an attempt to document the effects of Jewish quotas on admissions practices.
[214] "Mayor's Aide Urges A State University," *The New York Times*, February 21, 1946. The dynamics of WASP social closure not only structured City College's institutional environment, but also its internal organizational culture, according to Gorelick (1981). She

City College students were well aware of the structure of exclusion that defined higher education in the U.S. Following World War II a civil rights coalition including the Urban League of Greater New York, the American Jewish Congress, and the NAACP, pushed to pass the Austin-Mahoney bill, the first attempt at a "Fair Educational Practices Bill." The bill was modeled after the 1945 "Fair Employment Practices Act" which outlawed discrimination in labor markets based on race, creed, color or national origin (Wechsler 1977, p. 198).[215] In conjunction with efforts to gain an anti discrimination bill in higher education, the civil rights coalition tried to attack Butler's exclusionary monopolization of symbolic capital by pushing for the expansion of City College into a full fledged university. In conjunction with this strategy, the civil rights coalition also pushed for the development of a State University of New York.[216] This agenda gained steam when Dan Dodson, an N.Y.U. sociologist and executive director of The Mayor's Committee on Unity,[217] released a report confirming charges of anti-Semitic and other racially discriminatory admissions practices in elite private institutions of higher education. Official studies into the need for a state university system in New York State found substantial patterns of discrimination from quota systems (Berkowitz 1948).

---

notes, "like most U.S. colleges and universities at the turn of the century, CCNY was secular in form and Protestant in culture." Gorelick maintains City College's "institutional structure remained a form of secularized Anglo-Protestantism for some time" (138), emphasizing the tension between the college's civic identity and its institutional practices.

[215] On New York State's Fair Employment Practices Act, see (Chen 2006, 2009). On the civil rights movement in New York see (Biondi 2003; Sugrue 2008).

[216] Doing so would have broken the elite institutions' hold over the regional market for professional degrees and greatly expand access to higher education generally.

[217] The Mayor's Committee on Unity was founded in 1943 to investigate the root causes of an anti-Negro riot in Harlem in the midst of World War II. The Committee eventually evolved into the New York City Commission on Human Rights, see (Benjamin 1972).

By drawing a boundary between itself, as a national university, and City College, as a mere locally relevant institution, Columbia's anti-Semitic quotas had three effects: it symbolically legitimated its own clientele, the white-Protestant upper class, as academically meritorious. Secondly, it imposed categorical inequality between the protestant elite and the rest, especially Jews in this period, by establishing control over access to the highest positions in society and reserving them, almost entirely, for its historical clientele. Thus, Columbia, and other elite Northeastern schools, operated as an institutional mechanism by which the Protestant elite maintained their hold over the highest positions within society and legitimated the exclusion of outsiders, especially Jews. Moreover, as Columbia and other elite institutions justified their power over the institutional structure of education as the proper training regimen for the country's leaders, these two operations combined to code the Protestant-elite as the privileged carriers of American nationhood, while casting those excluded as second class.

While City College was a public school with abstract color-blind admissions procedures, it nevertheless came to be coded as a Jewish school. Within the broad culture of pre-war anti-Semitism, City College was stigmatized as the "Jewish University of America," as observers asserted it had been "taken over" by too many "dirty and tactless Jews" (quotations from Gorelick 1981:85; Steinberg 1974:11). Nor did City College function as an academic melting pot. Beginning in the 1890's, as more Jews entered City College, "the families of Anglo-Saxon, Dutch, German and Huguenot descent, who had been accustomed to register their boys in the College in

the old days, sent them elsewhere for a college education" (Rudy 1949:292-293). In fact, by instituting an anti-Jewish quota, Columbia arrested what threatened to be a continuous cycle of "white flight," preserving itself for "old stock" Protestants and preventing their mass departure for more exclusive environs. The process of "white flight" would re-emerge around the Open Admissions policy of 1970, however now Jews were firmly integrated into the privileged status of whiteness and were themselves the ones fleeing from upwardly striving ethnic minorities.

By institutionalizing symbolic boundaries reproducing the privileged position of the Protestant elite, Columbia ensured that City College and the slowly expanding municipal college system would be the only option for the majority of the city's working class youth, especially so for Jews. However, in also acting to retard the overall growth of the municipal college system in the face of sharply rising demand for higher education, Columbia helped to impose a zero-sum logic of access to higher education. While Columbia solved its "Jewish problem" by instituting anti-Semitic definitions of student merit, City College was compelled to move to selective admissions because its facilities were simply overwhelmed by the number of qualified students desiring a higher education. In justifying the selective admissions regime instituted by City College in the 1920's, Morton Gottschall, a long time Dean of Students, stated: "Although the city colleges as a whole should take the position that they will accept every student who has the ability to do the work, nevertheless, it is a physical impossibility. We therefore have the problem of trying to select those who are best qualified" (quoted in Neumann 1984:83). Gottschall, and other

administrators, therefore argued City College, in principle, ought to define merit in open terms, as anyone capable of undertaking the academic work. However, because of reasons of space shortages having nothing to do with pedagogical reasoning, the college would be required to redefine merit as a property of a smaller and smaller academic elite.

***

Throughout much of the 20th century, the college's greatest challenge was its lack of physical space, as it scrambled to cram as many class sessions into a day's schedule as possible. City College's President Robinson acknowledged that in spite of efforts to maximize the use of existing space, his college, as well as the municipal system as a whole, was unable to meet the increasing demand for college study:

> The pressure from those wishing to enter the College has become tremendous. The Policy of the President and the faculty has been steadily to raise the entrance requirements in order to admit to the limited facilities only the very ablest boys in the City . . . additional efforts have been made to increase the facilities of the College in order that the intellectually competent of the City may not be deprived of the educational benefits which would make them more capable members of our civic, industrial political community. (quoted in Neumann 1984, p. 124)

Due in no small part to Columbia's ability to establish broad institutional realities according to its own organizational interests, the ever rising demand for public expansion of higher education would go unmet. In lieu of a commitment from the City and State of New York to expand adequately to meet the rising demand for higher education, City College instead redefined the concept of merit upon which it

would base its admissions decisions, transforming merit from all those deemed capable to only those deemed to be the best.

Politically unable to expand, City College was compelled by its position in the field of higher education to redefine the “meritorious student.” At the turn of the 20th century, graduating high school with a 60% average guaranteed entrance to City College (Gorelick 1981:195). In 1924, City College established the line between the best and rest by instituting a “cut off” point, rejecting all applicants who did not graduate with a 72% high school average or above. By 1926, reflecting the sharply increasing value of higher education, and its own inability meet rising demand, City College raised their cut off to 75% (Neumann 1984:83), a number that would more or less rise steadily until black and Puerto Rican students occupying the college’s campus were able to compel CUNY to reverse the trend. Thus, to solve an organizational problem (Tilly 1998) precipitated by field dynamics (Bourdieu 1996; Karabel 1984, 2005), City College excluded students they believed capable of undertaking and benefitting from a course of higher study. In this way, a college education in New York City was transformed from a right of citizenship to a privilege of the academically elite.[218]

1924-1961

[218] In the 1960’s, Chancellor Albert Bowker of CUNY and President Buell Gallagher of City College floated notions that the city’s municipal university system should take responsibility for insuring that everyone become capable of a course of college study. Rather than remaining open to those in a position to avail themselves of a college education on a basis of equal opportunity, the notion that CUNY was responsible for ensuring that everyone would be in such a position is more akin to the logic of equal outcome. However, the idea of CUNY taking over the city’s public primary schooling system was never seriously pursued.

The period following the institutionalization of the cut off comprised contradictory logics in the college's admissions regime. In 1909, City College initiated one of its most significant innovations; an evening session geared towards students who met the regular admission requirements but were unable to forego their daily wage to attend the regular school day.[219] Admitting a mere 250 students in 1909, the evening session quickly gained in popularity. In 1916, Evening Session students in good standing gained the right to transfer to the Day Session, and vice versa. By 1925, the Evening Session had grown to 9,480 students, effectively doubling the size of the student body at City College (Neumann 1984:89). Also City College's governing board was re-founded as The Board of Higher Education (BHE) for the City of New York in 1926. The BHE was to oversee the expansion of the municipal college system, as Brooklyn College and Queens College would join City College and Hunter, in 1930 and 1937 respectively. Importantly, the re-founded governing body recommitted the municipal system to "the benefits of collegiate education gratuitously to citizens who are actual residents of the city and who are qualified for admission to any regular undergraduate course of study" (quoted in Neumann 1984: 107). In other words, the city committed to tuition free higher

[219] Neumann asserts that the Evening Session was the most significant institutional expansion that allowed the college to serve the working class (p. 89). However, most of the day session students were also of working class origins. The distinction between day and night students was rather between those whose working class families were in a position to deprive themselves of the contributing wage of the college aged student, and those who were not, but most families of City College students experienced the loss of a contributing wage earner to the family coffers a significant sacrifice.

education in the refounding of the municipal college system that would one day become CUNY.

The tuition-free policy had contrary logics however. On the one hand, the policy reinforced the principle of relative[220] economic accessibility to higher education to New Yorkers from all social classes. This policy was paramount in making City College's reputation as the "Harvard of the proletariat." On the other hand, by eschewing the collection of tuition, the BHE closed avenues of revenue generation that might have financed the expansion of the municipal college system; a system that was failing to keep up with the increasing demand for collegiate study. Additionally, as some students noted, the revenue generated by means tested tuition payments could have been redistributed as stipends for students who could not forego a daily wage to pursue a higher education, even one as inexpensive as free. Importantly, City College's persistently precarious finances, due in part to its subordinate position in the field of higher education, would lead it to innovate new categories of students in the hopes of generating revenue streams. The new categories of students divided the larger category of the "meritorious student" into hierarchies of value and worth, creating internal boundaries of privilege within the college.[221]

---

[220] Indeed, for many working New Yorkers, even a free college tuition was too expensive as young men and women were obliged for economic reasons to contribute to the family income.

[221] Goldberg (2008) argues modern citizenship not only draws boundaries that set off national communities from other national communities, it also draws boundaries *within* national communities: "if citizenship is understood as a gradated category rather than a status that one either wholly possesses or completely lacks, then citizenship may also be seen as a means of internal social closure" (86). Tilly (1998) also notes that categorical distinctions may be drawn at the boundary of organizations, or they may create internal frontiers when drawn inside an organization.

City College's chronically precarious financing became a full-blown crisis during the Depression years of the 1930's. As municipal tax revenues decreased, the acting mayor of New York, Joseph V. McKee, argued for the closing of the municipal colleges, instead suggesting the city should pay to send students to private schools. Such a measure would have subjected Jewish and other minority students in New York City to Columbia's discriminatory admissions policies. Grasping the logic of ethnic closure involved in such a proposal, City College's Alumni Association decried the idea:

> Now when the government of the City is profoundly disturbed by municipal problems of the gravest nature, all the tribe of detractors, whining over the shrinkage of their bloated money bags, jealous of a life and purpose they can not understand, and dissembling under the cloak of civic welfare their hatred of races and creeds not their own, rise up in ignorance and hypocrisy to call the College a luxury . . .[222]

In 1932, to appease political forces, City College committed to freezing enrollment numbers within the day session at 1931 levels. Admission to the day session would be based on a combination of academic criteria most heavily favoring high school grade point average (Neumann 1984:120-123). All other students meeting the earlier cut-off point for entrance, which had already been established because of lack of space rather than academic judgments, would be admitted to a partial program in the Evening Session as "Limited-Matriculated Students." Significantly, Limited-Matriculated Students would be charged $2.50 per credit (ibid.).[223] While conceived by administrators as a temporary measure adopted for reasons of financial expediency,

---

[222] *Alumnus*, April 1932, vol 28, no. 3, quoted in Neumann 1984:119.
[223] See also, "To Save $1.500,000 on City's Colleges," *The New York Times*, May 18, 1932.

the symbolic and material differences between the fully matriculated Day Session students, and the partially matriculated Evening Session students would remain in place until the Open Admissions policy came into effect in 1970.

The meaning of the categorical divide was not initially lost on students as they organized against the symbolic and institutional boundary between Day and Night Sessions.[224] The moderately liberal *Campus* newspaper upheld,[225] in the abstract, the legitimacy of distinctions drawn on the basis of intellectually defined merit. However, the paper protested the "pernicious aspect" of the tuition fee policy on Evening Session students in as much as it set a "money standard" rather than an academic one:

> Although it maintains the scholarship requirements for admission, it does set up a definite money standard. The argument that the better students will still gain a free education is not, it seems, entirely valid, for it is more than possible that students falling under the required 78% average may still have the mental capabilities to benefit from a collegiate education. That even a few such students might be forced out by financial troubles brands the scheme as decidedly objectionable . . . those students failing to meet the required scholastic average can gain admittance if they have the means, while students of similar intellectual capacities without funds will be denied the benefits of a college education.[226]

---

[224] By the 1950's, however, students would more and more come to invest the internal categorical frontiers with academic legitimacy, with the Day Session students understanding themselves to be academically superior to all others. This academic self-identity was an important frame through which the Day Session students interpreted efforts to expand access to City College.

[225] *The Campus* was the most prestigious of the student newspapers with a moderately liberal reputation, positioned similarly on the City College campus as the *New York Times* for the U.S. in general.

[226] "Educational Retrenchment," *The Campus*, May 27, 1932, p. 2.

As student activists predicted fees would likely force 74% of the Evening Session students to quit school,[227] a more radical student boldly argued charging Evening Session students tuition violated "the inalienable right of every student to have a free education,"[228]

However, the Mayor and the Board of Higher Education refused student arguments that categorical distinctions introduced between students with the purpose of charging tuition violated New Yorkers' right to a higher education.[229] In 1932, the year the categorical distinction between fully matriculated Day Session students and Limited Matriculated Night Session students was introduced, the cut off for Day Session admission was a 78% high school average. Already by 1936 the average was up to 80%, and on the eve of World War II the cut off had risen to 85% (Neumann 1984:111, 139). Even the expansion of the municipal college system, with two new independent senior colleges opening (Brooklyn College in 1930 and Queens College opening in 1937), could not curtail skyrocketing admissions standards.[230] In addition to squeezing City College financially, the Depression increased demand for higher education by reducing the pull factors the labor market had previously exerted on students. Up until the 1930's, City College operated as a revolving door, as many

---

[227] "City College Men Fight Rise in Fees," *The New York Times*, May 24, 1932. See also, "City Students Push Fight on Fee Rise," *The New York Times*, May 25, 1932; "Protest Fee Plan for City Colleges," *The New York Times*, May 26, 1932.
[228] "Walker to Receive Council Resolution Opposing All Fees," *The Campus*, May 24, 1932, p. 1.
[229] "City Hall Rebuffs Students on Fees," *The New York Times*, May 28, 1932.
[230] One factor mitigating the impact of the expansion of the municipal system by two independent colleges was the fact that Brooklyn and Queens Colleges were created out of already operating satellite branches of City College; while they expanded to further meet demand for higher education, they were not entirely new entities, as, in the case of Brooklyn, a satellite of City College had been operating in the borough since the early 20th century.

students entered for some education and left without completing their BA degrees. Such was a common practice because labor markets still rewarded the partial completion of college courses short of the full BA degree. However, as labor markets contracted during the Depression, students had much less reason to exit their schooling short of graduation (Gorelick 1981).

Thus, in 1936, only 11% of the total student body were newly admitted freshman while a further 4% were Evening Session transfers or former students re-entering City College (calculated from table in Neumann 1984:130). In lieu of expansion, with the vast majority of available positions within the student body occupied by returning students, City College had no choice but to sharply raise the cut-off point at which they separated the Day and Evening Session students. This categorical boundary would harden in the early 40's as City College, and its fellow municipal colleges, more and more admitted Evening Session students as associate's degree candidates rather than bachelor's degree. In the 1950's, this distinction would become all the more significant as the municipal system began treating their evening sessions in line with the newly introduced community colleges, further cementing the boundary of distinction amongst students (Neumann 1984:123).

By establishing a symbolic boundary between Day Session (first tier) and Night Session (second tier) students, and using the tuition revenues charged second tier students to fund the free education of the first tier, City College established an organizationally exploitative relationship of durable categorical inequality between its students (Tilly 1998). City College established hierarchical categories of merit in

order to resolve the organizational problems generated by its organizational embedding within a municipal and state political system and local field of higher education that undermined its expansion and even threatened its existence. Defining Evening Students as less meritorious, and therefore legitimately available for tuition extraction, gave City College a small measure of institutional autonomy at the cost of further introducing hierarchical distinctions that mitigated the logic of open citizenship administrators asserted the college should represent in practice.[231] Indeed, the predictions of City College students protesting the introduction of a "money standard" into the open logic of citizenship at City College would prove to be accurate. An official report on the graduation rates just before World War II found that only 10% of Evening Session students graduated from the two year course of study, with only 5% of overall students transferring to the Day Session to continue towards the BA degree. These rates compare to 60% of Day Session students who graduated (Neumann 1984:246).[232]

However, as the boundary separating the partially meritorious Evening Session students from the fully meritorious Day Session students hardened as a permanent institutional fixture, college administrators became increasingly uneasy over the academic arbitrariness of their own definitions of merit. Until 1941, the surest path to admission to City College was through a high school grade point

[231] From 1937-1940, 42% of Evening Session students were tuition paying Limited-Matriculation status, while 42% were fully matriculated. The remaining 16% were comprised of fee paying non-matriculated students and graduate students (Neumann 1984:169).
[232] As will be discussed below, these widely divergent educational outcomes are more likely due to financial conditions of Evening Session students rather than differences in academic ability.

average above the cut off point, with the cut off point being determined by non-academic criteria of financial and spatial economies. In the mid 1930's, Board members and City College administrators began questioning whether students whose grades were not superior might nevertheless be superior college students than those admitted on the strength of their high school record alone. President Nelson Mead asserted, "there can be little doubt that many of the applicants who are not admitted are qualified" (quoted in Neumann 1984:139). Mead further lamented of the entrance exams used in admissions beyond the foundational high school GPA, "ideally, the purpose of these exams would be to determine in doubtful cases the qualification of the applicants to undertake regular college work and not primarily to limit enrollment" (ibid: 140). Thus, rather than using examinations to reveal capable students, City College used admissions exams to depress enrollment and eliminate students whom they believed were likely to succeed in a rigorous public college. Finally, in 1940 the college eliminated remedial classes that had allowed students to make up pre-requisites unfulfilled in the high schools,[233] finding yet another way to eliminate from admission a type of prospective student who had proved capable and worthy in the past.

As the years and decades passed, the fiscal origins of the categorical distinction between day and night session students would be forgotten. Students,

---

[233] Failure to meet pre-requisites could have been because the high schools were still not entirely standardized, and therefore did not always offer all the pre-requisites determined by City College; or, because academic and vocational tracks were sharply distinguished in the New York City schools, and therefore students on non-academic tracks would have little opportunity to make up for past work even if they did make it back onto academic trajectories.

especially the privileged Day Session students and their faculty, would not remember that the original boundary between the two categories of students had not been drawn for academic reasons. Students and faculty would come to invest the boundary between the fully and partially matriculated students with academic legitimacy, understanding it to mark real differences in academic merit, rather than a categorical distinction constructed to attenuate a fiscal emergency. In fact, the constructed internal boundary separating the fully from the partially meritorious would come to be seen by many as the very source of City College's greatness. Far from a bastion of openly democratic opportunity, in the eyes of some, the extraordinary scarcity of access marked the college's fully matriculated students off as the most intellectually elite in the country.

Organizational Interests and World War II

While the categorical distinction between first tier Day Session and second tier Evening Session students would remain an institutionalized boundary defining merit, City College responded to an inverse crisis of under enrollment during World War II. From 1941-1945, City College lost much of its potential student body to the military. Enrollment in 1945, the final year of the war, was only 59% of peak pre-War enrollment hit in 1940 (calculated from table in Neumann 1984:164). While substantial, the numerical drop in enrollment does not reflect the alteration of admissions practices, often taken in secret, the college employed to keep their classrooms moderately filled. City College administrators secretly lowered the requisite high school average for automatic admission from 85% on the eve of the

War, to 74% in the latter years of the conflict; a mark below even the boundary that had since the 20's determined outright rejection. They also lowered the requisite scores in various entrance exams to facilitate admissions. In more public measures, they dropped several pre-requisites, including proficiencies in a second foreign language. In a desperate measure, administrators violated the sexist boundary that had segregated City College from Hunter College by admitting women to City's schools of Business, Education and Technology (women were still excluded from the College of Liberal Arts until 1951, Neumann 1984:160-164).

While City College struggled to maintain Day Session enrollments, Evening Session enrollments completely collapsed, and with them the revenue from the tuition payments collected from evening students. To counteract the decline in revenue, City College instituted a series of non-matriculated programs targeted towards adults who would be charged as much as $7.00 per credit hour. Much like the tuition fees charged Limited-Matriculation students, City College used these revenues to fund the gratuitous Day Session. While the relationship between Day Session students and non-matriculated students was exploitative, much like the relationship between Day and Evening Session students, administrators touted the policy as the epitome of progressive American educational development (Neumann 1984:175).

While Neumann (1984:112) argues that "external events" were the major drivers of changes in admissions procedures at City College throughout the 30's and 40's, the wild swings between tightening and loosening standards in fact shows they were driven by a complex interplay between external forces and City College's own

pursuit of its organizational interests (on organizational interests in higher education see Karabel 1984, 2005, Brint and Karabel 1989). Rather than structuring admissions practices according to stable, expertly crafted academic judgments of capability or worth, City College continuously redefined “merit” in order to solve organizational problems (Tilly 1998). The institutional dynamics driving the definition of merit are further exemplified by the regime of secret exceptions City College used to treat veteran applicants immediately following the war.

Many of the returning veterans did not meet the requirements for entrance established before the war. For some, this was because their high school studies were interrupted when they shipped off. Others, however, had not been on academic tracks in high school prior to leaving for war, but nevertheless wished to pursue a higher education as a part of the GI Bill of Rights upon returning. Officially, City College committed to admitting all veterans to some segment of the college, and then placing them in one of the various sessions based on their academic credentials, thus publicly upholding the distinctions of merit they comprised. However, in practice, City College made special efforts to place veterans in the privileged Day Session for nationalist reasons. For instance, all disabled veterans were awarded full time admission to the Day Session to maintain their benefits under the GI Bill. (Neumann 1984: 192) Unlike other Special students, Special veteran students were permitted to carry a full schedule, also to retain their GI benefits, with the public justification of “patriotic reasons” (ibid.). Additionally, and in secret, the college admitted veterans to the Day Session according to less stringent standards than students applying

straight from high school in 1946. Veterans with a 78% high school average were admitted to the privileged day session, as opposed to fresh high school graduates who needed an 83% average. Veterans with a 74% average, as opposed to 75% for fresh high school graduates, were permitted to take the entrance exams and be admitted to the Day Session if scoring highly enough. Finally, students who carried a C average in the Evening Session prior to being inducted into service were permitted to fully matriculate into the Day Session.

Because City College was unable to expand to meet the rising demand for higher education in the City of New York, it had, in the 1920's, created competitive admissions standards against its own conception of the student population who merited admission. While the boundary dividing the included from the excluded was generally drawn in academic terms (the Post-War admission of veterans representing an exception), *where* the college drew the boundary was driven by how City College negotiated its organizational interests. Furthermore, City College's rapid vacillations between tighter and looser admissions standards from the 30's to the 50's shows the broad array of factors that could affect how the college negotiated those organizational interests as beyond economic fluctuations that altered the societal demand for higher education, the college was also affected by symbolic and political factors, such as increased nationalism and state loyalty to returning soldiers.

Post-War Institutional Stagnation

Paralleling national trends embodied in the Truman Commission on Higher Education (Smith and Bender 2008:83-89; Wechsler 1977:251-4; Loss 2012:138),

local educational officials and political elites articulated the need for a broad expansion of the municipal college system to meet the post-war needs of both economic and political citizenship immediately following WWII. In several reports, the first dating to 1944, before the war ended, educational and political elites argued that higher education would become the essential institutional mechanism by which Americans would be trained to participate in the expanding technical and professional workforce, as well as instill within Americans the tools for proper citizenship. Official reports on the municipal system, carried out by several official bodies including the State Legislature, found that it would need to massively expand to meet this normative vision.

However, in stark contrast to the central importance political elites would place on higher education for the post-war production of economic and political citizenship, the municipal system of higher education in New York City entered a period of severe institutional stagnation. Despite the spate of official reports calling for a radical expansion of institutional capacity, the municipal system grew slowly and in feeble measures. As a result, as a college education became more and more central to full participation in post-war life in the U.S., the municipal college system, with City College as its flagship, would offer a smaller and smaller fraction of New York City's high school graduates access to higher education.

Even before the war ended, officials began calling for the massive expansion of the municipal higher education system. In 1940, in conjunction with the infamous Rapp-Coudert Committee investigation into the influence of communism in the City's

schools, New York State commissioned a study on the administration of the public education system, including higher education, of the City of New York.[234] The report became known as the Strayer Report, after it's director George Strayer. The report argued for the increasing importance of higher education for training professional workers and producing strong citizens.[235] It also argued the municipal system failed to serve as many students as could benefit from a post-secondary education, noting that in 1940 a third of the city's graduating high school class (16,000) applied to the Day Session of the municipal colleges, but only half of these applicants were admitted due entirely to lack of adequate facilities (Strayer 1944:402-4). Furthermore, both the Strayer Report and the Presidents of the municipal colleges worried the excessively stringent admissions criteria, necessitated by space shortages, threatened the mission of the college. According to President Gideonse of Brooklyn College, speaking of the municipal system as a whole:

> Our standards of admission are higher than those of any public institution in the country, and the numbers we turn down are so large that the implementation of our American ideal of equality of opportunity seems to be seriously hampered in view of the increasing demands of professional and business life for college graduation as a minimum requirement for newcomers" (ibid.:404).

The effect of excessively high entrance requirements, The Strayer Report asserted, was that beyond the 7,000 rejected applicants, many more strong students simply did not apply because the existing requirements were so exceptionally high (ibid.:423). Furthermore, the report also noted principals and guidance counselors in

---

[234] On Rapp-Coudert, an important forerunner to McCarthyism, see Schrecker (1986).
[235] Legislative Document No. 60, 1944, State of New York, George D. Strayer, pp. 397-399, hereafter Strayer 1944; see also Neumann 1984:230.

the high schools attested many more capable students were barred from applying because they had not decided on attending college until it was too late to fulfill the necessary high school prerequisites. Moreover, the study maintained, in lieu of stipends or loans for students, many prospective applicants who needed to contribute to their family's finances could not afford to attend even a tuition free college. Finally, the authors of the report noted that many students whom they believed could benefit from attending a four-year college were barred from applying to the city's colleges because their high school diplomas were of a vocational nature. The report therefore concluded:

> Considering the numbers who apply and are not admitted, the numbers who might apply if admission standards were liberalized, and those who are now financially unable to go to college but who might attend if assistance were provided, a really comprehensive four-year program of college education might easily serve at least 100,000 students in the post-war period. (Strayer 1944:424)

In contrast, in 1940 (the last year before the war distorted secular trends in admissions demand) the municipal college system served 67,046 students, of whom only 24,279 were fully matriculated in a four-year program of one of the senior college's privileged Day sessions (Strayer 1944:403).

On the one hand, The Strayer Report argued the colleges of the municipal system should further cement their internal symbolic boundaries of merit by creating three or four academic levels, ranging from the purely academic to the more vocationally oriented. The authors praised City College for meeting the educational needs of the most scholastically elite in offering a free college education to the most academically accomplished high school graduates. But the report also argued:

> A democratic society needs more than an intellectual elite. It needs a large number of people who have a deep understanding and appreciation of fundamental values. It needs many persons who possess social intelligence and who exercise social leadership. It needs as many individuals as possible who live the good life. Such a large group of liberally educated persons is not a luxury, but a necessity, in a democracy. (Strayer 1944:422)

In contrast to the un-democratic hierarchies of merit the authors of the report proposed City College construct internally, they also asserted that, to meet its central function in the production of democratic citizenship, the municipal system should aim to serve the top 50% of the city's high school graduates.

Thus, as early as 1944, in the name of democratic citizenship, officials in New York were calling for a doubling in size of the overall municipal college system, with as much as a fourfold increase in the number of fully matriculated students. However, the spate of post-war reports that would echo the calls for massive expansion made in the 1944 Strayer Report, reflect the municipal system's failure to adequately do so. In 1947, the presidents of the municipal college system, also noting the increasing necessity for collegiate study in preparation for the expanding post-war professional employment, the increasing need for technological workers, and the general increase in demand for vocational education, predicted "an increasing number of qualified young people will ask for a post-high school education."[236] More modestly, but in line with the Strayer Report, the municipal college presidents called for the doubling of the system's capacity over a ten-year period.

---

[236] President Harry Gideonse of Brooklyn College, quoted in Neumann 1984:204.

Also in 1947, City College conducted an internal study, the Pearman and Reid Report, to evaluate the feasibility of the recommendations made by the Strayer Report. The Pearman and Reid report cut to the heart of the matter, noting that, "in the minds of more and more people, a college education is necessary for intelligent living in a democratic society" (as quoted in Neumann 1984:266). The need was not just for individuals, but for the political community as well, as according to the authors of the report, "a large group of liberally educated persons is not a luxury, but a necessity in a democracy" (ibid.). However, if the democratic mission of higher education was clear to the authors, the report maintained, "unless substantial increases (in the number of instructional personnel and space provisions available to the college) are made, the rate of growth of The City College will continue to remain below the rate for colleges of the country as a whole" (ibid.).

According to Pearman and Reid, rather than academic principles, space shortages were the effective rationale underlying City College's admissions criteria. They noted that if City College was to meet the Strayer Report's goal of doubling its fully matriculated student body by admitting the top 50% of New York City's graduating high school class, then it would simply need to lower admissions standards from about 80% to 77%. The mere three percentage points of G.P.A. separating those deemed meritorious and worthy of admission and the sizable plurality clustered just below the cut-off reveals just how arbitrary, from an academic standpoint, admission standards were, as lowering the cut-off a mere 3% points would have doubled the incoming class size. Understanding the cut-off point was not

constructed according to academic principles, Pearman and Reid argued, “the number of students that can be accommodated in a building is hardly defensible as a measure of the need of the community for higher education” (quoted in Neumann 1984:267).

In 1950, at the request of the BHE, Donald Cottrel authored the municipal college system’s first master plan. The 1950 Master Plan paralleled previous calls for expansion, also noting the incredible over-crowding in the existing system, the rising demand for higher education amongst college aged people, and the increasing institutional articulation between higher education and occupational structures. Beyond the general arguments linking higher education and economic and political citizenship in the post-war period, Cottrell argued that higher education performed a unique function in the U.S.’s most diverse city:

> In New York City, the problem of assimilation and Americanization is unique. Though their parents and grandparents came from the four corners of the earth, the children must become Americans in loyalty, language and outlook. Credit for success obtained is in very large part due to our schools and colleges. (quoted in Neumann 1984:287)

In a prescient statement that would anticipate the arguments of the BPRSC, Cottrell asserted, “leadership for the economically poor neighborhood must come from within that neighborhood. Here higher education has a crucial role to play” (quoted in Neumann 1984:287). For Cottrell, broader access to higher education was vital for more than an increased ability “to earn a living,” because in a pluralistic society a diverse set of leaders from a broad array of groups “must carry their share of the responsibility for our democratic leadership at home and abroad” (ibid.).

Finally, in 1951, George Strayer was again called upon by the Mayor to report on the public education system in New York City, along with Louis E. Yavner. The Strayer-Yavner Report restated several of the themes from the first Strayer report of several years prior, focusing on the need for the municipal college system to physically expand to serve more of the city's youth. According to the authors of the report, most of the city's youth who were denied admission to the municipal college system were "excluded for failure to comply with entrance requirements which, according to professional judgment, were inordinately high" (quoted in Neumann 1984:290). In addition to renewing calls to double or triple the size of admitted students to the four year colleges, the Strayer-Yavner Report called for the creation of two year community colleges, in line with the recommendations of the Truman Commission on Higher Education (Brint and Karabel 1989:68-73).

Thus, from 1944 until 1951, the three key institutional power holders over the municipal system of higher education, the State Legislature in Albany, the Board of Higher Education for the City of New York, and the Mayor's Office, along with the acting Presidents of the city's senior colleges, all called for an extensive expansion of the municipal system of higher education. However, in spite of the calls for expansion of every aspect of the overall municipal system, the BHE only added three two-year community colleges to the system,[237] stagnating the system's overall capacity. Combined, the three community colleges that were founded in the 1950's enrolled only 3% of the city's high school graduates as of 1961 (Wechsler 1977:263).

---

[237] These were, Staten Island Community College in 1955, Bronx Community College in 1957, and Queensborough Community College in 1958. (Weschler 1977:263)

Stagnation at the senior college level was even more pronounced, as from 1950-1962 admission to the crucial bachelor's degree candidacy in fact declined at City College, from 8859 to 8563, in stark contrast to its increasing importance for the attainment of white-collar, professional employment (ibid.).

The continual raising of the cutoff point for admission was not due to judgments of what constituted academic merit, but was rather the result of a conscious decision by the BHE to keep entering class sizes constant (ibid.:263). Because the BHE failed to act on its own understanding of the centrality of higher education for the full realization of post-war economic and political citizenship, the supply of positions within the municipal college system would continually shrink in relation to demand for higher education throughout the 50's and 60's.[238] Rather than composing an academic definition of "merit" that fit its conception of post-war citizenship, the BHE chose to narrow the meaning of "merit," categorizing as such a smaller and smaller fraction of New York City's most academically credentialed high school graduates. Thus, overall, the ratio of New York City high school graduates (public and private) enrolling in one of the four-year colleges of the municipal system declined significantly from 1945 to 1970, the latter being the year open admissions was implemented (Wechsler 1977:262-63).

---

[238] Even as more options to pursue higher education emerged, such as the new SUNY system, and for many New Yorkers, the easing of pro-WASP admissions practices at private colleges, the fact that the cut-off point steadily rose throughout the Post-War period up until the Open Admissions policy, shows that demand for higher education was far outstripping the *public* capacity to deliver it.

The official reports and recommendations of the late 40's and early 50's advocated for the implementation of two-year programs, or community colleges, to service students who were thought to have a mix of vocational, professional, and liberal academic needs. However, because the BHE did not follow through on plans to expand the senior colleges in conjunction with the creation of two-year institutions, the community colleges, in the main, only had the space to admit students with almost identical academic profiles as those being admitted to the four-year programs. According to Gordon, "the new community colleges were serving essentially the same kinds of students as were the senior colleges—a special irony because the admissions requirements for the senior colleges in the early 1960's were already considered by many observers to be excessively high" (Gordon 1975: 91-2). Indeed, because overall capacity did not increase, the community colleges were compelled to replicate the inordinately high admissions standards of the senior colleges, requiring in the early 60's a 77.5% average for admission; the very target point recommended by the Pearman and Reid Study for the *senior* college admission all the way back in 1947 (ibid.). In 1957, admission to the Bronx Community College was frozen at 1,200 for the day session, and 1,700 for the evening session. Only one-third of qualified applicants were admitted, and thousands more students, who were previously targeted as likely benefitting from vocational studies, would never be admitted to such a vocational course of study because all seats were taken up by students on an academic track (Neumann 1984:322).

In light of the fact that there were few real academic distinctions between those admitted to the senior and community colleges, the municipal system did attempt to make transferring from an associate's degree program into the bachelor's degree program relatively easy. They did so by offering AA graduates matriculation into the BA programs with the equivalent of two years of study. However, while individuals could earn entrance to a senior college, the institutional boundaries separating the fully matriculated student from the partially or non-matriculated student, the day session student from the evening session student, and senior college student from community college student, hardened, as these categorical distinctions continued to justify exploitative relations. The municipal system continued to capitalize on the tuition of the associate's degree students, who were charged $125.00 tuition per term. Non-matriculated community college students were charged $10.00 per credit hour for a normal course of study, with an additional $6.00 charged per extra credit hour (Neumann 1984:322-3). The municipal system used these revenues to fund the tuition-free programs of the fully matriculated bachelor's students.

Such exploitative relationships organized across internal frontiers of categorical distinctions of merit were surprisingly significant. Early analyses of students pursuing the associate's degree in City College's Evening Session in the early 50's supported the Strayer Report's argument that students would benefit from support beyond free tuition. One study found that a full 72% of the incoming Evening Session associate degree students withdrew prior to the completion of the first year. However, 75% of such students dropped out while in good academic standing,

suggesting non-academic factors necessitated their withdrawal (Neumann 1984:311). Furthermore, Evening Session students were not likely to graduate with an AA until they were 28 or 29 years old, on average (Neumann 1984:310), suggesting they were burdened by the necessity to work while pursuing their studies on a very limited basis. The report also found that there was no relationship between a student's high school standing and his or her withdrawal from the associate's degree program. While students in the Evening Session whose high school average had been between 65%-72% did show higher rates of dropout due to poor scholarship (the cut off for admission to the day session was 80%), the report found in more general terms, the evening student scholarship "would appear to approximate that of Day Students rather closely" (quoted in Neumann 1984:310). Finally, despite some academic differences between the bottom and top half of evening session students, their rates of attrition were quite similar, suggesting that non scholarly forces were determining the success or failure of the associate's degree students (Neumann 1984:310-313). Thus, the different institutional treatment of different categories of students itself, largely drawn for arbitrary reasons, likely contributed to the very different educational outcomes between Day and Evening Session students.

In 1957, City College received 2,000 applications for admission, but admitted fewer than 200. "With an increased demand for admission," said the college's Registrar, "it is quite possible that our standards for admission may have to continue to rise if we are to keep within our physical facilities and staffing" (quoted in Neumann 1984:333). To counteract such problems, the new community colleges

necessarily became a stepping-stone into the senior colleges for those who could afford the tuition. However, as shown above, despite the modest *academic* differences between AA and BA students upon admission to the municipal college system, attrition rates for AA students were extremely high, suggesting the unequal treatment between BA and AA students was significantly detrimental to the chances of the designated subordinate student to thrive. Furthermore, senior college students and faculty adapted to the boundary between those categorized as fully and those categorized as partially meritorious, investing the categorical differences between AA and BA students with symbolic meaning.[239] For instance, in spite of the modest *academic* differences between the two groups of students, a 1957 faculty statement addressing faculty concerns that prospective students would use the relative ease of transferring directly into BA programs upon graduation from AA programs, warned, "we must guard against confusing the ideal of equality in educational opportunity with the fiction of equality in educational capability" (quoted in Neumann 1984:324).

From the standpoint of the faculty of the municipal colleges, the danger resided in students who used the two-year program as, in their view, an illegitimate way of circumventing academic standards, thereby threatening the academic and professional excellence of the senior colleges.

> Is it not reasonable to expect that many students who were refused admission to a (senior) college and have enrolled in a transfer program would not be content with a second class diploma from a community college? Would they not exert every effort to make the transfer

---

[239] On the routinization of practices around constructed frontiers in organizational life, see Tilly (1998:100-3).

> program serve as a back door to elude the entrance requirements? (ibid.)

Thus, in 1957, the faculty did not recognize that the students enrolling in the transfer program in the community colleges were in fact academically very similar to the senior college admits,[240] and therefore could not understand the two-year programs as simply an organizational extension of the four-year colleges, aiding in the immense organizational problem of overcrowding at the senior college level. By noting the vast difference in legitimacy and cultural capital between the associate's and bachelor's degrees, labeling the AA degree "second class," the faculty made an academically arbitrary boundary between students, drawn for organizational expedience, a categorical distinction of student *merit*. Thus, the fact that the boundary had not been drawn for academic reasons in the first place was forgotten, as faculty and senior college students came to understand it as distinguishing real differences in student achievement, ability and worth. In addition to the exploitation across the organizational boundary between AA and BA students that seemed to have a deleterious effect on the associate's degree student, a symbolic frontier was erected that distributed students according to hierarchies of merit. Rather than a continuum of students existing throughout the municipal system, in the 1950's, the community colleges became the official home of the "second tier" student (ibid.: 323).

---

[240] In 1957, the community college student bodies were split 50/50 between those admitted as transfer program students, likely to transfer into the four year BA programs in the senior colleges upon graduation, and terminal two year vocational studies students. However, by the end of the decade, because of the escalating crisis of declining capacity relative to rising demand, the majority of AA earners were transferring to BA programs in the senior colleges. (Neumann 1984:324)

Such “second tier” students were the victims of exploitative relations in as much as they were deprived of free tuition and located in a subordinate and stigmatized position within symbolic hierarchies of academic worth. The “second tier” students would continue to suffer from lower rates of academic success in spite of the fact that their academic qualities prior to admission were quite comparable to those admitted as privileged bachelor’s degree seeking students. Finally, and most importantly for the story of Open Admissions and the “death of City College” that many observers believed open access caused, these academically arbitrary symbolic hierarchies of merit constituted the cognitive frame through which most students, faculty and alumni evaluated the “third tier” student university administrators and social movement actors would attempt to incorporate into the municipal system in the 1960’s. Having come to believe in the legitimacy of their own intellectual superiority, and having come to invest great significance in their categorical distinction, within the eyes of those who had been arbitrarily anointed as meritorious, the black and Puerto Rican students who began to demand access to the college in the 1960’s were of dubious worth.

Chapter 5

Racially Encoding the "Meritorious Student"

In 1958, in the midst of continuing calls for the expansion of the municipal college system and in full view of the coming "tidal wave" of rising college demand associated with the coming to college age of the baby-boom generation,[241] City College's alumni association, through its journalistic organ the *Alumnus,* conducted a poll of its members. They wanted to understand the alumni's view of prevailing admissions practices. Through the polling, City College's alumni urged the municipal system as a whole to resist the "arbitrary expansion of the undergraduate enrollment if it means a lowering of academic standards"[242] For the City College alumni, a group that would prove to be one of the most conservative actors in the coming struggles of definitions of academic merit realized in institutional admissions practices, "free higher education for the able" should never degrade into "free higher education for all."[243]

However, in direct opposition to national trends that accompanied the increased state interest on the part of the federal government in higher education as a mode of citizenship production (Smith and Bender 2008:83-89; Wechsler 1977:251-4; Loss 2012:138), the municipal system's admissions standards had become *more*

---

[241] Experts predicted 1964 was the year the "tidal wave" of college-aged baby boomers would hit.

[242] Lawrence Podell, "The Alumni Take a Census," *Alumnus*, vol. 53, no. 7, June 1958, as quoted in Neumann (1984: 341).

[243] (ibid.)

restrictive and selective during the 1950's and early 1960's, not less (Gordon 1975: 176, 80). From 1950 to 1960, the cut-off point for admission to the bachelor's degree programs had risen from 80 to 85 (ibid.: 176), and, as noted by Neumann (1984: 53), almost all alterations of the cut-off point were directly due to the lack of sufficient facilities.[244] As shown in the previous chapter, and as was clearly understood by college administrators, admissions practices at the municipal colleges had little to do with the academic abilities of applicants, and everything to do with spacial economies: "The lack of space results in the denial of admission to a great number of worthy graduates of the city high schools as a result of which, undeniably, the community sustains a great loss in being unable to provide adequate facilities for the training of many promising young citizens" (minutes of the BHE, as quoted in Neumann 1984: 335). Indeed, until the Black and Puerto Rican Student Community (BPRSC) precipitated the Open Admissions policy by demanding equal access to BA degrees via occupying the City College campus, the post-war municipal system of higher education was overwhelmingly characterized by institutional stagnation.

One of the most frequent scholarly explanations for Open Admissions offers an institutionalist analysis, suggesting, against arguments that the seemingly radical policy was the result of extra-academic political meddling in educational policy, Open Admissions was in fact in keeping with City College's founding institutional mission of providing educational opportunity to the structurally disadvantaged newcomers to New York City (Gordon 1975; Neumann 1984). This argument aligns

[244] As noted in the previous chapter, the other changes in the cut-off point were also not made for academic reasons, but rather to mitigate the depression of enrollment rates during World War II.

with Rudy's (1949) influential early account of City College's history. Rudy, writing from within the mode of liberal consensus historiography that dominated the postwar period, portrays City College as a progressive institution whose function is in part to act as a machine of integration for various newcomers to the U.S.' most diverse city. He asserts, "the college had always been a sensitive weather vane, reflecting the main tendencies in the life of the city and nation" (ibid.:293). In particular, according to Rudy, the college's "student population had always reflected the tendencies in the population of the city at large" (396).

In the first few decades following WWII, New York City did in fact experience a rapid demographic transformation. During the 1950's, the city's total population remained stable, but about a million additional blacks and Puerto Ricans moving into the city replaced the same number of whites leaving (Wechsler 1977: 264; Karabel 1983: 22-25; Freeman 2000: 25-29). Contrary to the notion that the municipal college system's very function has been to educate structurally and culturally disadvantaged newcomers, however, as the city's demographics changed during the 1950's, the demographics of the municipal system's student body remained remarkably stable. According to Wechsler, throughout the 50's, the percentage of non-white graduates of the city's high schools remained constant at 13%, and non-white enrollment at the municipal colleges also remained constant at 5%. Throughout the 50's, while the municipal colleges admitted 20% of the city's high school graduates, non-whites made up only 1% of the high school graduates admitted (Wechsler 1977: 264, based on Holy 1962: 82-93; see also Karabel 1983: 22-26). In fact, not only was the CUNY system overwhelmingly white, but more

narrowly, it was majority Jewish, as other white ethnic groups within New York City were underrepresented along with blacks and Puerto Ricans (Karabel 1983). While several relatively controversial efforts were made to integrate a broader swatch of New Yorkers, including more black and Puerto Rican students into CUNY in the mid and late 1960's, it was not until Open Admissions was implemented in 1970 that relatively equal minority representation was achieved throughout the system, as well as a substantial influx of non-Jewish whites.[245]

Key to the institutionalist story is the conflict between the conservative Board of Higher Education (BHE), and its chairperson Gustave Rosenberg, and CUNY's second Chancellor, Albert Bowker (Gordon 1975; Wechsler 1977; Neumann 1984; Karabel 1983). The institutionalist explanations for the development of Open Admissions emphasize that throughout the 50's and 60's Rosenberg and the BHE, through a conservative defense of "academic standards" and "meritocracy," impeded and even blocked efforts to expand the overall system to serve the educational needs of a wider swath of the city's youth. Indeed, such institutionalist accounts are right to point out the BHE, largely a patronage outpost throughout the 50's and 60's, lacked the executive vision and vigor to achieve a significant expansion of the municipal system and to oversee its consolidation as a university capable of meeting the skyrocketing demands for higher education in post-war society. Moreover, the institutionalists also recognize the significant individual role Bowker played, and his

[245] Since no CUNY branch measured the ethnicity, however defined, of its student body, it is impossible to say for certain how predominant the university's student Jewish population was. Estimates vary from anywhere from 90% Jewish right before and after WWII, to more close to 50% Jewish during the 1960's. The privileged Day Session of the senior colleges were likely more Jewish than the exploited Night Session and Junior Colleges of the CUNY system.

prodigious efforts and acute political acumen, with Gordon (1975) and Neumann (1984) in particular attributing Bowker's instrumental role to his exceptional personal qualities.

Thus, the institutionalist explanation for Open Admissions reflects a functionalistically whiggish view of City College's history. In this view, the municipal system's stagnation during the 50's and early 60's is understood as a kind of latent transitional period, where the college's student-body over represented Jews because its institutional function had not yet adapted to the demographic trends transforming the city. On this view, the Open Admissions policy's birth was a violent one because as a governing entity, the BHE lacked the vision to recognize the necessary institutional change for the system to fulfill its functional role of providing an exceptional ladder of upward mobility for the city and nation's disadvantaged newcomers. In such accounts, it is the mechanism of functional institutional adaptation to a changing demographic environment that explains the policy change of Open Admissions.

However, this functionalist view of City College's history relies on a false memory of the institution as a melting pot for the dispossessed. In fact, as noted in the last chapter, until Open Admissions was implemented in 1970, the City College student-body tended to be dominated by single ethnic groups, middle class WASPs in the first period from 1849-1890, and Jews from 1890-1970. In practical terms, for the reasons analyzed in the previous chapter, City College never provided educational opportunity on a universal basis. Moreover, the limitations on the educational opportunity City College provided were becoming all the more significant and

pronounced in the post-war period as the importance of a four year college degree in gaining access to economic security. Thus, in view of the institutional failings of the municipal college system in the 1950's and 1960's, the Open Admissions policy is better understood as having been brought on by a *crisis in post-war citizenship* in the U.S. In this way, the various social actors demanding CUNY expand enrollment beyond the system's "traditional constituents" are best understood as demanding the *equalization of social citizenship*.

In analyzing Bowker, and other public higher educational elites, as "state managers" of the political-economic system (Karabel 1983; Block 1987), and understanding Bowker's actions as governed by his pursuit of CUNY's organizational interests within an evolving field of higher education and transformation of New York City's demographics, Karabel (1983) foregrounds the important role systems of education and higher education play in securing larger societal legitimacy. Karabel rightly points out that Bowker sought a policy of universal admission several years in advance of the campus takeover by the BPRSC. However, Bowker's plan for universal admissions is puzzling from two perspectives. First, from an organizational standpoint, CUNY's prestige in the '50's and '60's was based on its academically elite student body. Why would he risk this organizational prestige through such a radical democratization of access? Second, from a larger class standpoint, a policy of universal enrollment required a massively expensive influx of state funding, and therefore increased taxation of the wealthy classes. Karabel argues that Bowker's democratic aims can be understood when considering university administrators as "specialists of legitimation" (Karabel 1983: 48). For Bowker, the exclusion of blacks

and Puerto Ricans from a public higher education system that functioned ideologically to secure broad based belief in meritocratic upward mobility through equal educational opportunity and achievement was threatening an over-arching legitimation crisis. To serve its legitimating function, CUNY would need to expand radically to make the notion of upward mobility through higher education subjectively plausible for the majority of New Yorkers, especially the youth. Thus, Karabel's elegant synthesis of Weberian organizational analysis and Neo-Marxist state theory can easily be translated into the analytical logic of citizenship.

However, Karabel does not analyze the effects of the particular content of Bowker's political actions. Indeed, beyond the puzzle of why, as a "state manager" Bowker would be so intent on achieving a fiscally taxing policy of universal enrollment, lies a second puzzle of why the public understood Open Admissions, and the College Discovery and SEEK programs that preceded it, as ethno-racial affirmative action programs? Peculiarly, large segments of the public saw Open Admissions, a policy that guaranteed access to CUNY for all high school graduates regardless of their race or ethnicity or quality of their high school record, as specifically targeting racial minorities such as blacks and Puerto Ricans for academically un-merited inclusion in higher education.[246]

---

[246] That many whites would come to see Open Admissions as akin to a racially driven affirmative action program is paradoxical in as much as blacks and Puerto Ricans were far more likely than whites not to graduate from high school in the 1970's, thus limiting the principle of equality of outcome amongst those who entered CUNY it enshrined for five significant years. In other words, if Open Admissions continued to structurally discriminate against any groups, it was blacks and Puerto Ricans who were systematically more likely to receive an inadequate primary education undermining their right to a four-year degree.

In this chapter, I argue that while standards of "merit" at City College were in fact academically arbitrary, because several types of important actors had come to invest them with academic legitimacy, they became the prism through which efforts to expand enrollment at CUNY were interpreted and understood. Through the prism of sacred academic standards, efforts to expand enrollment contradicted the values of educational excellence. In the mind of key actors and large swaths of the public, the Open Admissions crisis was understood as a conflict between accessible education and educational excellence. Because the controversial efforts to expand enrollment were in large measure driven by racial politics, the opposition between access and excellence became racially coded, with many actors understanding the various efforts to expand enrollment at CUNY, not in terms of expanding the boundaries of educational citizenship, but of a charitable extension of educational opportunity to a population of black and Puerto Rican students who, because they were not categorized as meritorious within operative definitions, were seen as of dubious worthiness.[247]

This racial coding of the category "merit" was compounded by the stigmatizing effects of the College Discovery and SEEK programs,[248] each of which defined their target populations, in accordance with the leading social scientific expertise on the pathologizing effects of racism on its victims (Herman 1995: 174-207; Scott 1997; Ferguson 2004), as psychologically damaged an in need of

[247] On the importance of the difference between social provision structured as particularizing charity as opposed to the universal rights of citizenship in U.S. citizenship patterns see Fraser and Gordon (1998), on the opposition between the morally worthy and unworthy, see Katz (1989).
[248] As we will see, general patterns of everyday stigmatization of blacks and Puerto Ricans were also significant on City College's campus.

reconstruction. Thus, College Discovery and SEEK set a pattern of framing the inclusion of blacks and Puerto Rican students in CUNY as an opportunity to psychologically reconstruct damaged populations through higher education. Such a framing disregarded the deep crisis in postwar citizenship CUNY's institutional stagnation caused, that was in turn, unequally born by black and Puerto Rican New Yorkers. The framing of psychological damage also could not recognize the demand for equal citizenship black and Puerto Rican students asserted in their five demands that would accompany the 1969 campus takeover.

The Institutional Contradictions of the Office of the Chancellor

Originally proposed in the Strayer Report of 1944 as a means of coordinating the different branches of the municipal system and increasing collective planning, the BHE was unable to create the office of Chancellor until 1960. Indeed, characteristic of the municipal system's overall stagnation, although it took sixteen years to accomplish, the office was established without delineating clear lines of authority between the Chancellor and the BHE. In fact, CUNY's first Chancellor, John Everett, resigned to take up a post at the head of The New School for Social Research after serving less than two years at CUNY. When hired as Chancellor, Everett understood his mission to be to use the authority of the head executive's office to build the municipal college system into a dynamic university. On the other hand, the Chairperson of the BHE, Gustave Rosenberg, understood executive authority over the entire system to reside in his own office. Rosenberg's personal political ambitions far outstripped his executive energies or institutional imagination as he constantly acted as an agent of institutional stagnation (Gordon 1975; Wechsler 1979; Karabel 1983).

Thus, the organizational illogic of the unresolved bureaucratic relationship between the office of the Chancellor and the BHE was compounded by two very different visions for the University, with neither Everett nor Rosenberg able to formally claim the authority to strike a course of action. Finding himself without the executive authority to achieve his mission, Everett swiftly resigned.

In contrast, CUNY's second Chancellor, Albert Bowker was a far more formidable political and executive agent. Appointed in July of 1963 to help build CUNY's doctoral programs, Bowker immediately took a broad view of CUNY's institutional predicament. He was particularly concerned that as a public institution of higher education, the CUNY system was serving a smaller and smaller segment of the city's population. This narrowing of public service particularly manifested itself in the ever rising cut-off point for admission that was threatening, at the moment Bowker took office to reach a high school average of 90 to qualify for admission to one of CUNY's senior colleges. Additionally, Bowker was concerned that while the proportion of New York City's residents who were black or Puerto Rican was sharply increasing in the post-war decades, only a small portion of CUNY's overall student body were black or Puerto Rican. Furthermore, students from these two groups comprised an even smaller proportion of the privileged senior college student body.

By all accounts, Bowker was a brilliant, tough and even visionary administrator who set out immediately to transform CUNY (Gordon 1975; Wecshler 1977; Karabel 1983). However, in addition to a struggle with the BHE over competing claims to executive authority over the university, Bowker also was forced to contend with emerging forces in the local field of higher education. Columbia,

having secured its prestige through its dominant position in the local field of higher education in first half of the 20th century, and having successfully risen to the stature of nationally elite university (in part because of the municipal system's ability to absorb a large number of the stigmatized and institutionally stigmatizing Jewish students) City College's elite neighbor to the south no longer had an interest in retarding the growth of public higher education in New York (Gordon 1975:134-5). However, another byproduct of Columbia's secured elite reputation was the emergence of a new entity within the local field of higher education in the form of The State University of New York (SUNY). Due in part to the efforts of Columbia and Cornell to stave off public rivals in higher education, SUNY was not established until after WWII, long after the 19th century Midwestern land grant state university systems. SUNY's initial growth in the 1950's matched the overall stagnation of higher education in the New York (Gordon 1975:81). However, in the 1960's, the State system would begin to grow more swiftly as Governor Nelson Rockefeller made the university's ascent one of his top priorities in an attempt to burnish his credentials as a future liberal Republican candidate for President of the United States.

The competition between SUNY and CUNY for resources and prestige articulated with long standing conflicts between conservative upstate political forces and downstate liberal and progressive urban interests in Albany, New York State's capital. In as much as CUNY required an influx of state resources to materially expand to meet the rising demand for higher education, Bowker needed the support not just of the conservative BHE, but also the Mayor of New York, the Governor of New York State, as well as a state legislature that was divided between hostile

conservative upstate Republicans and a diverse coalition of downstate urban interests, sometimes divided along class and ethnic lines, but whom wielded formidable power when they managed to act in concert. As CUNY aimed to undergo a long overdue expansion in the 1960's, it came face to face with New York City's already thinly stretched finances. Any realistic financing of a massive CUNY expansion would have to come from state coffers. However, upstate legislators and political forces, already engaged in the massive expansion of the SUNY system, had seemingly little to gain from pouring money into a municipal university that by law did not admit out-of-towners and could not charge tuition to a significant portion of its student body. Bowker's attempts to meet the rising demand for higher education in New York City in general, and serve the educational needs of black and Puerto Rican New Yorkers in particular, were thus caught up in larger political conflicts in New York State. As upstate political actors held the keys to the state's coffers, they leveraged their power by threatening the CUNY system, in turn, with decreased institutional autonomy, institutional marginalization, or outright institutional absorption into the SUNY system.[249]

However, Rockefeller and other upstate actors were not driven solely by financial interests. Rockefeller aimed to make SUNY into one of the top public university systems in the country and coveted the academic prestige of City College and the other senior branches of the CUNY system (Hunter College, Brooklyn College and Queens College, in this period, all of which had reputations for intellectually elite student bodies.) Thus, upstate actors suggested that if CUNY and

---

[249] "GOP Hinges CU Aid on Link with State U.," *The Campus*, May 10, 1966, p. 1.

the City of New York were unable to properly fund the needed expansion of the CUNY system, rather than receive state aid while maintaining institutional autonomy, the entire CUNY system ought to be integrated into SUNY. On other occasions, upstate actors threatened CUNY with marginalization by threatening to amend earlier agreements to leave higher education in New York City exclusively to CUNY, proposing 4-year branches of SUNY within New York City's geographical limits. For its part, CUNY capitalized on its prestige amongst middle-class suburbanites (many of whom had attended City, Hunter, Brooklyn or Queens College and having rode the wave of rising post-war prosperity, and being able to capitalize on declining anti-Semitism in housing markets, decamped to the suburbs, but still believed that a prestigious and tuition-free higher education was something of a birthright,) by threatening to open senior college branches beyond the city limits on Long Island (Gordon 1975: 172-3).

According to Gordon, in addition to the struggle over prestige and resources waged over public higher education, an ethno-racial logic manifesting itself through competing "images and styles" lay underneath the struggle between upstate and downstate political forces over CUNY and SUNY's geographical boundaries and CUNY's institutional autonomy (Gordon 1975: 169-71). Politically, the City represented a vision in line with its "'brown bag' image—that of the earnest, bright young student, with barely enough money for books and the daily subway commute, carrying his lunch from home in a small brown bag" (ibid.). According to Gordon, CUNY backers understood themselves as "the sons of immigrants, or of immigrants themselves, placing their hopes and dreams of a successful future in City College, the

'Statue of Liberty of Education'" (ibid.). For its traditional 20th century constituents, mostly Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe who were experiencing rapid upward mobility in the post-war economic boom, CUNY represented democratic opportunity in the face of hostile, elitist, exclusionary WASP forces: "To the City dwellers . . . the upstate image was rich, powerful, and elitist, even 'WASPy' in style" (170). On the other hand, according to Gordon, upstate forces distrusted "City folk, whom they (saw) as tough, aggressive, cunning, and, inevitably, Jewish" (169).

Throughout the 1960's, these social and political forces intersected as Bowker, the BHE, New York City's Mayor, New York's Governor, and the State Legislature in Albany engaged in a yearly wrangling over CUNY's budget. Year after year upstate forces gained political leverage by zeroing in on the issue that divided downstate forces, free tuition at CUNY's senior colleges. From Albany's perspective, ending CUNY's 100 year plus commitment to free higher education for the highest achieving New York City High School graduates, in favor of some means tested tuition charge, was a fair exchange for a massive influx of state funding for the expansion of the CUNY system. Year after year, the BHE crafted a coalition, comprised of the United Federation of Teachers, the United Parents Association, the Women's City Club, the American Jewish Committee, and other powerful Jewish groups, as well as energetic masses of City College students and alumni (Gordon 1975: 171), to protect free tuition. From one standpoint, the coalition's obsessive focus on free tuition was seemingly in defense of a social democratic policy. However, because free tuition was only granted to the small fraction of students who were able to gain admission to the senior colleges, and because overall capacity

within the municipal system failed to meet the ever expanding demand within the city, institutionally free tuition was not the cornerstone of the right to a higher education for all New Yorkers, but rather a financial privilege bestowed on a small fraction of the academically elite, who tended to be white and Jewish. In noting the coalition's successes in thwarting attacks on the free tuition policy, Gordon rightly argues, "such politically effective groups were focusing their efforts on free tuition, defending tradition, obscuring pressing needs for expansion" (ibid.: 172).

Bowker on the other hand understood that CUNY was serving only an elite few and therefore saw the need for expansion clearly. Bowker's s agenda for the radical expansion and transformation of CUNY was stuck between powerful upstate forces that wished to co-opt the CUNY system by integrating it into the SUNY system, and an effective downstate political coalition that struggled to maintain its privileges within the status quo. Indeed, as more and more African-American and Puerto-Rican community leaders began seeing the tuition free policy as an impediment to the necessary growth CUNY would need to undertake to reach minority students, upstate Republicans seized on the tuition issue in what Gordon calls a "subconscious 'Southern Strategy'" that sowed divisions between Jews, and blacks and Puerto-Ricans (Gordon 1975: 175).

Karabel argues Bowker was the driving force behind the massive expansion of CUNY (Karabel 1983). Combining a neo-Marxist state theoretical perspective with Weberian approaches to the autonomy of organizational interests, Karabel argues educational administrators should be conceived as "state managers" (Block 1987), whose administrative function is to enact and protect the legitimating function the

educational system performs in the reproduction of class relations in the post-war capitalist order. In order to achieve this function, educational administrators must identify and pursue the autonomous interests of their organizations; that is those organizational interests that are autonomous from the specific and *particular* interests of class exploitation of the dominant class, as well as the larger state's interest in reproducing the *general* conditions of capitalist accumulation.

Beyond the decades of institutional stagnation that had resulted in CUNY meeting a smaller and smaller fraction of the potential demand for college education, the demand for CUNY from its "traditional constituency," Jews of Eastern European derivation who had arrived in New York City during the massive migration from 1880-1920, was declining for at least two reasons. First, Jews were increasingly being admitted to the more prestigious private colleges they were largely excluded from prior to World War II due to anti-Semitic quotas. More and more Jewish New Yorkers were choosing Harvard over "the Harvard of the proletariat." Secondly, New York City's overall Jewish population was declining in the 1960's as more and more Jews, along with many others from non-black ethnic groups, were relocating to the expanding suburbs. (Karabel 1983) Karabel argues Bowker recognized the declining economic and institutional security and prestige CUNY could garner from remaining tightly linked with its "traditional constituents" to the exclusion of other populations. Because many Jews were leaving New York for suburbs, City College was threatened with losing both its staunchest political supporters as well as its traditional pool of students. From Bowker's perspective, if CUNY did not massively expand to serve a much broader swath of the City's youth, it could lose its institutional relevance and

prestige, potentially threatening its sources of financing, thus weakening or even making the municipal university system irrelevant.

Indeed, from the moment of his hiring in the summer of 1963 through the achievement of Open Admissions, Bowker, through an assortment of measures, doggedly worked to expand access to CUNY: first by attempting to lower admission standards; then by innovating alternative admissions programs to reach black and Puerto Rican students who were severely underrepresented within the CUNY student body; to officially promulgating the goal of universal enrollment of all high school graduates by 1975; to, finally, the open admissions policy of 1970, that moved up the date of universal enrollment by five years. To achieve such a radical expansion of the CUNY system, Bowker had to extract massive resources by tenaciously navigating a complicated political field. Karabel suggests that from very early in his administration, perhaps immediately, Bowker intended to achieve open admissions, but needed a crisis situation for which an open admissions policy could be the solution (Karabel 1983:47).

Conrad Dyer, on the other hand, argues the campus takeover by black and Puerto Rican students, an action that was explicitly supported by civil rights leaders of various stripes in Harlem, was directly responsible for the timing and character of the open admissions policy (Dyer 1990). For Dyer, the universal admissions policy was the result of political action from below, not the political machinations of an elite state actor. Indeed, Dyer is correct in noting the rising chorus of public concern for CUNY’s ethno-racial imbalances from New York’s civil rights leaders was concurrent with Bowker taking over the position of chancellor. Dyer’s critique of

Karabel is not entirely fair, as Karabel's argument is ultimately conjunctural, claiming that the Open Admissions policy was the result of the intersection of the BPRSC social movement mobilization and Bowker's particular negotiation of CUNY's organizational interests. According to Karabel, neither the student mobilization nor Bowker's efforts would have been sufficient on their own to effect such radical change.[250] However, for Dyer, the ultimate point is political. Dominated social groups can achieve significant democratic change in the form of the radical reconstruction of higher education in New York City through confrontational political action from below, and not because elite actors willed it to be so. For Dyer, the agents of change were the black and Puerto Rican students who successfully organized and demanded it.

However, placing both analytical strategies within the context of educational citizenship is revealing. It is significant for the long term legitimacy of the Open Admissions policy that Bowker framed the policy as a necessary response to an ethno-racial political crisis. According to Bowker's framing of the policy, Open Admissions were needed not because postwar educational citizenship was systematically structured unequally due to institutional failings, but rather to avert a race war between whites and blacks and, more specifically, Jews and blacks. While Bowker's emergency discourse may have been in his interest as a state manager, focusing attention on the problem, such a discursive framing was not in the long-term

---

[250] Karabel writes, "what led to open admissions at the City University was not, therefore, mass action alone, but rather the way in which demands from below meshed with the organizational interests of the very institution that was the object of those demands" (Karabel 1983:47-8).

interests of justice. By eschewing the language of citizenship, the public came to see the policy in the terms of a political giveaway or as a form of charity to otherwise unworthy racial groups. While Open Admissions was achieved, the policy was a virtual stillborn, as it was vehemently opposed from the start and its radical form it lasted only five years.

Additionally, while Dyer emphasizes the power the BPRSC amassed through their organizational prowess and confrontational tactics, the group was in fact animated in form and content by the particular critique of the hegemonic liberal creed they developed. While in part motivated by strategic power interests, the BPRSC also rejected the manner in which an academically arbitrary construction of the "meritorious student" coded blacks and Puerto Ricans as unworthy of higher education within the U.S.' meritocratic liberal regime. The BPRSC rejected the institutional manifestation of a larger political culture that coded them as deficient, directly challenging the legitimacy of liberal regimes of citizenship in the U.S. As will be analyzed in subsequent chapters, it was through such a clear-eyed critique of American exceptionalism that the BPRSC demanded the equal right to higher education. While Dyer is certainly correct in arguing that without the radical mobilization by the BPRSC, the institutional goal of universal enrollment by 1975 (see below) would never have been achieved. However, in part due to the standpoint of white privilege that emerged around the construction of the meritorious student at City College, the radical re-imagining of citizenship through which the BPRSC made their claims to the right to higher education went unrecognized by large swaths of the public. This ultimately undermined the legitimacy of the radical expansion of

citizenship the Open Admissions policy entailed. This chapter reconstructs the standpoint of white-privilege that developed as the interpretive frame through which the mainstream City College student, faculty and alumni interpreted efforts to expand enrollment at City College.

Bowker's Push for Expansion

Indeed, Bowker's first policy action in the fall of 1963 was to move to lower the admissions standards to the four senior colleges within CUNY.[251] Believing that a high school average of 90, or even 85, was excessively high, Bowker set out to lower the cut-off point to the 1952 levels of an 82 or 83 average. Bowker noted: "When I accepted the Chancelorship, I hadn't realized how competitive the entrance requirements are. In my opinion the necessity of having a high school average of over 85% is too high. We will try to lower the average a little—82 or 83 per cent is possible."[252] Bowker's proposal was particularly aggressive as it coincided with a significant increase of the college-aged population with the coming of age of the post-war baby boom generation. In addition to lowering what he saw as arbitrarily competitive entrance requirements, Bowker hoped that relaxed entrance requirements might also increase the total number of black and Puerto Rican students admitted. The senior colleges, including City College, pursued several measures, such as extending the class schedule to Saturdays, to pack more students into already crowded

---

[251] "The College's Enrollment Crisis," *The Campus*, December 4, 1963, p. 1; "Bowker: Lower Admissions Standard Is Uniform Policy of City University," *The Campus*, October 9, 1963, p.1; "Pres. Speaks Today on Enrollment Crisis," *The Campus*, October 3, 1963, p 1; "Expansion Urged for City College," *The New York Times*, October 4, 1963; "Enrollment Crisis Roundup," *The Campus*, November 22, 1963, p. 3.
[252] "The College's Enrollment Crisis," *The Campus*, December 4, 1963, p. 1.

conditions.[253] However, any plan to admit more students, regardless of its aims, was contingent upon budget increases that may or may not have been forthcoming from the city and state.

While the dearth of black and Puerto Rican students within CUNY remained one issue among many in Bowker's public statements regarding his aim to ease admission standards, civil rights leaders in New York City began criticizing CUNY's ethno-racial imbalance in January of 1964. Benjamin McLaurin, the newest member of the BHE and its only African-American at the time, argued in January of 1964 that 5%-10% of CUNY's entering freshman should be admitted according to an alternative definition of merit, based on their academic *potential* rather than strictly their high school grades. According to McLaurin's thinking, admitting students based on potential, rather than high school record, would help increase the number of blacks and Puerto Ricans enrolled at the university. McLaurin argued that "no racial test should be applied" in admitting students; in other words, while his plan was aimed at increasing black and Puerto Rican enrollment it would not be procedurally crafted as a racially or ethnically based affirmative action program. Instead, McLaurin believed that demographic changes would combine with new admissions procedures to increase black and Puerto Rican representation.[254]

At the same meeting of the BHE, Josephine Nieves, a leader of the Puerto Rican community group ASPIRA, joined McLaurin's call for increased enrollment of black and Puerto Rican students, arguing that for Puerto Rican New Yorkers, who

---

[253] "Bowker: Lower Admissions Standard Is Uniform Policy of City University," *The Campus*, October 9, 1963, p. 1.
[254] "Minorities and the City University." *The Campus*, January 7, 1964, p. 1.

according to her made up less than 2% of CUNY's student body, "education no longer exists for us in the city." She argued, exemplifying the potential power of free tuition as a wedge issue dividing Jews from other ethnic communities, that CUNY should "make a Herculean effort to admit more" minority students "or the opponents of free tuition will have a mighty weapon to wield."[255] Finally, Ralph Parrish, the vice-president of the American Federation of teachers, argued that any efforts to increase enrollment at City College for the following fall of 1964 should be comprised of at least half black and Puerto Rican students. Parrish observed that while City College was geographically located within the majority black and Puerto Rican neighborhood of Hamilton Heights, just adjacent to Harlem, the college itself was "an enclave behind an iron curtain," more or less inaccessible to the residents of it's own neighborhood.[256]

While Bowker was certainly sympathetic to the civil rights critique, Gustave Rosenberg's response to criticism of CUNY's ethno-racial imbalances was swift, defensive, and tin-eared. Due to a fierce commitment to official color-blindness in institutional practices,[257] CUNY did not in fact keep track of the ethnic and racial composition of its student body. Thus, to counter the charge of a mere 2% enrollment of black and Puerto Rican students at CUNY, Rosenberg asked the various college presidents to estimate the percentage of their student bodies that were comprised of these two groups. From this method, Rosenberg claimed 7.4%-10% of CUNY's students were minorities, amounting to between 6,300 and 8,600 black and Puerto

---

[255] (ibid.)
[256] (ibid.)
[257] A commitment I show in other chapters to have been violated in culture and practice.

Rican students overall. According to Rosenberg, "this is undoubtedly more than any other university in the country."[258] In addition to denying that CUNY failed to serve black and Puerto Rican students in equal measures as whites, Rosenberg argued that new definitions of merit based on identifying future talent were unnecessary because the university already used SAT scores "to identify potential."[259]

Student reaction to Bowker's initial announcement of increased enrollment through the easing of admission standards reveals the categorical distinctions operating in student's minds. In an editorial titled "Population Explosion,"[260] *The Campus* argued that the institutional attempt to lower admissions criteria to 1952 levels, "constituted a revolutionary change in the philosophy behind the College." According to the politically liberal *Campus*, "since its establishment in 1847, the College has used the following method of setting admission standards: it calculated the capacity to absorb additional students. Looking at the grades of high school students, the College set the entrance requirements at an average, or cut-off point, that

---

[258] "Minorities and the City University." *The Campus*, January 7, 1964, p. 1.
[259] (ibid.) In fact, according to Conrad Dyer's examination of graduation records, between 1960-1965 there were 196 black graduates from City College, an average of 33 black graduates a year. City College graduated 17,613 baccalaureates over the same period, an average of nearly 3,000 per year. Thus, blacks were only 1% of City College graduates (Dyer 1990:64). While we can extrapolate the 1% African-American student population across the three other senior colleges with relative safety, considering they shared common standards, the two-year community colleges likely had more significant black and Puerto Rican student bodies. The results of CUNY's first ethnic census taken in the fall of 1967 found amongst fully matriculated senior college students, 87.3% were white, 4.9% were Puerto Rican, 4.2% were Negro (sic), 5.2% recorded other, and .8% gave no response. Amongst the non-matriculated community college students, 55% were white, 8.4% were Puerto Rican, 28% were Negro (sic), 7.4% recorded other, and 1.3% gave no response. While a significant proportion of the non-matriculated student population was non-white, the census was taken after the College Discovery and SEEK programs (see below) were in effect and does not reflect the proportion of CUNY's student body that was black or Puerto Rican before special efforts were made to admit them to the CUNY system. On the census see, "Study Indicates Non-White Ratio For City Colleges," *The Campus*, December 20, 1967, p. 1.
[260] "Population Explosion," *The Campus*, October 9, 1963, p. 2.

would admit only as many students as there was room for." While the editorial was in fact in error about the methods used for admitting students in the college's first 70 years of existence, it nevertheless illustrates the manner in which students had come to believe, that rather than being arbitrary, the cut-off point for admission was *academically* legitimate. City College students had come to sacralize their own "merit" through a mythical view of City College's hallowed academic standards. Thus, in the eyes of *The Campus*, it was the effort to expand the number of students admitted to the college's student body that was seen as arbitrary: "Now, it has been *arbitrarily* decided that the College must admit 3500 freshmen, 1100 more than this year and 2350 more than its capacity next year."[261] From the student standpoint embodied in *The Campus*, the "shoehorn" maneuvers to stuff more students into existing space threatened the academic experience of the students who legitimately *earned* their way into City College under the exceptionally stringent admission requirements. In the eyes of students, such methods for expansion were contrary to educational considerations and undermined the value of their college degree.[262]

While the editorial writers believed the interest in expanding access to City College was a revolutionary change in its institutional identity, they nevertheless acceded to the need for such measures: "Regrettably, the enormous numbers of high school students deserving an opportunity to attend college, force us to sacrifice the principle on this occasion . . . The students graduating high school in the next few years should not be deprived of a college education. We must all suffer slightly so

---

[261] (ibid., emphasis added).
[262] (ibid.)

they do not suffer greatly."[263] *The Campus'* editorial writers *identified* with their high school peers who had averages between 82 and 85, conceiving them as "*deserving* an opportunity to attend college," and assimilating them into the symbolic category of the fully matriculated, tuition free, *meritorious* senior college student. However, Bowker's attempt to lower the admissions cut off point would be just his first modest attempt to integrate more students into the CUNY system. As he and Civil Rights leaders proposed new admissions criteria and practices with the explicit goal of integrating more black and Puerto Rican students into CUNY, the traditional view of City College students, alumni and faculty, of exactly who was "deserving" of the opportunity to pursue a four-year college degree would be significantly challenged.

Faculty and Student Response to Increased Enrollment

Throughout Bowker's first year as chancellor, faculty and students questioned his aggressive plans to expand enrollment in the face of the coming of age of the baby boom generation. For instance, just days after President Gallagher of City College announced the college's iteration of Bowker's CUNY wide plans for increased enrollment, The United Federation of College Teachers (UFCT), who represented many City College professors, questioned the "assumption that lowering academic standards will necessarily produce an increase in students from underprivileged minorities."[264] In addition to concerns regarding necessary increases in workload, the UFCT and many faculty members, including the collective history and English departments, objected to the use of large lecture classes to economize resources.

---

[263] (ibid.)
[264] "Gallagher, Teacher Unit Dispute Enrollment Plan," *The Campus*, October 15, 1963, p. 1.

Faculty worried that a rapid expansion of admission would lead to the hiring of what they viewed as substandard faculty and an overall lower quality of instruction due to the rapid growth of class sizes.[265]

Ultimately, the City and BHE backed Bowker's plans for increased enrollment, including a reduced target cut-off high school average of 84, down from a projected 87-90, with a pledge of $2 million. However, the fiscal plan for increased enrollment depended on matching funds from Albany, which Rockefeller and the state legislature showed no interest in providing.[266] Bowker did not back down from his aggressive policy, alarming faculty and students that his aim was to achieve increased enrollment even if it sacrificed other institutional values, such as faculty work conditions and academic standards. Charged with reviewing Gallagher and Bowker's plans for expansion of enrollment, the Faculty Committee on Enrollment Policy at City College came out against plans to increase enrollment without also increasing physical space. The committee's chairperson, Professor J. Bailey Harvey of the speech department, stated, "we have grave doubts that the College can maintain its own high standards when admissions standards are lowered" without increasing classroom space.[267]

In a counter recommendation, the committee focused on a slightly different problem. To curtail skyrocketing admissions standards, the BHE had mandated that all graduates of the AA programs at CUNY community colleges who maintained a C

---

[265] (ibid.); "History Department Opposes Basic Course Lecture Classes," *The Campus*, October 15, 1963, p. 1; "Gallagher Plan on Enrollment Questioned by English Dept." *The Campus*, October 25, 1963, p.1.
[266] "CU Entrance Requirement To Be Set at 84 in Fall," *The Campus*, January 29, 1964, p. 1.
[267] "Faculty Group Criticizes Rise in Enrollment," *The Campus*, April 23, 1964, p. 1.

average or above were entitled to transfer into a BA program at one of the senior colleges. Some students who failed to reach the extraordinarily high senior college admissions cut-off could go to a CUNY community college and then transfer directly to a senior college after two years.[268] This policy effectively made the community colleges an extension of the senior colleges. Rather than suggesting ways to increase enrollment, the Faculty Committee on Enrollment Policy recommended expanding the partial matriculation School of General Studies and raising the entrance requirements of community college transfers to City College. While the committee based its opposition to expansion on the lack of adequate facilities, their counter recommendations aimed to thicken the boundary between the academically elite students already being admitted to City College, and the pool of community college transfers and slightly lower achieving high school graduates expanded enrollment was attempting to capture.[269] By responding to efforts to liberalize admissions standards with an effort to make transferring from the Junior to the Senior colleges more difficult suggests the faculty's real concern was not with serving a wider swath of the city's youth, but with maintaining the elitist exclusivity of existing procedures.

City College students also became wary of the blurring boundary between themselves and students seeking entrance from the community colleges. As students and faculty in the senior colleges became increasingly aware of the effective lack of distinction, they came to examine more closely the qualities of the community college transfers. Senior college students backed the college's new plan, made at the behest

---

[268] As will be discussed below, the cut-off point for community college admission was also extraordinarily high as well.

[269] (ibid.); "Group Charges Facilities Here Are Overtaxed," *The Campus*, April 29, 1964, p. 1.

of the disgruntled faculty, to limit the program of transfer students from the community colleges with averages lower than a B-. Faculty charged, with no facts to support the assertion, students who came to City College from the community colleges with averages below B- failed to maintain their community college averages once in the senior colleges. The plan essentially barred such community college graduates from full matriculation in the senior colleges, sparing them, the faculty claimed, from the "intellectual humiliation" they assumed they would bring upon themselves.[270] Despite the severe consequence of losing the opportunity to gain a BA degree, in the eyes of many City College students, the plan to limit transfer student enrollment did not go far enough.

An editorial appearing in *The Campus* argued that rather than receiving limited enrollment in City College, that all transfer students from a community college with a G.P.A. below a B average should be limited to the evening session. The editorial agreed with the notion pushed by the Faculty Committee on Enrollment Policy that transfer students were unable to maintain the averages they compiled in community colleges at the senior college level in spite of the fact that "the report," made by the committee, "did not state facts to prove this claim."[271] *The Campus* based it's assumption that transfer students from CUNY's community colleges found "the College's curriculum markedly more difficult than that of their former school," on the fact that the college's registrar found that 80% of all transfer students never

---

[270] "'Limited Program' Imposed On Borderline Transferees," *The Campus*, April 29, 1964, p. 1.
[271] "Transferring the Burden," *The Campus*, April 29, 1964, p. 4.

completed their BA.[272] However, as noted above, initial studies from a decade earlier of AA students in community colleges showed they often took many years longer to complete their degrees, likely because of hardships associated with needing to support their families financially, and most who did drop out did so while in good academic standing.

Whether *The Campus* knew of the prior study, or considered it out of date is not known. However, the student newspaper concluded: “It is clear . . . that academic standards at community colleges are lower than at senior colleges.”[273] For *The Campus*, it was not just a question of the pedagogical ability of community colleges to prepare students to pursue a four-year degree, or of undeveloped potential amongst Community College students that might flourish in the senior college environment. Rather, they believed there were qualitative differences between those who had been admitted to City College and those who had not:

> To think that students who attain, for example, a C average in community colleges can achieve the same average at a senior college is contrary to the logic on which the community college-senior college relationship is based. After all, admission to a community college requires a high school average approximately ten points lower than that of entrance to senior college.[274]

While, as was explicated in the previous chapter, the BHE, out of organizational expediency, had developed a policy that treated the community colleges as de facto extensions of the senior colleges, for the editorial board of *The Campus* the boundary

---

[272] (ibid.)
[273] (ibid.)
[274] (ibid.)

between the community and senior colleges marked two distinct categories of students endowed with unequal measures of academic worth or merit.

Such boundary anxieties amongst the privileged senior college students distilled into a general concern for the decline of City College itself. At semester's end, the history professor Bernard Bellush, at hearings on the Mayor's operational budget, testified that without increased funds CUNY would turn into a "second or third-rate institution," even threatening the new graduate program's accreditation.[275] According to an article in *The Campus* evaluating efforts to increase enrollments, "the question then is, will the College be able to increase its enrollments without drastically changing the school? All indications would tend to produce a negative answer."[276] The controversy continued the following semester in the fall of 1964, as CUNY's master plan called for further increases of enrollment to kick in before the planned opening of new buildings. In response, Professor J. Bailey Harvey called for an outright freeze on enrollment numbers until adequate facilities could be made available. Again, the plan pitted community college transfers against incoming freshman as the college's registrar noted that if the overall number of students were to remain fixed, with increasing transfer students expected, fewer freshman would necessarily be admitted.[277]

The Campus backed Harvey's conservative stance, endorsing the idea of the enrollment freeze. However, rather than protecting the symbolic boundary between

[275] "Bellush Says CU to Wane If Funds Fall," *The Campus*, May 13, 1964, p. 1.
[276] "Enrollments: Danger Ahead," *The Campus*, May 7, 1964, p. 1.
[277] "Harvey Asks College to Limit Enrollment to Present Level," *The Campus*, December 8, 1964, p. 1.

senior and community college students, *The Campus* was concerned with the potential for a decline in the overall prestige of City College itself.

> President Gallagher's enrollment policy is termed "Operation Shoehorn." According to the President, this College is a shoe and a shoehorn is needed to squeeze us into its classes. Under such a policy there is a serious threat that our educational standard will deteriorate, and the respect awarded the College's diploma by employers and graduate schools will be lost.[278]

While both faculty and students recognized the enrollment crisis had been created by the combined futility of the BHE, City, and State to adequately prepare for demographic changes and the overall rise in demand for higher education, they nevertheless perceived efforts to increase enrollment as threats to their own status and symbolic standing. Thus, rather than seeing Bowker's efforts to expand enrollment as an extension of educational opportunity and a softening of limits to access that had developed over time for arbitrary, non-academic reasons, both faculty and students had become invested in, and legitimized the symbolic hierarchy of value that grew up around the various boundaries segmenting student populations within the CUNY system.

Currents of students and faculty alike came more and more to see City College's raison d'être as the preservation of an academic elite rather than an exceptional avenue of democratic opportunity. In an article titled "Value of Degree in Danger," *The Campus* reported on beliefs of faculty members that overcrowded conditions threatened the prestige of the City College degree in the eyes of graduate schools. Again, quoting Professor Harvey, "our present image of high academic

---

[278] "If the Shoe Fits," *The Campus*, December 8, 1964, p. 2.

standing will continue for a while, but, in the future, any publicity about overcrowding will tend to get people less enthusiastic about our standards."[279] The article discussed the belief that certain employers declined to recruit City College students. In particular, the article cited Charles Meyer, the Assistant Director of the College's Placement Service as pointing towards Wall Street brokerage firms as a class of employers who were uninterested in hiring City College graduates. According to Meyer, for a brokerage job, "someone from an ivy league school who has a wealthy family and good connections is wanted. Success for the company depends on your contacts and your father's."[280] While Meyer's implied brokerage firms were not interested in City College students because of the confluence of anti-Semitic prejudice, class bias and the pursuit of symbolic capital, Professor Harvey took the further step of legitimating such grounds of evaluation: "If people were going to hire someone to deal with well-to-do people, I would have to be sure he had the right social instincts. With overcrowding, people are brought up in a way more or less like beasts. Things that happen on the subway can begin to take place in the hallways of the College."[281]

From Harvey's standpoint, and that of other academic conservatives, what City College and its students lacked in the inculcation of superior "social instincts," it made up through greater academic brainpower. Thus, according to Professor Gaston Gille, Chairperson of the Romance Languages department who had originally been

[279] "Value of Degree in Danger," *The Campus*, March 26, 1965, p. 1.
[280] (ibid.)
[281] (ibid.)

hired by William Knickerbocker,[282] what made up the difference for CCNY students was that, "City College graduates are able to reach the top of the class in graduate school,"[283] overcoming whatever Jewishness or other forms of social dis-grace from which they might suffer in his view. While certain conservative faculty may have been soft on, or even implicitly legitimated the practices of elitist social closure practiced by such employers as Wall Street brokerage firms, and the coded anti-Semitism they entailed, the largely Jewish student body at City College tacitly grasped that their claim to high standing within the post-war United States was based on exceptional academic credentials.

Thus, student anxieties over the elite academic reputation of City College must be understood within a larger transformation in the meaning of merit following WWII in the United States. (Karabel 2005; Tsay et al. 2003) As Karabel notes (Karabel 1984, 2005), the tradition of the "gentleman's C" that prevailed at elite colleges and universities in the first half of the 20th century was not rooted in the dominant class' ability to gain exceptional privileges for their underachieving progeny. In fact, the gentleman's C represented the normative definition of merit in the first half of the 20th century. This definition emphasized well-rounded "manly" gentleman, able to exhibit the physical and social vigor that augured well, in the minds of the Protestant elite, for positions of leadership. Excessive academic achievement thus signaled misplaced emphasis on abstract learning and intellectual

---

[282] In his recommendation in support of Gille's hiring addressed to the President, Knickerbocker gushed over Gille's gentlemanly ways, in stark contrast to the Jewish faculty members whose careers he was accused of sabotaging.
[283] "Value of Degree in Danger," *The Campus*, March 26, 1965, p. 1.

pursuits, weakness of character, a propensity towards anxiety and overall nebbishness. (Karabel 2005:132, and passim) However, following WWII, the nationalizing system of higher education, in line with cold war national interests that now required scientific achievement and competition on a global scale, redefined merit along more purely academic lines. Not only did such a redefinition of merit favor the possibility for upward mobility and social inclusion for many high achieving Jews,[284] the transformation of the meaning of merit gave Jews a realistic pathway into the national elite, in contrast to the systemic anti-Semitism that prevailed prior to WWII. Thus, many CCNY students believed that their efforts to reach the upper echelons of the national elite in the 1960's depended on City College being more than simply a high quality public education, but one that marked them as intellectually superior. From this standpoint, they had a strong interest in limiting the educational opportunity embodied by City College as an institution. As the boundary marking merit in City College admissions would become more and more racialized, the efforts by "traditional" City College students to uphold the boundary marking them as elite would double as an effort to preserve their access to an exclusive whiteness.

College Discovery

Students and faculty well understood that one of the rationales behind increased enrollment was the hope of enrolling more black and Puerto Rican students

---

[284] While often overstated, Jews as a group commited to higher education in higher numbers and earlier, as a strategy for upward mobility than other white ethnic groups Steinberg (1977, 1989); Gorelick (1981); Foner (2000). As Jews were more likely to have invested in education as a means of upward mobility, a large portion of the ethnic group were in a good position to take advantage of the meritocratic transformations that occurred following WWII.

at CUNY. In fact, *The Campus* reported such a goal as the main reason behind the policy initiative.[285] However, as Bowker and the Presidents of the Senior Colleges pursued increased enrollment, several civil rights leaders in New York City began publicly criticizing the ethno-racial imbalance at publicly funded CUNY. As discussed above, beginning with Benjamin McLaurin, Josephine Nieves, and Ralph Parrish's criticisms of the lack of black and Puerto Rican students in CUNY in January 1964 meeting of the BHE, the municipal university more and more came under attack from black and Puerto Rican community leaders. In November of 1964, Lester Granger, a former executive director of the National Urban League, delivered a report to the New York State Senate calling for the abolishment of the free tuition policy at CUNY's senior colleges. Granger argued that, ironically, the policy discriminated against students from low-income groups because it restricted access to potential streams of revenue that could have been applied to increasing facilities for greater overall enrollment. Rather than selecting the students with the best grade point averages regardless which high school they attended, Granger suggested that a certain fraction of *each* high school's graduating class should be admitted to the senior colleges within CUNY.[286] Granger argued CUNY's overall admissions practices should be based on the principle of a "reasonable expectation of success" of various applicants,[287] rather than an elitist cut-off point.

---

[285] "Enrollments: Danger Ahead," *The Campus*, May 7, 1964, p. 2.

[286] Many of City College's students came from elite public high schools that also had high test standards for admission, such as Bronx Science and Stuyvesant High School.

[287] "Report to Albany Hits Free Tuition as 'Discriminatory,'" *The Campus*, November 23, 1964, p. 2.

Granger's report reflected the new interpretive frames and rising urgency civil rights leaders and black and Puerto Rican students would bring to the question of equity in admissions in the mid and late 1960's:

> If one, or possibly two, of the City University's Senior Colleges which were designated as having special concern for the ablest and most original students, this would be understandable, but to organize the whole system into a higher education preserve for a 'talented tenth'–or fifth—of the City's high school graduates seeking college degrees smacks of a kind of 'educational colonialism' that is far removed from the socio-educational problems of an urban democracy.[288]

Indeed, more and more civil rights leaders would use the idiom of colonialism, as an antonym to liberal democracy, to describe the structural position of blacks and Puerto Ricans within New York City and the United States generally, and in relation to CUNY as an institution in particular.[289]

Initially, while sympathetic to the problem, most students framed the issue of ethno-racial imbalance amongst the student body at CUNY within individualistic idioms. *The Campus* published an editorial that took a position between Benjamin McLauren and Gustave Rosenberg in their row over CUNY's success (or lack thereof) enrolling black and Puerto Rican students. *The Campus* sided with McLauren against Rosenberg's claim that there was no ethno-racial imbalance of any consequence at CUNY: "It would be difficult to disagree with Benjamin McLauren . . . that there should be more Negroes and Puerto Ricans in the City University."[290] While acknowledging the problem, *The Campus* completely rejected any changes in

---

[288] As quoted in Gordon (1975:174.)
[289] On the theory of internal colonialism that developed a structural theory of racism as applied to the United States, see Gutiérrez (2004), and below.
[290] "On Minorities," *The Campus*, January 7, 1964, p. 2.

admissions principles, even ones, such as those suggested by McLauren, that were carefully crafted to broaden definitions of student merit without explicitly considering race or ethnicity. Thus, according to *The Campus*:

> But it is not difficult to disagree with Mr. McLauren's means of enrolling more Negroes and Puerto Ricans in the CU. It can be said of the present entrance requirements that they are cold, but it must be recognized that they are at the same time impartial. There is no discrimination. To introduce an unmeasurable quality like potential, as Mr. McLauren suggests, would introduce discrimination.[291]

Instead, *The Campus* argued that the solution to more equal enrollment lay in properly preparing minority students for the competition for admission: "The solution, we would suggest, lies in the pre-college education. Here Negroes (sic) and Puerto Ricans must be adequately educated so that all candidates compete on an equal basis for CU admission."[292] In suggesting, "discrimination in either direction is equally undesirable," *The Campus* presaged the conservative claims of "reverse-discrimination" that would come to structure subsequent debates over affirmative action policies up through today.

While *The Campus*' critique of New York City's primary and secondary public educational system implicitly acknowledged the structural or systemic character of its inequities, the newspaper's editorial writers nevertheless framed higher education as an earned privilege of individuals, rather than a right of citizenship that was being denied blacks, Puerto Ricans, and others by various structures of exclusion. It did so by placing the ultimate responsibility for change on the personal transformation of members from the minority groups themselves:

---

[291] (ibid.)
[292] (ibid.)

"Obviously, if these minority groups are to pull themselves out of the desperate straits they are in, they must have a solid core of educated leaders."[293] Thus, in citing mythical "bootstrap" idioms so common within U.S. political culture, the editorial writers denied any civic connection between themselves and the "desperate" conditions in which they believed minority groups found themselves. Such a disavowal framed a City College education as an individually earned privilege that most blacks and Puerto Ricans, by implication, were failing to achieve due to their own collective pathology.

As Bowker's and civil rights leaders' campaign to innovate ways to include more black and Puerto Rican students progressed in the spring of 1964, the re-emergent student left on the City College campus took up the cause of public school integration in New York City. Four student organizations, The Student Peace Union, Marxist Discussion Club, Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), and Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) all endorsed a sympathy boycott at City College in support of Reverend Milton Galamison's elementary-school boycott demanding primary school integration.[294] The four leftist student organizations called on City College students to boycott their college classes in protest of what they saw as weak measures aiming at primary and secondary school integration in New York City.

The Campus however, came out against the sympathy boycott. While they welcomed Galamison's City College speech on the issue of school integration,

---

[293] (ibid.)

[294] "Rev. Galamison To Talk Today At Rally Here," *The Campus*, March 12, 1964, p. 1. On Galamison's role on integration and community control efforts leading into the Ocean Hill-Brownsville teacher strike, see (Podair 2002); on Galamison generally, see (Taylor 1997).

conceiving one of the college's appropriate roles as a platform and forum for robust public debate, they denied any association among CUNY's admissions procedures and the practice of racial or ethnic segregation. Of the leftist groups pushing for CCNY students to boycott the college *The Campus* stated: "We are sure the leaders of the sympathy boycott do not mean to imply that segregation exists at the College, and thus, we cannot understand any relevant motive for a boycott."[295] For the editorial writers, "the effectiveness, or even correctness of boycotting an admittedly prejudice-free university,"[296] was illogical:

> No municipal college has ever been mentioned in their (the public school integration movement's) pleas—and rightfully so. The colleges' standards for admission make no provision for question of religion, race or color. Students are invited from all over the city to enter any of the colleges and, as much as academic standards allow, the municipal colleges are integrated.[297]

Again, rather than seeing admission standards has having been arbitrarily developed to adapt to decades of space shortages, *The Campus* legitimized the boundary for admission as representative of "academic standards." From such a vantage point, they could not see potential parallels between structural inequalities in the formally equal right to primary and secondary education that the integration movement was fighting against, and the institutionally structured pattern of admissions practices at the municipal colleges that yielded unequal outcomes.

Gustave Rosenberg, the Chair of the BHE, gave a speech in 1963 in which he asserted CUNY's mission to face demographic changes in New York City by serving

---

[295] "Cut the Boycott," *The Campus*, March 10, 1964, p. 2.
[296] "Talk of the Town," *The Campus*, March 12, 1964, p. 2.
[297] "Cut the Boycott," *The Campus*, March 10, 1964, p. 2.

"our new public—young people from those segments of our population which are just now awakening to the idea that higher education is for them" (as quoted in Gordon 1975: 93). In reality, as documented above, Rosenberg's Board had been content in doing very little to reach more students of any race or ethnicity. Thus, in early 1964, during his first year in office, Bowker circumvented the Board as well as the Council of Senior College Presidents to attain seed money for the College Discovery program. College Discovery aimed to discover and develop procedures for identifying "young men and women, who because of economic deprivation and lack of expectation of opportunity which surround them in their home environment, do not rank high in academic achievement, despite their native abilities."[298] To be eligible for College Discovery a student needed to be from a low-income family and to have been selected for having untapped promise by his or her high school principal (Gordon 1975: 206). The program had two prongs. In the first, students who did not meet existing admission standards were admitted to a limited community college program and eased into college level work. The second prong targeted high school freshman who were nominated by guidance counselors or other social welfare agencies for showing untapped promise, and placed them in one of five intensive study centers at five New York City high schools. In the centers the students received college preparatory courses, small class sizes, access to tutors, guidance, and a small stipend for incidental expenses (Wechsler 1977: 276).[299] Of the students selected for the first

---

[298] Office of the Chancellor, City University of New York, February 17, 1964, as quoted in Gordon (1975: 94).
[299] See also, "Plan For Deprived Groups May Be Severely Curtailed," *The Campus*, April 7, 1964, p. 1.

year of the second prong of College Discovery, more than three-quarters completed the course and were admitted to either a community or senior college (ibid.).

College Discovery was a very modest program, initially enrolling 230 students and expanding to 500 admitted students in the fall of 1965, and finally 760 students CUNY wide (Gordon 1975: 207; Karabel 1983: 26).[300] Additionally, the program was devised to confine the alternatively admitted students to the community colleges, where they would have to prove their merit before gaining entrance to a senior college. Thus, formally, College Discovery did not threaten to "pollute" the elite academic standards senior college students and faculty had come to cherish. In spite of these facts, in circumventing the BHE to achieve the experimental program, Bowker activated the same anxieties over "academic standards" that animated the City College student reaction to the policy of increased enrollment. In fact, the BHE, backed by some of the senior college presidents, initially rejected the College Discovery program, voting to turn down the $500,000 in seed funding Bowker had personally obtained from the State Legislature. In doing so, BHE members and some of the senior college presidents objected that College Discovery would violate meritocratic admission principles. Ultimately, Bowker convinced the presidents of the colleges to flip their support in favor of the program, but still had to threaten to resign in order to get the BHE to back down from its veto (Gordon 1975: 95; Wechsler 1977: 275-6).

As Bowker's policies aimed at expanding overall enrollment at City College and CUNY in general, and black and Puerto Rican enrollment in particular continued,

---

[300] A sizable minority of whom, as noted above, were white.

the boundary separating the fully meritorious student from others would become more and more politicized. An example of such politicization can be seen in a letter to the editor of *The New York Times*, written by Brayton Polka and Bernard Zelechow, two Instructors of History at City College. Polka and Zelechow wrote in response to the announcement appearing in *The Times* concerning City College's long awaited building program.[301] They praised the ambitious plans to add to City College's building stock, reasoning the buildings would enable the college to "maintain present standards and meet current needs due to severe overcrowding."[302] However, the authors rejected the idea articulated by the college's administration that the increased space ought to be used to admit more students, again with the aim of enrolling more students from minority communities. While Polka and Zelechow admitted affirmative action type programs were necessary in the pursuit of racial equality in such areas as housing and job opportunities, they rejected the idea that such measures should be extended to higher education in order to safeguard hallowed academic standards. According to the authors, "The purpose of a college of the distinction and reputation of City College (and of its three sister senior colleges) cannot be furthered by the lowering of intellectual standards."[303] For Polka and Zelechow, the senior colleges had to be defended against intellectual pollutants: "What, may one ask, is the purpose of the community colleges, if not to assist those students whose record in high school does not permit them entrance into the senior colleges?"[304] For Polka and Zelechow,

---

[301] Polka, Brayton and Bernard Zelechow. "City College Urged to Maintain Aims," *The New York Times*, February 2, 1965.
[302] (ibid.)
[303] (ibid.)
[304] (ibid.)

it was clear, "The notion that the purpose of a college is social . . . should be firmly rejected."[305]

Polka and Zelechow's letter drew the ire of City College's President Gallagher as well as Social Psychologist Kenneth Clark. The latter registered his disapproval in an interview with *The Campus*, noting that the existing admissions methods and trends within CUNY, including College Discovery and the higher standards for transferring after completion of an AA degree, threatened to ghettoize the community colleges, marking them off as the secondary reserve of minority students. According to Clark, Polka and Zelechow viewed the community colleges as legitimate "dumping grounds for the uneducated." In contrast, Clark argued, "we should not have all-white four-year colleges and inferior community colleges."[306] Indeed, Clark's argument aligned with the increasing sentiment among black and Puerto Rican civil rights leaders that efforts to enroll minority students, such as increasing overall enrollment at CUNY as well as the College Discovery Program, ended at the senior college gates. From the standpoint of civil rights leaders, the community colleges and the College Discovery program were seen as mere "dumping grounds" for youngsters from their own communities (Gordon 1975: 95), as, in their view, internal segmentation within CUNY amounted to educational segregation or ghettoization.

Along these lines, a *Campus* report on City College's image in the adjacent, predominantly African-American neighborhood of Harlem found: "An increasing

---

[305] (ibid.)

[306] "Clark Will Answer Letter of Dissent on Enrollment Rise," *The Campus*, February 10, 1965, p. 1.

number of Harlem leaders are viewing the College as a school 'for whites only' that is indifferent to the community's needs."[307] James Hicks, editor of the Harlem based newspaper *The Amesterdam News*, noted the stark difference between City College's day session, representing the fully matriculated senior college students, and its partially matriculated evening session, remarking the college was "almost as lily white during the day (session) as the campus of the University of Mississippi."[308] Indeed, the lack of racial integration at the school had so tarnished the view of City College in the eyes of African-American civil rights leaders that John McDowell, a prominent activist with CORE, expressed the suspicion that the college used a secret racial quota to limit the number of students of color they admitted.[309]

The Ascension of the Chancellor and the Achievement of SEEK

While City College did not use a racial quota to limit the number of students of color it admitted, in fact, there was no need for such a quota to depress the black and Puerto Rican student body. While the university did implement College Discovery, which yielded a very modest increase in black and Puerto Rican enrollment, efforts to expand overall enrollment by squeezing more students into existing spaces were generally minimized by CUNY's inability to secure proper funding for increased faculty and instructional staff. While Bowker and his expansionist allies had struggled for several years to devise ways to admit more black and Puerto Rican students, such efforts were yielding very modest results. At the same time, each academic year throughout the 1960's witnessed a political battle over

---

[307] "College Image: Color it White," *The Campus*, March 18, 1965, p. 1.
[308] (ibid.)
[309] (ibid.)

CUNY’s financing that not only often resulted in moderating and even undercutting efforts to expand, but also often threatened to undermine CUNY’s ability to maintain its existing capacity.

Both Bowker and his expansionist allies among civil rights leaders, as well as CUNY’s conservative supporters, led by Gustave Rosenberg and the BHE (who were most committed to what they viewed as the sacred free tuition policy for the senior college BA students), understood the stabilization of CUNY’s finances, let alone a massive expansion of them, would necessarily be drawn from New York State’s coffers. However, Governor Rockefeller’s interests lay with SUNY, and against the downstate democratic coalition of urban interests that included those of Jews, blacks, Puerto Ricans and working classes. The yearly budget battles would see two important political shifts over the course of the 1965/66 academic year; first, Bowker would win his struggle with Rosenberg and the BHE and gain executive authority for the Office of the Chancellor over the CUNY system. Second, the increasingly organized black and Puerto Rican Civil Rights coalition would use their support for the free tuition principle to win financing for the SEEK program, a program similar to College Discovery but on a larger scale and oriented towards entrance into the senior colleges rather than the community colleges of CUNY (Gordon 1975:178-200; Wechsler 1977:268-274).

In September of 1965, Bowker released a paper authored by his office without the consultation of the BHE, proposing CUNY charge tuition. The revenues from tuition collection would, in Bowker’s plan, serve as the base for a $400 million capital construction fund to finance the long called for expansion of the CUNY

system. In exchange for moving away from the sacred principle of free tuition for senior college students, Bowker proposed that the State of New York should fund the entirety of CUNY's operating budget (Gordon 1975:184). Such a funding scheme would minimize the pressures CUNY's operating costs placed on the City's budget, while conceding the issue of free tuition to the State in exchange for increased fiscal responsibility over its budget. Bowker's plan caused an uproar, and after it was chastised by the BHE, senior college students, CUNY alumni associations, and the liberal press such as *The New York Times*,[310] Rosenberg moved aggressively to assert his own authority. The Chair of the BHE called for "undivided fealty" on the part of the Chancellor and various Presidents of the colleges that comprised CUNY. In response, Bowker, and the Presidents of Hunter and Brooklyn College, as well as other top administrators resigned, noting that "fealty" was a medieval concept that had no place in an educational bureaucratic administrative structure (Wechsler 1977:271).

Bowker's gambit worked as it drew renewed public attention to the underlying budgetary problems CUNY faced and Rosenberg and the Board's persistent denial of the basic issues. The BHE, previously squarely in Rosenberg's camp, split, with a large portion of its members extending an olive branch to Bowker and the other top administrators. As public opinion turned back in Bowker's favor, and the City and BHE worked, against Rosenberg's wishes, to convince Bowker to rescind his resignation, Bowker took advantage of his leverage to have the formal relationship between the Chancellor and the BHE rewritten. Bowker only agreed to

[310] "The Bowker Proposal," *The New York Times*, November 13, 1965; Gordon 1975: 188.

remain Chancellor once he achieved agreement to have CUNY's bylaws rewritten such that the Office of the Chancellor would henceforth be recognized as the chief educational and administrative officer of the University, as well as the chief administrative office of the Board of Higher Education (Wechsler 1977:273). Having been defeated in the power struggle precipitated by contrary visions and bureaucratic contradictions, Rosenberg would months later quietly resign as Chair of the BHE in pursuit of a New York State Judgeship.

While Bowker would surface from his battle with Rosenberg with greatly bolstered institutional and personal power, the months of bureaucratic wrangling meant that the underlying budgetary issues were left unresolved (Gordon 1975:193). Prior to besting Rosenberg, Bowker had dropped the tuition proposal in the fall in response to the negative commentary from many fronts. However, as budgetary realities became more clear by the spring, Bowker announced that CUNY would be forced to admit 4,000 fewer freshmen in September of 1966 as compared to September of '65 unless funding from the City and State were increased (ibid.:194). As Bowker wrestled with Rockefeller and the newly elected liberal Republican Mayor John Lindsey for more funds, black and Puerto Rican Civil Rights leaders and State legislators asserted that beyond matching the previous years' freshman class, any increased funding ought to go to expanding black and Puerto Rican enrollment at CUNY. As upstate Republicans attempted to drive a wedge between traditionalist Democratic legislative supporters of CUNY, who were loyal to the free tuition policy above all else, and black and Puerto Rican Democratic legislators by continuously

criticizing the lack of minority students at CUNY, the latter made their support for any budget resolution conditional upon a means tested tuition fee (ibid.: 196).

Led by Harlem Assemblyman Percy Sutton, the tactical move was successful, as the Democratic coalition in Albany shored up its unity against Rockefeller and the Republicans by demanding separate funding for the SEEK (Search for Education, Elevation, and Knowledge) program. Facing an overwhelming Democratic majority in the two legislative houses in Albany, Rockefeller caved and signed a bill providing funding for a freshman class equal to the 1965 class, an increased capital fund to begin funding for enrollment expansions, and $1 million for SEEK, all without forcing CUNY to sacrifice the policy of free tuition (Gordon 1975:197). SEEK was CUNY's most aggressive attempt to integrate poor and especially minority students into its student body. Similar to College Discovery, SEEK used economic criteria to establish eligibility, requiring prospective participants reside in an officially designated poverty area and be nominated by either a recognized community organization, state or city legislator, city agency or official, high school principal or high school teacher (ibid.:206). SEEK began in the fall of 1966 with 1,000 students, and through ongoing political wrangling was able to increase to more than 4,000 by the fall of 1969 (ibid.:207).

As will be discussed below, the SEEK program had an experimental aspect such that its structure and procedures varied from campus to campus, and even internally within City College itself. However, in general, the program offered a special curriculum of remedial work combined with regular senior college offerings. Most SEEK students received more contact hours per week with instructional staff

than "regularly admitted students," and additional tutoring was available for students admitted through the program. As Wechsler notes, significantly more than half of the full-time SEEK students earned passing grades, and around 10% earned averages equal to a B or better during the programs first two years (Wechsler 1977:276). While the College Discovery program had been designed to respect the boundary that had come to be interpreted by many faculty and students alike as one of merit separating the community and senior colleges within CUNY, SEEK more aggressively admitted students directly to the senior colleges. However, as will be seen below, they were originally admitted with a second-class status, without the same rights and privileges as the "normally" admitted students.

SEEK and the Public Racialization of Expanded Admissions

Resentment of the SEEK program came from many directions. In the first place, the special admissions programs, like College Discovery and SEEK, were questioned by many parents of students who were denied admission based on the traditional cutoff and who believed this was the case because of the spaces taken by the special admits. While Bowker and his newly loyal BHE pursued special admissions plans, the cut-off point for regular admission to CUNY continued to rise year after year in spite of advertised efforts to lower it. For public relations reasons, the BHE purposefully did not advertise how many students were being admitted through College Discovery and SEEK. However, continual assurances to concerned citizens that all College Discovery and SEEK student enrollment were made in addition to regular admissions caps, and eliminating the special admissions program could not have affected "normal enrollment" levels, fell on incredulous ears. Since

most of the students who were expecting admission into CUNY but fell just below the rising cut-off point were white, they believed they were loosing a zero-sum contest for higher education with minority students of color because of unmerited ethnic favoritism (Wechsler 1977:278).

In the summer of 1968, in the wake of Martin Luther King's assassination, Bowker announced the top 100 Scholars program. Bowker justified the program as an effort to address rising racial tensions in New York City, which he described as "a social danger requiring our immediate attention" (ibid.). Indeed, following Bowker's logic, many white observers understood the policy in strictly racial terms, as if it only applied to blacks and Puerto Ricans. In reality, the program entitled *all high school graduates* from New York City's public schools who placed in the top 100 of their class a spot in some branch of CUNY.[311] Nevertheless, many believed the program only applied to blacks and Puerto Ricans, others believed it was a quota system, and still others simply believed that if additional slots for admission to CUNY were available they should be allotted to whomever was next on the list according to the established combination of SAT scores and high school GPA (ibid.:279).

In addition to external criticisms of SEEK, City College and other CUNY faculty also criticized the program. According to SEEK's first City College administrator, Professor Leslie Berger, "The College did not want to take the

---

[311] The reasoning behind the program was that some prestigious high schools, like Bronx Science or Stuyvesant, sent large swaths of their graduating classes to a CUNY senior college, while few to none of the top graduates form lower achieving schools in economically distressed neighborhoods were qualifying for normal admission to CUNY. Top 100 Scholars was an attempt to circumvent systematic differences in quality of high schools, something that affected many whites as well as blacks and Puerto Ricans. Indeed, according to Wechsler, in its first year of operation, 40% of the Top 100 Scholar admits were Puerto Rican (or Spanish surname), 32% were black, and 29% were white (Wechsler 1977: 279).

students… The College administration and the faculty were unwilling to expand at the rate at which we had money for" (quoted in Dyer 1990: 72). Additionally, Professor Fran Geteles, an early SEEK counselor noted the general faculty attitude towards the program:

> In the early days in the SEEK program we were very careful not to put more than 2-3 students in any section of a class, so the teachers would not be angry and up in arms and feel you loaded them all down in my class, you had to be cautious, we had a Registrar who was a genius at balancing it out (quoted in Dyer 1990:72).

Indeed, Crane Johnson, a Professor in the Speech Department, argued in a letter circulated to the faculty that SEEK students were unprepared for college level work and therefore consumed valuable campus resources that would be better spent on more deserving students and faculty.[312] However, in labeling SEEK students "trash," Johnson's argument went beyond suggesting a reallocation of resources based on a professional academic judgment of the abilities of specially admitted students.

On the one hand, Johnson's rhetoric was quickly deemed politically incorrect, as his letter elicited picketing and protests from the student left at City College, as well as official faculty censure.[313] Eventually, before the following school year began, Johnson chose to resign. However, in line with Johnson's categorization of SEEK

---

[312] "Speech Teacher Scores SEEK In Letter to Dept. Chairmen," *The Campus*, March 28, 1968, p. 3.

[313] "Pickets Score Teacher For 'Racist' Statements," *The Campus*, April 30, 1968, p. 1; "Prof. Johnson Quits College," *The Campus*, September 19, 1968, p. 3. That Johnson was picketed by the student left on the City College campus, censured by the Faculty Senate, and pressed to reverse his opinion of the SEEK program (which he did in response to the protest and the censure, ultimately he retired before the beginning of the following school year), shows that SEEK was seen by leftist students and faculty as a vitally important policy, while being seen by others as controversial and offensive to "academic standards." Indeed, as will be shown in later chapters, many white students and faculty on the left took up the cause of SEEK and campus integration.

students as "trash," the SEEK program did in fact pathologize its student beneficiaries in official terms, thus institutionally resonating with Johnson's politically incorrect view. The SEEK program, which went into effect in the fall of 1966, had its roots in the Pre-Baccalaureate Program (or Pre-Bac) established at City College in 1965. In enacting SEEK, the New York State legislature intended "to advance the cause of equality of educational opportunity at the City University" (quoted in Gordon 1975: 199). However, both the College Discovery and SEEK programs had *experimental* aspects, explicitly reported on in the city and various college presses, that aimed to uncover objective indicators of underdeveloped college level talent and ability amongst socially deprived populations. Through College Discovery and SEEK, CUNY hoped to develop "sound criteria for the discovery and measurement of college potential" among socially disprivileged youth.[314] Thus, beyond the arithmetical aim of increasing black and Puerto Rican representation within CUNY, College Discovery and SEEK were organized to generate data and advance theories regarding positive indicators for future academic success beyond the high school grade point average and SAT scores that CUNY assumed adequately measured and predicted college level academic success in normally admitted populations.[315]

---

[314] Office of the Chancellor, City University of New York, February 17, 1964, as quoted in Gordon 1975: 94.

[315] Thus, it should be pointed out, both College Discovery and SEEK operated within the logic of meritocracy based on one part conceptions of achievement and one part conceptions of *talent*, that, in broad terms, is so central to modern institutional arrangements. What the two programs did was assume that *talent* in principle should be located in black and Puerto Rican ethnic communities in equal proportion to white communities, but that because of the failure of public schooling such talents remained uncultivated. College Discovery and SEEK proposed to discover positive indicators of those talents so that they could be incorporated into existing selection procedures in college admissions, and to realize the most effective means of cultivating such talents through higher educational pedagogy. In other words, the

In particular, College Discovery and SEEK were based on social-psychological theories that argued an "environment of failure" inhibited minority students from developing their talents and realizing their potential.[316] In a brief profile within a report announcing the commencement of the program, *The Campus* typified the College Discovery applicant in the following manner: "When they gave the boy the application to fill out, he had to write that he didn't know who his father was. His mother, he said, earned less than fifty dollars per week, working as a waitress."[317] *The Campus* went on to quote the prospective student:

> 'In my short span of life I have been exposed to an environment of failures and I conceive that the reason for these failures was the lack of determination to study and improve and an apprehension and expectation of defeat. I have noticed that these failures deteriorate the lives of my friends and relatives and I am determined to prevent this from happening to me.'[318]

In part working off his book *Dark Ghetto*, the famous City College social psychologist Kenneth Clark, working in conjunction with his colleague Leslie Berger, used College Discovery and SEEK to test their theories of the pathologizing effects of ghetto confinement on racial and ethnic minorities.[319] According to Clark's and

---

two programs sought alternative methods of measuring and cultivating talent, but did not posit wholly different conceptualizations of merit to be applied to poor, working class, black and Puerto Rican communities.

[316] "Project Fights 'Environment of Failure," *The Campus*, September 21, 1964, p. 1.

[317] (ibid.)

[318] (ibid.)

[319] Clark's views combined a social structural understanding of black inequality with a psychologically rooted one. While Clark viewed blacks as being largely confined by white racism to ghetto neighborhoods of the urban North, Clark understood the operative effects of ghetto confinement to be psychological mal-formation. In contrast, Political Scientist Allen Ballard, another City College faculty member who was a strong proponent of the SEEK program and who would become one of the program's early administrators, had a far more structural understanding of black inequality that minimized the strong current of psychological deformation that ran through Clark's views (Clark 1965; Ballard 1973).

Berger's theories, the economic, social and cultural depravations of growing up in a "ghetto" environment pathologized youth, causing them either to become passive in the face of opportunity, or to become rebellious against the norms of mainstream society (Clark 1965:12-3). According to SEEK's operational theory, such accumulated pathologies were the root cause of minority youth's failure to thrive in primary and secondary schools, inhibiting them from accumulating a requisite academic record to take advantage of the structural opportunities for upward mobility made available to them, such as the color blind admission system of tuition free CUNY. According to SEEK's operating theory, to counteract their dysfunctional development, ghetto youth needed to be entirely reconstructed on a psychological level by being removed from their harmful ghetto environment and placed in one where productive, studious values could displace the putatively harmful ones.[320]

In this vein, one of SEEK's experiments was the Alamac Hotel in which as many as 200 SEEK students took up housing in an effort to remove their accumulated ghetto stains (Dyer 1990:77). As CUNY was (and still is) largely a commuter school, the housing function at Alamac Hotel existed according to a different logic than typical college housing. Located at 71st and Broadway in Manhattan, several miles and some 70 blocks removed from the City College campus, the Alamac Hotel was CUNY's only dormitory. In addition to providing an environment separated from the homes the program deemed harmful to the student's psychological health, the space

[320] On the theoretical orientation towards pathological psychology in the dominant strands of social science on the significance of race and racism in post-war U.S., see Herman (1995: 174-207); for a broader critique of sociology's disciplinary role in the pathologization of African-American culture see Ferguson (2004).

at the Alamac also separated SEEK students from the "mainstream" student population, as the Alamac also had classrooms in which its residents received extensive remedial education. Speaking of the "pre-baccalaureate" program that would be renamed SEEK, Berger said the program's logic, "came out of the idea to put pressure on students to perform—to show that they could qualify for the baccalaureate program. We did not give credit for any remedial work. The idea was to prepare them for the competition" (quoted in Dyer 1990:71). In a related speech that called for the creation of institutional agency that could act as an "educational ombudsman," protecting the rights of children in ghetto schools, Clark also revealingly commented on what he saw as the inability of minorities to compete. According to Clark, the ombudsman agency would "do for these schools what middle class parents do for their schools—that is, insist on the level of educational efficiency necessary for their children to be able to compete effectively."[321]

According to one early SEEK counselor, the initial Alamac program did not have academic counselors, only psychological ones. "In the beginning, Berger had hired only clinical psychologists because the thinking was that students had a lot of problems and that this was what they needed." Moreover, the SEEK program consolidated the racial coding of the theory of group pathology: "This meant that most counselors were white."[322] Indeed, the Alamac Dorm witnessed its own mobilizations in the late 1960's, with students demanding to be treated as students,[323]

---

[321] "Clark Seek School Ombudsman," *The Campus*, December 6, 1966, p. 3.
[322] Fran Geteles, quoted in Dyer (1990:101).
[323] AAUP Bulletin (1974); "SEEK Operates Market Place of Ideas in West Side Hotel," Nancy Hicks, *The New York Times*, May 21, 1969; "Dismissals at Alamac Hotel May Result in Confrontation," *The Campus*, Tom Ackerman, October 29, 1969, p. 1.

and not patients, with SEEK Alamac students connected with Queens College demanding that, "There must be academic counselors and not 'psychiatric' counselors (social workers)" (quoted in Dyer 1990:101, emphasis in original).[324]

The Alamac dorm and classroom space became the gateway for all SEEK students entering CUNY. Several hundred students received classroom instruction and counseling services at the Alamac hotel for one or two semesters, and then would move on to special matriculated status at one of the senior college branches (Dyer 1990:77). While only a small portion of the College Discovery and SEEK students were actually housed in the Alamac dorm, its experimental quality was representative of the way the programs related to its beneficiaries. Thus, College Discovery and SEEK constructed and categorized their beneficiaries not as students exercising their rights of citizenship, but rather as individuals in need of being saved from their pathological communities.[325] Indeed, pathologized SEEK students' "experimental," rather than rightful presence on the City College campus, was cemented by the fact that they were not granted the same rights and responsibilities as "normally" admitted students.[326] Initially, on a CUNY-wide basis, SEEK students were purposefully

---

[324] Paralleling the mobilizations on CUNY campus that mirrored the Five Demands and BPRSC campus takeover, students at the Alamac Dorm successfully overturned the paternalistic pedagogical structure, achieving the reassignment of the dorm's original director who was replaced by Aijaz Ahmad, who was described by *The Times* as a 29 year old Pakistani poet, but who would later be known as a Marxist Post-colonial literary critic. While stigmatized within the mainstream student body as psychologically oriented remediation, professors linked specifically with the SEEK curriculum included Adrienne Rich, Toni Cade Bambara and June Jordan.

[325] Pierre Bourdieu notes that the etymological root of the word "category" comes from the ancient Greek "to accuse publicly."

[326] In a later chapter, I will trace the process by which black and Puerto Rican students interpreted their claim to a higher education within the terms of the rights of citizenship,

granted a partially matriculated status and thus were required to take a restricted schedule. To *earn* equal status, SEEK students were required to complete 15 credits with an A average, 30 credits with a B average, or 50 credits with a C average, granting them full matriculation at one of the senior colleges.[327] In addition to being limited to a partial schedule, SEEK students were excluded from serving in student government and playing varsity sports.[328] SEEK students experienced their second-class status as stigmatizing as it would become one of the bases of the development of "SEEK consciousness" and the enactment of the BPRSC preceding the campus takeover of 1969 (Dyer 1990:70-78). While SEEK students were symbolically segregated by their second class status on the City College campus, at Queens College students were *physically* segregated, as the program was conducted entirely on a separate campus and, almost unbelievably, directed by a probation officer rather than a professional educator (ibid.: 75).

While many white students on the campus left would begin challenging racism in various aspects of City College life in the late 1960's,[329] most City College students continued to be weary of the various proposed means of enrolling more black and Puerto Rican students. Such anxieties continued in the face of promising early results from the College Discovery and SEEK programs.[330] In the fall of 1967,

---

rejecting and then reversing the symbolic logic used to stigmatize their presence within CUNY.

[327] "SEEK Granted Funding," *The Campus*, September 4, 1968, p. 1.

[328] (ibid.)

[329] "Leftist Groups to Stress Campus-Centered Issues," *The Campus*, October 4, 1967, p. 3.

[330] "Discovery Program Reported Effective in 'Alumnus' Study." *The Campus*, January 4, 1967, p. 2. The first publicized reports at City College found that 50% of the first 113 College Discovery and Pre-Bac students at City College kept an of "C" or better in their limited

some four years into Bowker's tenure as Chancellor of the university and a year and half before the campus takeover that would lead to open admissions, the evening session at City College proposed collapsing the two sessions at City College into one, merging the two student populations. As noted above, the evening session was unable to award Bachelors degrees, as while it was physically located at City College it was in fact categorized as a community college. Evening session students generally had to have had a strong academic record in high school in order to gain admission to a CUNY community college as, as noted above, CUNY's administration treated them more as two-year feeder schools for the overcrowded senior colleges. CUNY's administration did not recognize legitimate academic distinctions between the normally admitted community and senior college student, assuming both were more or less equally capable of successfully completing a four-year course of study. Thus, when studying their own student body, the evening session estimated that 1/3 of it would have liked to attend classes during the day session from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m., while the final 2/3 of the student body had jobs and would still confine themselves to the courses scheduled for the evening.[331] Seeing no real academic difference between the two populations of students except for an arbitrary boundary established by spacial economies, the evening session proposed allowing the 1/3 of its students interested in studying during the day the ability to do so.

---

enrollment. Furthermore, several students had exceptional records and were being granted transfer to full matriculation at City College.

[331] "Master Plan Committee To Propose Merging Day and Evening Sessions," *The Campus*, November 30, 1967, p. 1.

Again, *The Campus* was alarmed by the potential blurring of the boundary between day and evening session students: “a combination of the evening and day session enrollments into one program could only be deleterious to the tradition of high standards at the College.”[332] Rather, in response to several years of Bowker’s efforts at increasing overall enrollments at CUNY in general, and City College in particular, *The Campus’* editorial writers argued it was time to change course:

> In endorsing certain suggestions proposed for the College’s new master plan, *The Campus* is here basing its opinions on the principle that the quality of education at the College must take precedence over all other goals. Although we recognize that the College has obligations to the city and to society at large, we feel that these obligations cannot be met unless the College first meets it (sic) obligations to itself.[333]

Thus, for *The Campus*, continued enrollment increases, assumed to be based on social goals rather than academic principles, threatened to alter City College’s very identity. Instead, *The Campus* urged:

> The most important conclusion the Master Plan revision should reach is that the College emphasize academic excellence rather than expansion of admissions as the prime criteria of policy in the future. The time is past when obtaining more students at the expense of quality education can be the key impetus in computing admission standards.[334]

The Campus was not just concerned with the influx of what they saw as inferior students, but also with a brain drain driven by the suburbanization of many of City College’s traditional clientele, as well as a perceived decline in prestige they believed was resulting from adverse educational conditions related to overcrowding. “As more and more high quality students from New York City leave the five

---

[332] “Qualitative Analysis,” *The Campus*, November 30, 1967, p. 4.
[333] (ibid.)
[334] (ibid.)

boroughs for the State University units, it is inevitable . . . that the quality of municipal college students will diminish,"[335] believed *The Campus*. Thus, in contrast to Bowker, who aimed to ultimately open CUNY to any New York City youngster who desired a college education, the student editorialists at *The Camus* argued City College should expand beyond its legislated commitment to the citizens of New York City to recruit elite college going students from around the country: "To reverse any downward trend in the quality of education at the College, an attempt must be made to gain superior students from outside the city and the state."[336] To attract a national elite, *The Campus* suggested City College spend resources to shed its commuter school structure and brown bag image by remaking itself in the image of its elite neighbor to the south: "Obtaining students outside of the city and state is difficult . . . Not only would a dormitory program bring in out-of-state talent but it would also greatly improve the academic atmosphere for the New York City students."[337]

However, *The Campus* did not object to the social mission Bowker was increasingly making CUNY's own, as they supported increased efforts to integrate black and Puerto Rican students into the CUNY system: "Of course the College should not forget its duty to the community, but an expansion of the pre-baccalaureate program here, and the proposed creation of a new University college for disadvantaged students would well meet this ideal."[338] In effect, *The Campus* argued that the symbolic boundary segmenting merit internally within CUNY be

[335] (ibid.)
[336] (ibid.)
[337] (ibid.)
[338] (ibid.)

strengthened. “Disadvantaged students,” a term that universally served as a euphemism for blacks and Puerto Ricans, deserved a shot at higher education, but they should be segregated, either physically in the case of the new proposed unit, or symbolically in the case of the Pre-Bac program, from the elite students in the senior colleges. *The Campus'* definition of academic excellence was also based not on the quality of education offered by the school and its instructional staff, but on the superior qualities of the student, which they believed were measurably manifest in a student's high school career. Thus, they defined excellence not in academic practice, but in who was granted the status of meritorious. Finally, *The Campus* believed that City College's reason for being was to provide an excellent education for a superior student rather than educational opportunity for all as a right of citizenship.

Conclusion: Racially Encoding the Third Tier Student

In formal policy terms, both College Discovery and SEEK used economic or class criteria to define the eligible populations of “disadvantaged” students whose “native abilities” and “talents” were not being developed by an unequally achieving public school system in New York City. However, in political discourse and practice, all contemporary actors framed and understood the policies as what we would today call ethno-racially based affirmative action programs. It is not that actors understood class criteria as legally and politically convenient proxies for ethno-racial populations. Rather, in the eyes of black, Puerto Rican, Jewish and other white actors, and even politicians and administrators, College Discovery and SEEK were understood as explicit efforts to target black and Puerto Rican students for fuller inclusion in CUNY. The gap between the public perception of the two alternative

admissions programs and how they actually operated was furthered by the fact that beyond the de jure class logic of the two programs, in *practice* they included a significant number of economically dispossessed whites. According to Wechsler, of those entering the College Discovery Program in its first five years, more than 40% were black and about 25% were Puerto Rican; however as much as 30% of the College Discovery students were from groups outside the two publicly recognized target groups, including around 20% of whom were white (Wechsler 1977: 276).

It is not, however, surprising that, contrary to their formal institutional logics, the public saw such programs in ethno-racial terms.[339] Indeed, the educational and political architects of the College Discovery and SEEK programs devised them with the intention of countering the dearth of black and Puerto Rican students being served by CUNY. From the outset of his Chancellorship, Bowker was clearly concerned that the demographic makeup of CUNY's student body was not representative of the City's as a whole. Bowker achieved the College Discovery program, against the wishes of the BHE and some of the senior college presidents[340] by negotiating directly with the State Legislature in Albany. Concurrent with Bowker's initial efforts to increase black and Puerto Rican representation within CUNY through easing admission standards and piloting the College Discovery Program, a number of black and Puerto Rican civil rights leaders in New York City began publicly criticizing the

---

[339] In as much as City College's registrar expressed concerns that programs that established racial and ethnic categories as explicit criteria for admission might be illegal, it is possible that College Discovery and SEEK were intentionally organized according to an economic logic to avoid legal challenges.

[340] City College's president, Buell Gallagher, who had a long history as a champion of African-American civil rights, was unlikely one of the dissenters, considering that the Pre-Bac program, the pilot program for SEEK, was voluntarily undertaken at CCNY.

lack of black and Puerto Rican students at CUNY. In fact, while surreptitiously supported by Bowker, the SEEK program was the direct result of leveraged demands by African-American lawmakers in Albany to address the lack of minorities at the senior colleges.[341] Such legislators argued that a public institution ought to be representative of the public it serves. Minority lawmakers aligned with upstate Republicans who repeatedly decried the lack of blacks and Puerto Ricans within New York City's public university, and supported such programs as College Discovery and SEEK while criticizing CUNY's tradition of free tuition, even if they likely did so for cynical political reasons.

While the original impetus for the coding of the enrollment issue as an ethno-racial conflict between blacks and Jews may have come from upstate Republicans who desired to divide the potentially powerful black/Jewish political coalition (Gordon 1975: 175), the racial framing of disputes over enrollment came to be taken on by all actors. Thus, Bowker, perhaps the most effective and dogged actor in support of radical expansion of CUNY enrollment, increasingly framed the issue as a direct ethnic conflict between blacks and Jews, suggesting in March 1969, on the eve of the campus takeover that would lead to Open Admissions, that proposed budget cuts to be imposed on CUNY would foment ethnic tensions between Jews and blacks so far that they were likely to "explode."[342] Increasingly through the late 60's Bowker framed the yearly budgetary battles over CUNY's finances within the terms of ethnic

---

[341] In fact, Biondi argues that the creation of the SEEK and College Discovery programs point to a history of the popular *legislative* origins of Affirmative Action policies, as against the assumption that such policies were driven by academic elites (Biondi 2012: 116).
[342] "Students Forsee Budget Victory; Bowker Fears New Racial Conflict," *The Campus*, March 26, 1969, p. 1.

conflict rather than the terms of education and citizenship. Again discussing the proposed budget cuts on the eve of the BPRSC campus takeover Bowker argued: "This may be as destructive of ethnic relations in this city as almost anything that's happened in the last decade."[343] According to Karabel, from the standpoint of organizational theory, "it may be said . . . Bowker had a 'solution', open admissions, that he had wanted to impose long before he had a 'problem' that would justify its imposition" (1983: 47). While the language of "racial crisis" may have served Bowker's interests as a "state manager" well, it framed what is properly understood as the crisis of post-war citizenship created by CUNY's woeful inability to meet college demand in the 1960's, as a conflict between legitimate academic excellence, and academically illegitimate social needs.

In these past two chapters, I have employed the tools of institutional analysis and the sociology of culture to analyze how City College constructed the "meritorious student" through their admissions practices up to the eave of the Open Admissions crisis. My analysis has shown that, while generally selective according to academic principles, rarely were City College's admissions *standards* the result of expert academic judgments of who was capable and worthy of the pursuit of a college degree. Generally, City College's definition of academic merit as manifested in their admissions practices were determined by the college's subordinate location within the field of higher education, and on its institutional dependence on political processes well beyond its institutional control. However, while political and institutional realities impeded the college's development, forcing the admissions standards to

---

[343] (ibid.)

become more restrictive, several significant actors came to invest those academically arbitrary standards with academic legitimacy. Thus, efforts to expand enrollment were seen by many as contrary to the values of meritocracy.

Bowker did recognize the legitimation crisis in the post-war structure of citizenship brought on by CUNY's elitist and restrictive admissions practices. However, his solutions to the crisis of citizenship, as well as the symbolic structures he practically deployed in politically seeking those solutions, threatened to stratify educational citizenship both institutionally and symbolically. While blacks and Puerto Ricans would be integrated into CUNY, they would be stigmatized as symbolically polluted and academically suspect students. In the public at large as well as in the mainstream public and press on the City College campus, the expansion of enrollment was not seen within the terms of citizenship and the right to education, but rather as the political management of race relations and racial tensions. Those excluded from City College were labeled as social problems whose pathologies might be cured through higher education, not as citizens whose equal rights were being systematically violated.

Indeed, in stark contrast to the 30's and 40's at City College, mainstream student opinion at City College invested the boundary that marked them as meritorious and superior with legitimacy. While in fact academically arbitrary, the boundary defining the meritorious student at City College came to be understood by the privileged students, faculty and alumni, as a boundary legitimately marking the worthiness of the student. However, as the boundary between the academically worthy and unworthy student also came to take on racial meanings, whiteness and

merit came to be symbolically conflated. Thus, in investing the academically arbitrary boundary defining merit with legitimacy, the privileged day session City College student, the majority of whom were Jewish, came to see the very presence of black and Puerto Rican students as academic pollutants undermining academic excellence. Thus, efforts to undermine the expansion of enrollment could be actively pursued through the language of sacred academic standards and meritocracy, but many black and Puerto Rican students understood such concepts to be coded ways of saying that the enlargement of the black and Puerto Rican student body by definition undermines the academic excellence of the institution.[344]

In this way, the institutional history of City College admissions practices also doubles as a history of the institutional production of white privilege. In constructing an institutional genealogy of the category of "merit," these chapters establish the institutional and social location, or *standpoint*, from which students, faculty, administrators and alumni drew and interpreted boundaries. In contrast to purely inductive analyses of boundary drawing processes (Lamont 1992, 2000), in reconstructing the social and institutional standpoint from which different actors interpreted the efforts to increase enrollment, and their boundary drawing practices, the analysis also grasps the ways in which actors understood their underlying

[344] On this interpretation, the oft-repeated phrase that "Open Admissions ruined City College," takes on definite racial and racist meanings, and can be seen as an example of what Bonilla-Silva calls "color-blind racism" (Bonilla-Silva 2003).

interests. Rather than free floating processes of boundary drawing, actors established their interests by taking up particular relations to City College as an institution.[345]

To further this point, whereas Jews and blacks had been positioned in similar terms prior to WWII, the transformation of educational citizenship following WWII privileged Jews, as they had monopolized access to an increasingly scarce and increasingly valuable City College degree. The shifting position of Jews in relation to educational citizenship was one important part of a much larger transformation in the meaning of their ethno-racial status, or of their passing into whiteness in the postwar order (Brodkin 1998) (Goldstein 2006) (Alba and Nee 2003) (Alba 2006). Indeed, in a postwar Cold War society that constructed its national identity in liberal meritocratic terms, the performance of "merit" and the institutions that legitimately recognized such performances held the power to confer upon individuals and groups full inclusion within the national community. Thus, while a large proportion of New York City Jews in fact had their material life chances curtailed by the arbitrarily high admissions standards to City College that blocked large numbers from acquiring the cultural capital endowed in the degree, many Jews tended to see it as in their interest to pursue the *symbolic capital* of belonging conferred on Jews as a social group through their investment in the legitimacy of the high academic standards represented by City College. In other words, many Jews invested in the legitimacy of high academic standards at City College, despite not individually benefitting from them, because they tended to mark Jews, as a social group, as worthy of belonging.

---

[345] Analyses that rigorously reconstruct the social and institutional standpoint from which actors makes sense of their lives include, Bourdieu (1991, 1993:ch1, 1996); Wacquant (1995); Auyero (2001:152-181).

However, because both Jews and the high academic standards defining the "meritorious" student at City College had come to be coded white, the Jewish defense of such standards doubled as a defense of their recently acquired white privilege. Thus, the Jewish and larger white investment in the existing academic standards at City College, is an example of what Bonilla-Silva has called "color-blind racism." (Bonilla-Silva 2003) For Bonilla-Silva, rather than social closure being achieved against racialized minorities through ideologies of biological inferiority, color-blind racism is in effect when, "whites rationalize minorities' contemporary status (of structural inequality) as the product of market dynamics, naturally occurring phenomena, and blacks' imputed cultural limitations" (ibid.:2). Thus, investment in the legitimacy of City College's academic standards allowed Jews to enjoy the symbolic capital of whiteness, regardless of whether they or their children were actually admitted, while simultaneously drawing boundaries of social closure against blacks and Puerto Ricans.

Moreover, the racially coded understanding of putatively sacred academic standards became the prism through which many existing City College students and large swaths of the public interpreted the meaning of the Open Admissions policy. That so many Jews interpreted the Open Admissions policy from an institutionally generated standpoint of white privilege explains how they could understand a universal policy open to all high school graduates as one targeted specifically to blacks and Puerto Ricans. While they misrecognized the policy as particularistic, they accurately recognized it as a threat to their ethno-racial privilege. Thus, in contrast to explanations of boundary drawing processes that simply posit overarching liberal and

republican political traditions at hand from which actors draw upon to construct boundaries (Lamont 2000), the illogic of confusing Open Admissions for affirmative action is sensible when understood as a practice protecting racial privilege.

As the very public discussion by college administrators and student newspapers of the manner in which SEEK and College Discovery experimented with "cures" for black and Puerto Rican "pathologies" contributed to consolidating blackness and Puerto Ricanness as stigmatic badges, separating those students off from the "traditionally" or "meritocratically" admitted white students, the Black and Puerto Rican Student Community (or BPRSC) would reject these very terms of pathologization, understanding their place within CUNY not as a result of charity, or the political byproduct of a social emergency, but as the realization of their *right* to higher education. I turn to the analysis of this process in the next chapters.

Chapter 6

The Circulation of Counterpublic Discourse and the Making of the Black and Puerto Rican Student Community at The City College of New York

In a report based on a study initiated in 1963, the soon to be famous Social Psychologist Philip Zimbardo argued that patterns of racial segregation in extracurricular activities he observed on the City College campus were the result of practices of self-segregation on the part of black students. While noting that black students at City College were "on the periphery of campus life," Zimbardo argued that the practices of self-segregation he attributed to black students were the result of "built-in feelings of inferiority."[346] According to Zimbardo, black students practiced self-segregation in order to protect their own egos, allowing them to "minimize social comparisons with whites, anticipating that it might reveal some unfavorable discrepancies."[347] *The Campus*' reporting seemed to support Zimbardo's observations, if not necessarily his explanation, as it quoted one black student as stating, "sure, we segregate ourselves, but it's not done purposefully. It's only natural for someone to want to be with her own kind."[348] Another black student interviewed by *The Campus* also agreed that racism was not the root cause of patterns of segregation on campus, admitting she "would like to believe that it's the whites who are causing us to segregate ourselves, but it's just not true. Negroes are such a

---

[346] Zimbardo quoted in, "Psychologist Finds Negroes Segregate in Cafeteria," Neil Offen, *The Campus*, April 20, 1966, p. 1.
[347] (ibid.)
[348] (ibid.)

minority here that when one of us is with a group of whites, we of course feel uncomfortable."[349]

Contrary to *The Campus*' reporting however, the majority of black students attending City College did not agree with Zimbardo's findings. Immediately, and in part a direct response to Zimbardo's claims of self-segreation, black City College students organized the Onyx Society. In it's charter, the Onyx Society committed itself to "convey a contemporary and novel expression of the viable but heretofore distorted image of the Negro college community."[350] Countering Zimbardo's distorted image of a self-segregating black community at City College, Onyx members asserted that *white discrimination* was the reason few City College blacks participated in extracurricular activities and campus clubs. According to Everard Rhoden, the Society's Vice President, patterns of segregation on the City College campus were "primarily a white manifestation. The Negro is not the core of the problem—he is only on the periphery."[351]

Chartered in response to Zimbardo's study, membership in the Onyx Society grew rapidly to more than 200 students in a span of just two-weeks. In fact, Onyx's prompt growth led *The Campus* to surmise that it had become the largest student club at City College. While Onyx was open to and welcoming of non-black students, the club was almost entirely comprised of blacks, with its members estimating that the more than 200 black students who had swiftly joined amounted to nearly half of all

---

[349] (ibid.)
[350] "Onyx Society Offers Negro View," Andy Soltis, *The Campus*, May 4, 1966, p. 2.
[351] (ibid.)

black students on campus.[352] The rapidity with which black students joined Onyx on the heels of the Zimbardo report, along with its almost exclusively black membership, suggests both widespread experiences of exclusion on the part of black students, as well as a significant divergence in perception amongst whites and blacks regarding the root causes of segregation on the college's campus.

While the members of Onyx attributed the cause of student segregation on campus to white discrimination, concerns over such patterns were not a new development in the spring of 1966. In contrast to the late 1940's, when black and Jewish students joined forces to bring down segregation in the Army Hall dormitory, in February of 1960, President Gallagher of City College criticized what he saw as an "indifferent attitude" among City College students towards the racial integration of extracurricular activities.[353] Observing that only one white student attended the meeting of the campus' chapter of the NAACP at which he had given a speech, Gallagher asserted, "there is no reason why" the college's chapter of the "NAACP should be predominantly Negro. There must be more students at the College who have an interest in this area that isn't overshadowed by politics."[354] While lamenting

---

[352] (ibid.) It is not clear if the Onyx members were only estimating matriculated black students, or also including night session students. CUNY schools did not keep track of their ethno-racial compositions until 1967, making any statement of demographic distributions necessarily an estimate.
[353] "Pres. Scores Integration Apathy Here," Barry Mallin, *The Campus*, February 24, 1960, p. 1.
[354] (ibid.) Gallagher is implicitly criticizing communist and other mostly white leftist students who were active in civil rights campaigns for black equality. Gallagher, like many other liberals, accused the communist party and its student organizations of "politicizing" the civil rights struggle to try and build party membership and undermine the credibility of the U.S. Here, Gallagher is suggesting that white students who had an interest in promoting civil rights

the lack of white participation in the college's chapter of the NAACP, Gallagher also noted blacks were conspicuously absent from significant areas of the college's life, noting some of the college's fraternities were "exclusive," blacks infrequently attended student dances, and that student seating patterns in the college's cafeterias were segregated.[355]

For Gallagher, while troubling, patterns of segregation at City College in the beginning of the 1960's were not the result of discrimination. "It's not a question of racial prejudice," Gallagher claimed, "but the fact remains that nobody goes out of his way to make friends among different groups. Students follow the path of least resistance and move in the circle of their own friends."[356] In an editorial, *The Campus* agreed with Gallagher's analysis, asserting that while not completely absent, "racial and religious prejudice is not a way of life at the College."[357] While clearly concerned, Gallagher asserted City College was not outside the norm for colleges in terms of struggling with racial segregation and that there was little the administration could do beyond encouraging increased integration. "The situation is not any worse than at any other schools," said Gallagher, "and no one group is at fault. But we still can't force students to integrate. The best we can do is talk about it and discuss it and hope that gradual progress will take place."[358]

---

causes could join the NAACP without worrying that it would associate them with communist party currents or taint them as "fellow travelers."

[355] (ibid.)

[356] (ibid.)

[357] "Damning Praise," *The Campus*, March 17, 1960, p. 4.

[358] "Pres. Scores Integration Apathy Here," Barry Mallin, *The Campus*, February 24, 1960, p. 2.

Despite Gallagher's concern, racially segregated patterns persisted more than three years later, as in the fall semester of 1963, in preparation for Chancellor Bowker's plans to admit more black and Puerto Rican students, City College's administration urged fraternities to make special efforts "to pledge people from culturally disadvantaged groups."[359] While fraternity and sorority students understood the college's administration to be urging them to pledge more blacks and Puerto Ricans, some disputed the implication that fraternities were at fault for the segregation of extra-curricular student associations. Instead, they asserted it was black students themselves whom refrained from seeking to join fraternities: "I've gone around on rush evenings to many fraternities and find almost no Negroes (sic) there."[360] The issue of segregated fraternities would be revived yet again a year later when one fraternal organization was in fact discovered to have refused to admit a prospective black member because of his race.[361]

In the face of this latter case of formal discrimination, the student council quickly moved to dissolve the fraternity's charter. However, the incident brought wider attention to the place of black students on the City College campus, especially in regards to extracurricular life. A report by *The Campus* found that none of the over 2,000 students in the House Plan Association (a network of extracurricular clubs that put on social events and other projects) were black; only around ten of the

---

[359] "Blaesser Asks IFC to Pledge 'The Culturally Disadvanted," Joe Berger, *The Campus*, December 6, 1963, p. 1.
[360] (ibid.)
[361] "HPA Charges House With Discrimination," Henry Gilgoff, *The Campus*, October 27, 1964, p. 1.

approximately 1,000 sorority and fraternity members at City College were black, no blacks had served on Student Government going back at least five years, and none of the staff members on any of the three day session student newspapers were black.[362] According to *The Campus'* report, the almost total absence of black students from extracurricular activities at City College was not the result of "any overt discrimination by student organizations… Exclusion from an activity on the basis of creed or race is forbidden by the College;" a policy whose effectiveness *The Campus* believed was evidenced by the dissolution of the fraternity that had been found to have been discriminating against blacks.[363]

While exonerating the college of overt racism, *The Campus*' report did note two widely held explanations amongst administrators, faculty and students, for the almost complete absence of black students from extracurricular life at the college. First, the day session at the college was estimated to be somewhere between two and five percent black.[364] In other words, many noted there were simply relatively few black students enrolled in City College's prestigious day session who could have possibly participated in extracurricular activities. Significantly, in connection with the question of the segregated nature of the college's social life, *The Campus* sited President Gallagher's explanation that the "deterioration of social institutions" in predominantly black neighborhoods such as Harlem and Bedford-Stuyvesant, was to blame "for the failure of potentially qualified Negroes to gain admission to the

---

[362] "Activities and the Negro," Alice Kottek, *The Campus*, November 5, 1964, p. 1.
[363] (ibid.)
[364] (ibid.) As shown in the last chapter, that the City College student population was 5% black during the day session at City College in 1964 is likely to be an over-estimation.

College."[365] Thus, Gallagher blamed the predominately black communities of Harlem and Bedford-Stuyvesant, and not the excessively high and academically arbitrary admissions standards practiced by the college,[366] for the relative absence of black and Puerto Rican students at City College.

A second widely cited explanation was of a different character. *The Campus* reported "feelings of discomfort, expressed by several Negro (sic) and white students, at racial mixing in social situations."[367] Lending credence to this latter explanation, *The Campus'* report noted that the proportion of blacks participating in extracurricular activities was even smaller than the relatively small proportion blacks represented in the overall student body.[368] According to Steve Cagain, the chairperson of the college's chapter of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), patterns of segregation on the college's campus reflected deeper patterns of segregation within the city of New York: "very few people (at City College) have lived, worked, gone to school with or associated socially with Negroes."[369] The President of one fraternity house reported that a former black member of the house, "never mixed at parties and never danced with any of the girls. He didn't feel right, and anyway, it would make the girl feel funny."[370] *The Campus* suggested most black students anticipated making whites feel uncomfortable in social situations and therefore declined to participate: "'Why the hell should I go' (join an activity), one Negro student exclaimed. 'I have a

---

[365] (ibid.)
[366] See chapters above.
[367] (ibid.)
[368] "Activities and the Negro," Alice Kottek, *The Campus*, November 5, 1964, p. 1.
[369] (ibid.), p. 2.
[370] (ibid.)

feeling if I did go, they might not want me.'"[371] According to Student Government President John Zippert, the absence of blacks from social and extracurricular activities at City College was a matter of "subtle segregation," and he called on all clubs to overcome the status quo by actively recruiting "minority group members."[372]

Zimbardo's 1966 study, then, intervened in a longer standing debate regarding whether black students were stigmatized at City College, and whether racism might be the root cause of patterns of segregation on the college's campus. However, by lending scientific authority to the notion that blacks separated themselves off from whites of their own preferences and volition, Zimbardo's analysis went further than simply absolving City College of anti-black racism.[373] Instead, in arguing that psychological anxieties based in feelings of inadequacy and inferiority on the part of blacks were the root cause of patterns of segregation, Zimbardo affirmed the significance of the stigmatization of blackness at City College, but shifted blame for it from white racism to the internal psyches of blacks themselves. Furthermore, Zimbardo's study was conducted before institutional efforts to admit more black and Puerto Rican students were enacted, meaning all black City College students at the time of Zimbardo's study had gained entrance through the extraordinarily high admissions standards analyzed in the previous chapters. Thus, following Zimbardo's logic, inferiority complex in relation to whites was a general property of all black

---

[371] (ibid.)

[372] "Zippert Urges Clubs Recruit More Negroes," *The Campus*, November 5, 1964, p. 1-2.

[373] Rather than the result of feelings of inferiority, patterns of "self-segregation," if and when they exist, could be the result of positive affiliations and solidarities with one's identified social group.

psyches, and not limited to those who are exceptionally categorized within a specific institutional context, i.e. the exceptional beneficiaries of the College Discovery, SEEK or affirmative action programs more generally.

As one of their initial activities, Onyx invited Zimbardo to speak to their members regarding his report. Zimbardo came away from the meeting criticizing the club, stating, "I don't have the solution to the problem (of racial segregation at City College,) but I feel the Onyx Society is a step in the wrong direction."[374] Zimbardo predicted the club would actually further racial segregation on the college's campus by drawing black students away from already existing clubs, which, in line with his analysis of self-segregation, Zimbardo presumably understood as racially and ethnically neutral social spaces. Yet, Onyx leaders asserted they had no separatist agenda, encouraging their members to participate in any club or activity to which they were drawn, "not just because they are Negroes," seeking "integration . . . as a superficial idealistic policy,"[375] but rather to fully cultivate any and all of their personal interests. In addition to challenging distorted images of the college's African-American student community, Onyx was chartered to cultivate interest in "Afro-American culture," as well as to provide "information, social contacts and assistance" to black students on campus.[376] The club's initial activities included parties, fashion shows, social outings, organizing lectures on African-American

---

[374] "Onyx Society Offers Negro View," Andy Soltis, *The Campus*, May 4, 1966, p. 2.
[375] (ibid.)
[376] "Onyx Society Offers Negro View," Andy Soltis, *The Campus*, May 4, 1966, p. 2.

heritage, as well as a proposed Educational Committee to orient incoming students on registration and the draft.[377]

The Onyx Society served as an important organizational base for the development of the Black and Puerto Rican Student Community (or BPRSC), the group that issued the Five Demands and carried out the campus takeover.[378] Conrad Dyer's analysis of the student mobilization and campus seizure, the most thorough and meticulous study of the collective action available, emphasizes the transformation of Onyx from a social club to a political organization (Dyer 1990:65-78). According to Dyer, racial conflict was muted at City College prior to the mid 60's because the "normally admitted" black students practiced a politics of assimilation tied to middle class aspirations (ibid.:65). On Dyer's view, the predominantly black and Puerto Rican students of working class origins who entered City College through the College Discovery and SEEK alternative admissions programs beginning in 1965 politicized and radicalized Onyx (Dyer 1990:62-70). Dyer suggests that because the alternatively admitted students were less likely to be middle class, they did not identify with an assimilationist politics and were far more amenable to the radical strands within a changing political climate linked to the spread of Black Power ideologies. Moreover, Dyer argues that the formally separate status of College Discovery and SEEK students, in being only partially matriculated students and being formally excluded from extra-curricular activities such as sports and student government, stigmatized such students, thereby supplying their motivation to mobilize.

---

[377] (ibid.); (Dyer 1990:66).

[378]

While a deep and meticulous analysis of the process of mobilization by the BPRSC, Dyer's account suffers from several flaws. First, while Onyx certainly did undergo a process of radicalization, it is clear that it was founded in the first place, at least in part, to oppose the stigmatizing logic of the Zimbardo report. While Onyx was certainly in part a social club, it also was founded as *political* confrontation with the stigmatizing logic of the Zimbardo report and deep patterns of racial stigmatization and segregation on the City College campus dating back to at least 1960 that Zimbardo legitimated. Dyer is right to argue that the execution, logic, and official discourse surrounding the College Discovery and SEEK programs stigmatized its black and Puerto Rican beneficiaries. And, as I will further analyze below, the Alamac dorm, instituted to re-socialize SEEK students, served as an important network hub for political organization across CUNY campuses. However, as shown above, the official discourse surrounding the special admissions programs institutionalized *pre-existing* patterns of informal segregation and stigmatization of students of color on the City College campus.

These facts are important because they point to the role of symbolic violence, cultural meaning and interpretive practices in the BPRSC mobilization, in its *causes* and it's near and long term consequences or *outcomes*, as well as within contentious politics and political action more generally. The emergence of critical political consciousness amongst black and Puerto Rican students was not limited to those who participated in the College Discovery and SEEK programs alone, but was a more general confrontation with racism at City College. While dominant sociological

theories of collective action in recent decades developed out of the initial insights of resource mobilization theory have given primacy within their analyses to material resources, movement organization, instrumentalist conceptions of cultural meaning,[379] and actors fundamentally driven by instrumental rationality, Armstrong and Bernstein have called for the analytical centering of "the relationship between forms of domination and forms of challenge," in collective action research (Armstrong and Bernstein 2008:81). This relationship should be analytically central because it captures the interests, material and symbolic, with which political actors are constituted and which underlie their practice.

Bourdieu's neglected theory of collective actor formation foregrounds the process by which the collective grievance is constructed through critical interpretive practices of existing dynamics of symbolic violence and misrecognition (Sherwood 2014). For Bourdieu, the impetus to act politically is produced by the harm of symbolic violence that wounds particular populations with negative categorizations and evaluations. However, as Bourdieu fundamentally notes, dominated actors tend to misrecognize the wounds of symbolic violence as natural or legitimate within a doxic state of social relations (ibid.). Thus, according to Bourdieu, properly political action can emerge only once actors have broken with the doxic state (ibid.).[380] For Bourdieu, the break with doxa operates as a kind of "transgression which is indispensable in

---

[379] In particular the framing perspective.

[380] Bourdieu writes, "Politics begins, strictly speaking, with the denunciation of this tacit contract of adherence to the established order which defines the original doxa; in other words, political subversion presupposes cognitive subversion, a conversion of the world" (Bourdieu 1991a:127-8).

order to *name the unnamable,* to break the censorships, institutionalized or internalized," that otherwise secure the misrecognition of symbolic violence (Bourdieu 1991a:129). However, according to Bourdieu, in order for the break with doxa to have real political effects manifest in group formation and practical mobilization, the symbolic break with doxa must be brought into public discourse:

> …through the *labor of enunciation* which is necessary in order to externalize the inwardness, to name the unnamed and to give the beginnings of objectification to pre-verbal and pre-reflexive dispositions and ineffable and unobservable experiences, through words which by their nature make them common and communicable, therefore meaningful and socially sanctioned." (Bourdieu 1991a:129)

While Bourdieu writes here about the circle of discourse between charismatic leaders and the groups they constitute and reconstitute in an ongoing process through their representative discourse, the principles of analysis also pertain to the circulation of discourse in publics. In line with Resource Mobilization heuristics, Dyer's analysis of the BPRSC mobilization emphasizes the instrumental role in the campus takeover of the Committee of Ten, a subgroup within Onyx and PRISA inspired by the potency of secretive organizational tactics they witnessed in the movie *Battle of Algiers*. While the Committee of Ten did play an important role in planning and executing the campus takeover, the construction of the larger BPRSC as a collective actor representative of a broad swath of students of color at City College was part of a broader process of group formation. In contrast to the instrumental role of The Committee of Ten, the larger BPRSC was constructed in and through the development of a critical counterpublic at City College that openly circulated anti-

racist public discussion and debate to the entire City College community.[381] In fact, the BPRSC constituted themselves as a practical actor through dialogical public debate that resulted in a critical theory of internal colonialism[382] through which they came to understand race relations at City College as well as City College's institutional relationship with U.S. society at large.

While Dyer links the development of the BPRSC to a broad transformation in the ideological "climate," that he describes as a switch in orientation from integration to separation, within black communities in the U.S. (Dyer 1990:82; 196-227), by emphasizing the role of The Committee of Ten he ignores how City College students in particular negotiated the ideological climate. By tracing the circulation of anti-racist counterpublic discourse amongst students at City College in the late 1960's, I am able to track and specify the process of BPRSC group formation through public discussion. This is vital, because not only were the ideas circulated by the anti-racist counterpublic at City College more complex than a simple opposition between integrationism and separatism would imply. But the BPRSC was animated *in content and form* by the specific theory of internal colonialism they developed.

As argued by Michael Warner, through their general cycling of discourse, publics and counterpublics can have a specific world-making capacity. Warner writes, "public discourse says not only 'Let a public exist,'" which for Warner would amount

---

[381] I do not dispute the Committee of Ten's role in planning and initiating the campus takeover. However, the larger population of black and Puerto Rican students, calling themselves the BPRSC participated in the campus takeover as well as the broad based public discussion of racial politics within which the BPRSC took form. On counter-publics, see especially (Warner 2002), as well as (Fraser 1997).

[382] On the anti-racist theory of internal colonialism, see (Gutiérrez 2004), and below.

to an integral group simply representing itself, "but 'Let it have this character, speak this way, see the world in this way.' It then goes in search of confirmation that such a public exists, with greater or lesser success—success being further attempts to cite, circulate, and realize the world understanding it articulates" (Warner 2002:114). Through dialogue and discussion, publics and counterpublics construct and circulate novel standpoints on the world. Moreover, these novel standpoints, in and through their public circulation, project an understanding of the world that it enacts performatively. For Warner, public discourse is poetically world-building when it can "characterize the world in which it attempts to circulate and it must attempt to realize that world through address" (ibid.:114). Over several years, anti-racist students at City College, in part spurred by the organization of the Onyx Society as well as the appearance of new anti-racist perspectives in the student press, developed a critical standpoint rooted in a theory of internal colonialism (Gutiérrez 2004), and applied it to the situation at City College. As I will argue in this and subsequent chapters, the process of public discussion and debate amongst City College students, built certain characterizations of the world of U.S. society that challenged liberal assumptions by framing the U.S. as a fundamentally colonial power. In turn, from the anti-racist counterpublic some City College students built, they were able to project radical alternative imaginings of social relations in the U.S., particularly in regards to institutions of higher education. Additionally, these radical imaginings were the symbolic vehicle through which the BPRSC constructed itself as a multi-ethno-racial political group.

Tech News

Beginning in February of 1966, a new kind of article began to appear in the *Tech News*, the student newspaper for The School of Engineering and Architecture at City College. Appearing below articles on the new chairperson of the Architecture Department and the relationship between Engineering and Liberal Arts curricula, was a report and analysis of a brewing conflict between the college, the Parks Department and the larger Harlem community over the college's plans to build facilities, including an athletic field, on the grounds of St. Nicholas park in the majority black neighborhood. The student journalist's name was Paul Simms, a black pre-med student who had recently joined the paper. According to Simms' report, the Harlem community made two arguments against the plan: "1) the people (of Harlem) have no assurance that they will benefit to any great extent from this construction; and 2) they feel that they should not let an all white school take over a section of a public park used by a predominantly Negro community."[383] Simms, who was also one of the early founders of the Onyx society,[384] based his analysis of the significance of the college's planned land use on an interview he conducted with James Hicks, the Executive Editor of the Amsterdam News, a newspaper oriented towards the majority black community of Harlem as well as other black communities beyond.

In relating the institutional life of City College to the majority black community of Harlem, within which City College is geographically situated, as well

[383] Paul Simms, "St. Nicholas Park Program Under Fire from Community," *Tech News*, February 15, 1966, p. 1.
[384] Simms' first article in *Tech News* appeared in February of 1966, two months prior to Onyx's chartering in April of 1966.

as the larger context of the Civil Rights Movement, Simms' article represented a set of concerns that would increasingly appear in the pages of the *Tech News*.[385] By interviewing Hicks, Simms connected the public discussion circulating within the college's gates to the one unfolding just beyond its walls, linking internal and external publics. In his second article, appearing the following fall semester in October of 1966, Simms publicized an upcoming talk on the apartheid system in South Africa. Simms reported the talk, which was sponsored by Student Government and the Onyx Society, would cover topics such as, "Life in the Police State of South Africa; U.S. White Power Structure and South African Apartheid; Why South Africa is Ripe for Revolution: Who Will Lead It; How Black People in the United States can Help Their Black Brothers."[386] The double movement of applying the frames of the larger civil rights movement to interpret and define the local issues on the City College campus while simultaneously placing issues at City College within the larger context of anti-racist political struggles happening around the world, would transform the *Tech News* into an important organ of the developing anti-racist counter-public on campus.

According to Warner, a counterpublic, existing against the background of a larger dominant public sphere, "enables a horizon of opinion and exchange; its exchanges remain distinct from authority and can have a critical relation to power; its extent is in principle indefinite, because it is not based on a precise demography but

[385] In fact, the focus on race relations, racial politics and anti-racist practices would so come to dominate the pages of the *Tech News* that the paper would eventually codify its new orientation and rename itself *The Paper*, ending its orientation towards the interests of engineering students.

[386] "Apartheid Policy To Be Discussed," Paul Simms, *Tech News*, October 25, 1966, p. 2.

mediated by print, theater, diffuse networks of talk, commerce, and the like" (Warner 2002:56). For Warner, counterpublics are paradoxical, on the one hand, "defined by their tension with a larger public" (ibid.), and thus opening up its participants to hostility or a sense of indecorousness (ibid.:119). On the other hand, counterpublics are more than subcultural groups as they rely on the circulation of discourse amongst strangers, who are constituted as a public by their regard and attentiveness to those very networks of discourse. Warner writes, "like all publics, a counterpublic comes into being through an address to indefinite strangers" (ibid.:120). A counterpublic is not comprised of secret codes between intimates, but freely circulating discourse that may be encountered and interpreted by anyone.[387]

For Warner, what distinguishes a counterpublic from a simple community of idiosyncratic speech, is the self-understanding of a dominated population. According to Warner, "a counterpublic maintains at some level, conscious or not, an awareness of its subordinate status" (ibid.:119). According to Michael Dawson, a black counterpublic has animated black intellectual thought through much of U.S. history (Dawson 2001:27-42). For Dawson, the black counterpublic is the product of both the manner in which blacks have faced their own structural exclusion from full citizenship across U.S. history, as well as a related embrace of the idea of "black autonomy as both an institutional principle and an ideological orientation" (ibid.:27).

[387] Warner however argues that counterpublics do tend to have sites of discursive density that in some ways constrain the free flow of their discourse, writing, "Addressing indefinite strangers, in a magazine or a sermon, has a peculiar meaning when you know in advance that most people will be unwilling to read a gay magazine or go to a black church" (Warner 2002:120). Importantly, in the case analyzed here, the counterpublic took root in a student newspaper freely available to all members of the City College community.

According to Dawson, the experiences of systematic exclusion combined with the pursuit of individual and communal autonomy were the conditions of possibility for the emergence of particularly critical political standpoints within the black counterpublic. In particular, Dawson emphasizes the black counterpublic sustained various critiques of the hegemonic notions of political liberalism that have been understood by scholars and many political actors to exhaust U.S. political culture. "The black counterpublic," Dawson writes, has served "as a site not only for the criticism of existing American democratic institutions and practices but also for a severe interrogation of American liberalism" (ibid.:29).[388] Indeed, it was just such a critical engagement with the deeply entrenched traditions of political liberalism that characterized the burgeoning anti-racist counterpublic at City College in the late 1960's.

In general, Dawson analyzes four distinct forms of black political ideology across U.S. history, black nationalist, black feminist, black Marxist, and black liberalism, all of which, he argues, have been animated by the institutional underpinnings and circulation of discourse made possible by the black counterpublic. Through critical public discussion, the BPRSC at City College in the late 1960's combined elements from black nationalist, black Marxist and radical black liberalism, to develop their own inflection on a anti-racist critical theory of internal colonialism in the United States that placed local race relations within a global context of power

[388] In general, Dawson analyzes four distinct forms of black political ideology across U.S. history, black nationalist, black feminist, black Marxist, and black liberalism, all of which were animated by the institutional underpinnings and circulation of discourse made possible the black counterpublic.

and empire. Importantly, the very openness of discussion within the counterpublic at City College pushed its participants past a fundamentally black standpoint. Counterpublics have extraordinarily dynamic potential in processes of group formation and collective action, not because they represent already existing identities that are automatic reflections of asymmetrical social relations. Rather, their power comes from the messy way they enable the collective reflection of a dominated population on the very conditions of their own subordination. Warner writes, “the subordinate status of a counterpublic does not simply reflect identities formed elsewhere; participation in such a public is one of the ways by which its members’ identities are formed and transformed. A hierarchy or stigma is the assumed background of practice” (ibid.:121).

By foregrounding the *process of public discussion* circulating within a population without analytically prescribed boundaries, we can distinguish between what Bourdieu calls a group on paper and a group in practice. (Bourdieu 1990:138) In doing so, we can gain leverage on an ongoing debate in the sociology of race and ethnicity between those, such as Bonilla-Silva in a hugely influential paper (Bonilla-Silva 1996), who argue for structural theories of racism on the one hand (Bonilla-Silva 2003), and those who argue for an ethnic boundaries construction approach (Brubaker 2004; Loveman 1999; Wimmer 2013) on the other. The strength of Bonilla-Silva’s position is that it locates the dynamics of racial phenomena squarely in the roots of structural power and domination, arguing that in societies that have constructed racial systems, relations between races are exploitative and thus

determine objective interests underlying political and social practice. For Bonilla-Silva, racism is more than simple psychological prejudice, but is rather built into the very structure of society. (Bonilla-Silva 1996) Critics of structural theories of racism, such as Loveman, Brubaker and Wimmer, argue that such a conceptualization "reifies race" (Loveman 1999), freezing racial groups as unchanging, invariant, ontological entities. According to the ethnic boundary construction approach, understanding racism as structural undermines the analyst's ability to examine historical variation and temporal change in regards to group identities and solidarity. Groups are not given in social structures, but rather dynamically made.

As analyzed above, blacks on the City College campus did share a common set of social properties and attributes as they were commonly subject to dynamics of symbolic violence and cultural and social stigmatization. However, how black and Puerto Rican students understood their overlapping experiences changed over time through the dynamism of critical public discussion and debate. Moreover, it was through a collective practice of critical reflection, discussion and debate about the meaning of the experience of symbolic violence *within the context of hegemonic political liberalism*, that the BPRSC came to construct themselves as a practical group with a critical racial consciousness. These interests were not pre-given, but rather generated through the interpretive practices of City College students. However, much as Bourdieu would suggest (see Sherwood 2014; Bourdieu 1990), students of color at City College were reflecting on and reinterpreting real experiences of symbolic violence, cultural stigmatization and systemic exclusion at City College and

the country beyond.[389] If an underlying structure of racism did not necessarily determine the identity and interests of black and Puerto Rican City College students, many did come to understand the United States to be defined by just such a structure of domination, and to interpret their own interests in conflict with that underlying structure.

While Paul Simms led the effort, he would be joined over the years by other students with similar concerns but different perspectives who would also take advantage of the pages of the *Tech News* to engage with the themes of race relations, racial politics and racial inequality. However, tracing Simms' principal efforts makes sense not simply because he was the most prolific contributor to the print component of the developing anti-racist counter-public, but, moreover because he *was not* an organizational leader within the Committee of Ten, the subgroup explicitly responsible for the direct planning of the campus takeover. Foregrounding Simms' role, then, emphasizes the importance of the broad public discussion of race and power within the process of practical group formation that resulted in the BPRSC over and against the secretive cadre of The Committee of Ten.

In this chapter, and the next two, I present the development of this anti-racist counterpublic on the City College campus through a more or less linear analysis of

---

[389] Bourdieu writes, "By bringing diffuse experiences to the full existence of 'publication' and consequent officialization, this power of expression and manifestation intervenes in that uncertain site of social existence where practice is converted into signs, symbols, discourses, and it introduces a margin of freedom between the objective chances, or the implicit dispositions that are tacitly adjusted to them, and *explicit aspirations*, people's representations and manifestations" (Bourdieu 2000:235, emphasis in original).

primarily Simms' journalistic career at *Tech News* prior to the campus takeover. Presenting the development of the anti-racist counterpublic at City College in more or less linear time does not, however, depict the linear development of the BPRSC political identity and group. Rather, by showing how Simms' perspective changes over time, sometimes in explicit dialogue with others, sometimes in implicit dialogue, a linear treatment portrays the messy, dialogical development of political identity, one that never comes to an end point, is never static, but rather always in a state of flux and becoming. Moreover, illustrating the dynamism of debate, position takings, and standpoints within the anti-racist counter-public therefore show the *real effects,* in form and substance, of political discussion and debate on BPRSC group formation.

Interviews With Prominent Men

In the spring of 1967, Simms began a series of interviews of prominent black political actors, commentators and civil rights leaders in New York City that would run across two semesters worth of *Tech News*. The series was comprised of interviews with such prominent figures as Daniel Watts, editor of *The Liberator*; Floyd McKissick, National Director of the Congress of Racial Equality; Minister Louis Farrakhan; William Wright, founder of the United Afro-American Association; the comedian and civil rights activist Dick Gregory; and Thelma Johnson, Assistant Deputy Commissioner for the Human Resources Administration in charge of Educational Programs. *Tech News* announced the first in the series, an interview of Daniel Watts which appeared on March 21, 1967: "This is the first in a series of

interviews with prominent men (sic),[390] whose ideas add new insight to various situations affecting this campus both directly as well as indirectly."[391] For *Tech News*, the series of interviews with black civil rights, political leaders, and intellectual leaders was necessary because such perspectives were new, in other words, underrepresented within public discourse within the City College community.

According to Dawson, the ideological conflict that has, across time, been enabled by and flourished within the black counterpublic, has organized around a series of fundamental questions (Dawson 2001:12). Broadly speaking, political discussion within the black counterpublic has striven to grasp the structural position of blacks in the U.S., the nature of power in U.S. society, the proper strategy and tactics blacks should enact to achieve black equality, the nature of whites in the U.S., and the nature of political liberalism as founding principle, dominant political culture, and nationalist belief system in the U.S.[392] Indeed, these were the themes Paul Simms pursued in his interviews with black political leaders. Especially through pursuing the question of the nature of power, the status of political violence, and the nature of whites in the U.S. As Simms pursued these themes in his interviews, the thrust of discourse drove towards the heart of the liberal tradition in the U.S., and whether such

---

[390] *Tech News* modified the sexist tag it placed on the series when Simms interviewed Thelma Johnson, stating, "This is the sixth of a series of *TECH NEWS* articles on Contemporary Black Thought," "'I'm Tired of Seeing Black Doctor Material Become Bootblacks…'" Paul B. Simms, *Tech News*, December 19, 1967, p. 2.

[391] "Dan Watts on Powell and on Black Rights and The White Man," Paul Simms, *Tech News*, March 21, 1967, p. 2.

[392] I am paraphrasing from Dawson's list (2001:12).

a prism could be used to make sense of the position of blacks in the U.S. and used to struggle for black equality.

Interview With Daniel Watts

Simms' first interview with Daniel Watts would establish many of the recurring themes discussed in the anti-racist counter-public. One of these was the nature of *power*. For instance, Simms asked Watts about the viability of a third political party being proposed by Adam Clayton Powell, who at the time of the interview was responding to a campaign to oust him from his congressional seat due to accusations of corruption. For Watts, Powell's proposal was not serious.

> The time to start a third party was when he was in Congress, not after he was thrown out. Adam, however, could serve as the catalyst that would get a third political party of black men: but we should not be disillusioned. We would not be able to take over the House and we shouldn't even think along those lines because it is too unrealistic, but if black men could form a voting block to direct votes, it would be a major step forward."[393]

Watts understood that while blacks could not form a majority of the voting population in the United States, that they could increase their strategic bargaining power by voting en masse.

Watts' electorally based realist view of power aligned with his pessimism regarding the political utility of *violence*. While suggesting that the potential for violence existed as a response to the campaign to oust Adam Clayton Powell, Watts argued extra-legal forms of protest and political expression were a dead end because they did not grant blacks any leverage over whites. According to Watts, the L.A. riots

---

[393] Dan Watts on Powell and on Black Rights and The White Man," Paul Simms, *Tech News*, March 21, 1967, p. 2.

in the Los Angeles neighborhood of Watts, hurt more blacks than whites, and, moreover whites learned from the experience not to fear black violence: "White people are no longer afraid of black people. They were at one time, but no longer. After the Watts riots when many more blacks suffered than whites, 'Whitey' knew that the black violence threat was a hoax."[394] Thus, while Watts did not deny that the rioting of previous summers in predominantly black neighborhoods within U.S. cities should be understood as political expressions, he challenged the utility of such political forms. Linking urban unrest to the burgeoning black power movement, Watts connected the declining leverage potentially obtained by the threat of violence with what he saw as a hollow symbolism of Afrocentric politics: "As it stands right now, black women cut their hair, get in them robes, and along with black men, cry 'Get Whitey, Uhuru,[395] Baby. Don't mean a thing. Until black people prove to the whites that they aren't foolin' about this thing, it will stay just the way it is."[396]

Importantly, Simms interjects his own view openly at this point in the interview: "I stated that he was right and that the only way out for the Negro in this country was education. He did not agree. He believes: 'It's too late. At one time, education would have done the trick, but no longer."[397] Simms' intervention emanates from a mainstream liberal standpoint, relying on individualist idioms of upward

---

[394] Dan Watts on Powell and on Black Rights and The White Man," Paul Simms, *Tech News*, March 21, 1967, p. 2.
[395] Uhuru is the Swahili word meaning freedom or independence.
[396] It is curious that Watts grants agency to women for this form of politics he is criticizing as hollow and ineffective whereas overall he seems to privilege black men as representative of general black subjectivity.
[397] Dan Watts on Powell and on Black Rights and The White Man," Paul Simms, *Tech News*, March 21, 1967, p. 2.

mobility, a focus on communal uplift through universal values such as education and a faith in the ultimate openness of U.S. society and belief that merit can overcome prejudice. However, Watts responds violently to Simms' question, and its implied perspective, asserting, "power must be applied," and contradicting his previous analysis, "violence must be demonstrated."[398]

Watts' reaction to Simms' perspective flowed from his critique of liberal paradigms of U.S. citizenship, and in particular whether such paradigms applied to blacks. According to Watts, "Black men (sic) in this country are in serious trouble," because they put faith in the decency of white "friends," and political allies. For Watts, allying with liberal whites was a form of self-deception: "this ability we have to create illusions around us *plus the anchorage to this country* will be our undoing. Remember, for the most part, despite what a few white people say, we are in this fight alone."[399] For Watts, the strategy of allying with liberal whites in the pursuit of black equality was poor because it relied on a false idea that the U.S. is at bedrock a civically liberal nation, one whose institutions are fundamentally open. However, for Watts, blacks in the U.S. were exceptional to such liberal ideas and their analogous meritocratic principles. For Wright, blacks were positioned in a fundamentally subordinate position in the U.S. and could only break free by applying power. Ultimately, Watts is pessimistic, arguing that neither identity driven politics nor accommodationist coalitions with white liberals are likely to succeed. "Those black men and women have gotta' get out of that bag 'Uhuru' and the belief that 'I can't get

[398] (ibid.)
[399] (ibid.) emphasis added.

anywhere without 'Chuck' 'My friend 'Chuck''—shit… We are obsolete. Education is not the great rescuer of black people. No, baby, we in trouble.'"[400] For both Watts and Simms then, the questions of power, violence, and group racial identity are all fundamentally tied to the underlying question of the nature and legitimacy of hegemonic liberalism.

Simms' interjection establishes his journalistic project as dialogical. His goal was not simply to represent a series of critical positions, but to constitute an ongoing discussion, one that would radically alter his own perspective. His language in 1967, calling blacks "Negroes," and his commitment to a liberal-assimilationist project of upward mobility, would in time transform into a radical critique of the liberal creed in the U.S. The dialogical quality of Simms' journalistic project was moreover enhanced by his tone in his first interview. Not only did he interject his own voice by offering his own positions, which he in turn allowed to be disputed by Watts. But he often took a tone of ironic distance from Watts, noting at one point that Watts continued a colorful rant about "Chuck" (meaning prominent white liberals) while Simms himself was trying to get out the door and leave.[401] For Simms, the interview project was not one of identification with powerful and prominent black leaders, but one of critical debate. While Simms seems skeptical of Watts at times during his interview, when

---

[400] Dan Watts on Powell and on Black Rights and The White Man," Paul Simms, *Tech News*, March 21, 1967, p. 2.
[401] (ibid.)

Watts asserts his preference for Floyd McKissick's leadership from CORE to that of Stokely Carmichael, Simms turns to McKissick for his next interview subject.[402]

Interview With Floyd McKissick

If Wright understood power in realist terms rooted in the numerical realities of the electoral system, McKissick's understanding rooted black oppression in culture.[403] For instance, Simms immediately turned to his interest in education, to which McKissick responded by accusing New York's educational system of *distorting the minds of black students*: "I've got a beef with the educational system in that it is teaching black minds to be white puppets. That's what the parents of I.S. 201 were talking about."[404] For McKissick, the mis-education of blacks in the U.S. undermined the proper group solidarity that ought to define the black community. "This system teaches black people self-hate to such an extent that they want to separate from the average Negro community."[405] Such self-hate was part of a larger cultural system of white supremacy that aimed, according to McKissick, at subjecting blacks to psychological control. For McKissick, New York City's schools were not failing to educate blacks, leaving them ill prepared to compete with whites as

---

[402] (ibid.)

[403] "Miseducation in Schools," Unattributed, *Tech News*, March 28, 1967, p. 3. Although Simms does not have a byline for the article, it is very unlikely than anyone else conducted the interview and wrote the article.

[404] (ibid.) In 1966, parents of students at Intermediate School 201 in Harlem demanded a black principal replace the white principal assigned to the school. The conflict presaged the Ocean Hill—Brownsville conflict that pitted a largely Jewish New York City Teacher's Union against African-American communities over the issue of community control over public school districts.

[405] (ibid.)

individuals, but rather mis-educating blacks and imposing social control on the community through false pedagogies.

For McKissick, attempts to confront the cultural system that teaches blacks self-hatred is met by the dominant power. Speaking of the potential of chargers of sedition being brought against Stokely Carmichael, McKissick argued, “this entire action is another attempt of a racist society to control the black man’s mind and to castrate any militant black man. They try to control him psychologically, since they can’t control him with chains.”[406] Here, McKissick frames power as masculinity, “Stokely Charmichal is an honorable man. He has shown the courage that most men won’t show. The trouble is that most people don’t know who they are, where they’re going, how they live, or who controls them. And there are many black people like that.”[407]

While Charmichal is granted full masculinity because of his courage, he is admirable according to McKissick moreover because he knows himself beyond the racist prisms circulated by white supremacist culture that reduce blacks to puppets. For McKissick, the very category “Negro” is integral to the white supremacist prism and culture that exerts psychological control over blacks. “The term Negro is a word used to describe an immorality—slavery,” McKissick says. “In truth, there are no Negroes, only black men. There is no country called Negro; no Negro language; no Negro culture. It is a racist name, and thus perpetuates racism.”[408] For McKissick, the

[406] (ibid.)
[407] (ibid.)
[408] (ibid.)

educational and larger cultural system in the U.S. perpetrates symbolic violence on blacks, imposing on them a self-hating subjectivity. The cultural system that defined the "Negro" as less than whites is directly linked, in McKissick's discourse, to the violent immorality of the system of slavery. Thus, according to McKissick, the only true form of political agency is through militantly confronting the deep cultural system of white supremacy in the U.S.

> The word 'militant' is supposed to be a bad word but it really defines black men who won't accommodate to (the problems of) this society. Respected leaders are those who will accommodate the society. If accommodating this society is what I have to do to be called a 'respected leader', I want no part of it. I want to be respected as a man.[409]

Simms responded to McKissick's promotion of militancy by asking about the status of violent protest. However, McKissick refused to affirm the normative superiority of non-violent protest, arguing that violence on the part of CORE was a defensive response to prior violence of white America. "I have been the victim of violence. We at CORE are not going to lie down and get beaten to death. We do not, however, advocate the use of aggressive violence; only as a protective force."[410] Simms then linked the theme of political violence to the theme of racial separatism, asking McKissick about the proper role of whites in the future organizing of CORE. "White people have always played an important part in CORE, and we are not rejecting them now. All we say is help us (black people) to get what's rightfully ours. All we want to

---

[409] (ibid.) Again, McKissick figures agency and power as masculinity.
[410] (ibid.)

be is respected as men."[411] For McKissick, hegemonic liberalism combined with cultural white supremacy to structurally and symbolically position blacks as subordinate in the U.S.

Interview of Louis Farrakhan

Simms chose Minister Louis Farrakhan for his final interview of the semester. Farrakhan had spoken at the Black Power Conference organized by the Onyx Society that spring, and Simms chose to interview him because according to Simms, Farrakhan "was not given adequate coverage in one campus newspaper, and because much of what he said at the conference would be on interest to the college community."[412] Farrakhan began the interview by discussing the nature of black solidarity by objecting to the category "Black Muslim," stating:

> There is no such thing as a Black Muslim. This is a press name. The word "Muslim" is an Arabic word which means 'righteous.' The press uses the term 'Black Muslims' to try to separate us from the Islamic world and from our own people who have been taught that 'black' is something bad. They use this phrase to give the impression we have gone astray, and thus set up a psychological barrier among black people.[413]

Thus, for Farrakhan, the false category used by the press "Black Muslim," doubly denigrated blackness. First, because for the press blackness signified inferiority, and second, because it insinuated that blacks were incapable of an authentically full experience and expression of the Islamic faith.

---

[411] (ibid.)
[412] "Black Muslims Don't Exist," Paul Simms, *Tech News*, May 9, 1967, p. 2.
[413] (ibid.)

Farrakhan also rejected the possibility of blacks achieving equality in the U.S. through integration by citing a leading source of the liberal tradition in the U.S.: "In 1863, President Lincoln said that black people living side by side with whites, would be, at best, intolerable…Integration in this country is meaningless. To integrate a few educated Negroes into this white society is not solving the problem of the black people."[414] Instead, Farrakhan noted his religious leader Elijah Muhammed's proposal that blacks seek to separate from the U.S. Indeed, Farrakhan attacked the very foundation of liberal citizenship in the U.S.:

> America is the strongest country in the world, but she is based on a false premise. And when the truth comes to the surface, she will have revolution—religious, political and governmental. The Constitution says that this is a government of the people but it really is a government of the individuals who use the people as pawns.[415]

For Farrakhan, racial conflict was inevitable because the liberal principles the U.S. claims to be founded on are a sham. Instead, the country was founded on racial slavery whose political dynamics continue to structure social relations, according to Farrakhan.

> The burden-bearers in this country want to be represented and treated as human beings; but in the hearts and minds of white people, they know that it is contrary to nature for a master to recognize a slave as an equal. The more the black man wants justice, the less the white man wants to give him justice; the more the black man wants political equality, the less the white men want to give him political equality. This is the reason that the races are in conflict.[416]

[414] (ibid.)
[415] (ibid.)
[416] (ibid.)

Much like the interviewees who preceeded him, Farrakhan undermined the idea the U.S. is structured according to liberal, individualist principles in regards to blacks. Racial uplift routed through individualistic projects of upward mobility were unrealistic in the face of the structure of power that blacks faced as a collectivity.

For Simms and most of his interviewees, acknowledging the structure of power relations that defined the collective position of blacks in the U.S. begged the questions of racial and political violence. Farrakhan asserted from the standpoint of his faith, "man acting in truth will never do violence. If you come to me in truth, I will never do you harm."[417] Yet, for Farrakhan, the lack of truth emanating from whites in the U.S. was the root cause of racial and political violence, "now I ask you, what is left for the black man in this country who has tried every means of redress? Only violence, to the extent that the man's soul is satisfied, can be expected."[418]

However, upon Simms' prompting, Farrakhan shared a different conception of power than Watts and McKissick, arguing both power and economic independence are rooted in land ownership:

> Land is the basis of the economy and … you have no wealth if you are only a consumer. Until we (the black people of this country) can produce, we cannot have any wealth or expect to have any equality. Until we can be independent from those we are presently dependent upon, we can never call ourselves equal with them.[419]

---

[417] (ibid.)
[418] (ibid.)
[419] (ibid.)

For Farrakhan, echoing the logic of the tradition of political republicanism, those who could not achieve economic independence were unworthy of equal respect and recognition.

> The problem with the 20th century black man is that he wants to be respected as an equal, but he does not want the responsibility of an equal. White people would be doing themselves a disservice, recognizing the black people of today equal to the whites; black are almost totally dependent upon whites—they can't even produce toilet paper.[420]

However, while Farrakhan argued that economic power was rooted in the capacity to autonomously produce (i.e. ownership of productive land), he believed true power coupled economic autonomy with self-understanding:

> Economic power is useless without a knowledge of self. But take a look at what the educational power of black people has done is the past years for the 25,000,000 black people in this country; there were 14,000 B.S. graduates who were black; 775 graduates with a masters degree, and 75 with doctor's degrees; -- and what have they done for the community? To have sufficient education, one must have a knowledge of self.[421]

For Farrakhan, liberal political strategies that aimed at individual upward mobility within a structure of meritocracy were false because they alienated those individuals from the black, and presumably Islamic communities. For Farrakhan, knowledge, education, wealth and power all flowed from a proper relationship to one's own community, "if I were a black student graduating, I would be looking for a program that perpetuated a civilization not detrimental to me and my people—a program that

---

[420] (ibid.) Farrakhan's linking of economic autonomy with the worthiness of respect and recognition would make a big impact on Simms, as he would pose this notion to several of his subsequent interviewees.

[421] (ibid.)

would build something permanent for me."[422] Indeed, at least one formulation of Farrakhan's would make a real impression on Simms as he would continuously ask his subsequent interviewees if blacks wanted to be respected as equals without taking the responsibility of equality.

Interview of William Wright

In October of 1967, Simms interviewed William Wright, the President of the Newark New Jersey based United Afro-American Association. According to Simms, the goal of Wright's organization was to "unite and improve the black people in the United States and orient these people to what is really happening to them."[423] For Wright, central to the *reality* of the black experience in the U.S. was the impossibility of achieving the liberal goal of integration.

> I don't believe that integration in the system we live can ever be accomplished between blacks and whites. It should be made crystal clear that the whites have designed a society meant solely for whites, and when they admitted a black man, he has had to do as they suggested or demanded. Look what the white man in this country has done to the American Indian. This white society has cut him off completely and explicitly from the American way of life. In this country, the black man is faced with an eventual genocidal war from his white oppressors.[424]

According to Wright's view, the U.S. is not liberal by design and illiberal by exception, but rather is purposefully organized to promote white supremacy.

Instead of relying on what he saw as the false liberal traditions in the U.S., Wright argued the problems of racial inequality and segregation should be framed

---

[422] (ibid.)
[423] "An Interview With William Wright," Paul Simms, *Tech News*, October 3, 1967, p. 2.
[424] (ibid.)

similarly to the anti-colonial liberation movements of people of color around the world. Said Wright, “we have two courses of action: 1) to prepare ourselves with all the necessary tactics for fighting on a battlefield; and 2) to begin a communication system with the African and Asian nations in the world and hopefully they will come to our aid.”[425] Simms, like he did with his other interviewees, asked Wright his thoughts on black power politics and in particular C.O.R.E.’s shift to black power. “One of the most important areas that we have begun to be involved in is the establishment of a black political party,” responded Wright. “The thinking behind this move is that neither the Republican Party nor the Democratic Party is a meaningful tool for the black people and that both parties were set up for the white structure, and intended to include only white people.”[426] According to Wright, although the two party system systematically supported white supremacy, black voters could gain great leverage if they voted strategically. “To my thinking, there are around 20,000,000 voting black men in this country, and we can elect any man in either major political party to any national position. Therefore, any Presidential candidate must meet our demands or suffer defeat.”[427] Then presaging the increasing dominance of black voters in many U.S. citities, Wright said, “on the local level (Newark), we could elect any man to any major office in this city. This is a known fact, for we are in the majority in the city.”[428]

---

[425] (ibid.)
[426] (ibid.)
[427] (ibid.)
[428] (ibid.)

Yet Wright's view of power and the precarious position of blacks in the U.S. went well beyond electoral strategies, as he asserted blacks had difficulty seeing their position in the U.S. clearly. For one, Wright argued that the cultural and symbolic violence of racism imposed a kind of social death onto blacks in the U.S., exemplified in particular by the denigrating term "Negro." "The term Negro is a cleverly designed term created by white people," said Wright, "which really means dead; non-existent. This is a clever trick by a racist society to completely separate the black people from their heritage."[429] Simms further probed Wright's notion of power, asking if blacks have an "infinite capacity for deceiving themselves?" To which Wright replied, "yes, I do believe that black people look at their situation unrealistically. Using one race in this country as an example, the white people could not enslave the American Indians, but through military power and psychological controls, they have been able to contain them."[430] Wright predicted that as blacks increasingly shed their unrealistic belief in American liberalism the whites would necessarily respond with more political violence and even a coming genocidal effort on the part of whites against blacks.

> In the U.S., in a few more years, there will be a move towards a genocidal war unequaled in the history of this country, for the blacks are steadily moving out of the non-violent stage. Those people who state that we can coexist, are deceiving themselves. The only way that white people will be able to effectively deal with us in the future will be to attempt to exterminate us.[431]

Furthermore, for Wright, the tendency to construct systems of hyper-exploitation that he saw in white-America was not limited to blacks and Native Americans. He

---

[429] (ibid.)
[430] (ibid.)
[431] (ibid.)

asserted, “it should also be noted (as a possibility) that the Puerto Rican seems to be much more domesticated than the black man and I would think that the same political structure that enslaved the black man will try to enslave the Puerto Rican.”[432]

While Wright asserted he and other black leaders would, “give up our lives to improve the lot of black people in this country,” Simms did not accept the idea of revolutionary violence uncritically. Instead, Simms challenged Wright, confronting him with what he called, “the fact that every time RAM (the Revolutionary Action Movement) attempts to do anything of a violent nature, they are captured and that more black people have died in the rebellions than white people.”[433] On the defensive, Wright suggests the shortcomings of revolutionary political violence are not rooted in the tactics themselves, but in the lack of group solidarity amongst blacks in the U.S. Comparing black resistance to racism with Vietnamese resistance to U.S. colonial warfare, Wright asserted:

> The reason that the U.S. is having so much trouble with the Vietnamese people is that every man, woman, and child is fighting against him. This is what will happen in this city (Newark), for the revolutionaries in this city will be engaged in a struggle for survival of the 25 or 30 million black people in this country.[434]

Wright indeed viewed the central power structure of the U.S. to be at war with black communities:

> The National Guard is training to deal with rioters as though they were soldiers in an army. They are really training to annihilate black people. The only insurance policy for the black man is to know some guerrilla warfare and arm himself with automatic weapons and ammunition for

[432] (ibid.)
[433] (ibid.)
[434] (ibid.)

> self-defense. Maybe I am overly pessimistic, but I am sure that we are going to need it.[435]

By inserting his own critical voice into his interviews, Simms transformed what may have otherwise been a series of static *representations* of radical positions into an ongoing multiperspectival *discussion* of differing political standpoints. Simms deepened the dialogical logic of his interviews by posing questions taken from statements of previous interviewees to subsequent interviews. For instance, Simms asked Wright what he thought of Farrakhan's statement, "that the problem with the 20th century black man is he wants to be respected as a man but doesn't want the responsibility."[436] Wright contested Farrakhan's republican notion that those without property were incapable or responsibility, arguing instead that far from resulting from their own failings, blacks were excluded systematically from economic autonomy in the U.S.:

> There is no major financial institution in the city of Newark that will deal efficiently and try to alleviate some of the problems of the black people in this city. The city hired no black sub-contractors to do any of the construction work in the city. Of the 1400 policemen in the city, only 200 are black and of these 200, approximately 100 are walking lies—black bodies with white minds. These financial powers would rather use black bodies on a daily basis rather than admit to the black capabilities. Therefore, it is obvious that black people are not given the opportunity to borrow the money to help themselves in this capitalist world. The black people in this country are continuously played upon as idiots. No, Mr. Simms, if given the opportunity, black people in this country would more than prove their ability.[437]

---

[435] (ibid.)
[436] (ibid.)
[437] (ibid.)

Finally, Simms asked Wright about the role of white people in anti-racist struggle. Wright was the most aggressive in minimizing the potential role of whites in black liberation struggles, asking, "What did these white people do to prevent the brutality and murder that took place in Newark? Nothing. What has the white society done to arrest those people who have exercised brutality against black people? Nothing. The best way white people can help us is begin to arrest those people who have been killing black men."[438]

Interview of Dick Gregory

Simms brought the same set of concerns to his interview with the comedian and civil rights activist Dick Gregory. Completely eschewing questions regarding celebrity and performance, Simms asked Gregory's views on political violence, the nature of power, the efficacy of education and the meaning of the term "Negro."[439] For instance, Simms asked Gregory, "what 'Power' do you consider primary—Black Power, Green Power, Brain Power or what exactly?" According to Gregory, "Black Power is the key, and it means black power. Black, in any dictionary, is defined as the opposite of white. Power is defined as the ability to change through force."[440] Piggy backing on an analysis that emerged organically in earlier interviews, Simms asked Gregory if was opposed to the term "Negro." While Gregory, unlike previous interviewees, did not object to the term, he argued it signaled "otherness" in the U.S.: "The term 'Negro' comes from the word 'Nigra,' used in the south to denote a person

---

[438] (ibid.)
[439] "An Interview With Dick Gregory," Paul Simms, *Tech News*, October 31, 1967, p. 2.
[440] (ibid.)

from that area around the Niger River. I accept the term 'Negro" because I am not an American and I am not an African."[441] Thus, while Gregory did not reject the term as dehumanizing, he agreed with critics who argued the term symbolized un-Americaness.

Simms asked Gregory about the prospect or inevitability of revolution: "is the freedom movement in this country really at a revolutionary stage or is there still some hope of a successful peace in this country?"[442] Gregory only partially accepted Simms' formula that revolution is to violence as reform is to peace. "Revolution is rapid change; evolution is gradual change," said Gregory. "Revolution is a natural thing. When man takes over the revolution, man kills his own kind…This killing of one's own kind is a signal of the beginning of a revolution. This reaction to oppression is a natural reaction."[443]

When asking Gregory about the educational system, Simms importantly frames his question in an entirely different manner than in his first interview with Watts. Simms asks Gregory, "What do you think of the educational system in this country that teaches black people only of white values and conditions minds to think in white terms?" Gregory again refused the logic of Simms' question, noting the existence of a deep current of radical militancy amongst whites in the U.S. symbolized in particular by John Brown, whom Gregory argued was far more radical than H. Rapp Brown or Stokely Carmichael. Yet, the exchange shows how Simms'

---

[441] (ibid.)
[442] (ibid.)
[443] (ibid.)

standpoint was itself evolving. At the beginning of his interviews, Simms pushed a liberal standpoint on education and the place of blacks within U.S. society, signaling his belief that blacks could gain inclusion within a basically open society through assimilative educational processes. However, where he once asserted that education was the key to black power and uplift, he now saw educational institutions as imposing white supremacist values on blacks whose differences were denied or denigrated. Through his several months of interviewing, Simms' own discourse was altered as he developed a critical standpoint on hegemonic liberalism and educational institutions.

Interview of Thelma Johnson

Simms continued to pursue his interest in the place of education in the struggle for racial equality and racial liberation. He sought out his first woman interviewee, Thelma Johnson, the Assistant Deputy Commissioner for the Human Resources Administration in charge of Educational Programs.[444] Simms asked Johnson what could be done to counteract the failure of the Board of Education to effectively educate in black communities. In her reply, Johnson favored the decentralization of the school bureaucracy. According to Johnson, the local school districts were not responsive to diverse communities; not just black communities, but

---

[444] "'I'm Tired of Seeing Black Doctor Material Become Bootblacks…'" Paul B. Simms, *Tech News*, December 19, 1967, p.2. Simms' exchanges with male political and intellectual leaders contemplating the rise of black power of exhibited sexist logics. Thus, it is significant that Simms sought out Johnson as an authority on the important subject of education that was then roiling the New York political arena as black communities increasingly struggled for community control over their local school districts while criticizing the largely white and Jewish school administrative structure and unions for professional negligence and ineffectiveness.

also those of Yiddish speakers, Chinese, and Puerto Ricans.[445] Simms followed up by asking, "how do we take the school system away from the Board of Education?" Johnson however rejected this notion.

> It's not a question of taking away the school system from the Board. What has happened is that the Board of Education in the past has not been responsible to anyone for the actions they took. Therefore, they have acted very irresponsibly. We, the citizens, have simply got to help them reconstruct themselves. I'm damn tired of seeing white shoemaker-material become doctors and black doctor-material become bootblacks. Fifty-one percent of the population in the City School System is either Negro or Puerto Rican. And, two-thirds of this population is deficient in some manner or another. And this reflects upon the guidance within the Board of Education. This does not have to happen. This system has reached such a low ebb, that the Board cannot improve the situation by itself.[446]

Simms was not only interested in Johnson's expertise on education. He also pursued the broader themes he had in prior interviews. Thus, Simms asked Johnson her view on the notion recent anti-poverty programs, which Johnson asserted changed people's lives by giving them meaningful employment, had created the conditions for and generally encouraged the urban riots of 1967. Johnson rejected the link, asserting, "Accusations that the Poverty Program was the cause of the rioting are wrong. The people have some hope through the poverty program that they receive nowhere else. And who could ascribe to a program 3½ years old, the blame for a problem that has existed over 300 years."[447] However, Johnson also argued riots are an ineffective and

---

[445] (ibid.)
[446] (ibid.)
[447] (ibid.)

self-defeating form of politics. "Personally, I don't subscribe to riots. You can't gain anything from a riot, and oftimes the poor lose the most."[448]

Again, Simms put Farrakhan's notion that blacks sought equality without wanting to take self-responsibility to Johnson. "Several months ago in an interview, a comment was made that black people want the rights of equality without responsibility." To which Johnson incisively responded:

> Scared people make all sorts of remarks. Black people have always been willing to take the responsibility all along; they just were never given the opportunity. Black people in this country want equality, no matter what comes along with it. When black children are 2 to 5 years behind the national norm at graduation, who is responsible if they are not able to compete with whites? No, Mr. Simms, they are not given the chance to take the responsibility.[449]

While like other of Simms' interviewees, Johnson interpreted black subjugation in structuralist terms. However, in a progressive liberal vein, she argued that the state could be bent to uproot the deep structure of racial inequality and deliver justice. She rejected both the notion that blacks were psychologically deficient or culturally hampered, as well as romantic visions of the transformative power of political violence.

Jane Tillman Irving

The City College public began to take notice of Simms' interviews as another African-American student, Jane Tillman Irving,[450] joined the staff of *Tech News* and emulated Simms' form, if not his standpoint. According to Warner, "publics have an

---

[448] (ibid.)
[449] (ibid.)
[450] Irving would go on to have a career as a prominent T.V. journalist.

ongoing life: one doesn't publish to them once and for all… It's the way texts circulate, and become the basis for further representations, that convinces us that publics have activity and duration" (Warner 2002:97). For Warner, publics are not symbolically fixed; they are not scenes where a group makes itself by simply representing itself. Instead, publics and counterpublics gain their particular force because they are reflexive and dynamic. Warner writes, "these forms single out circulation both through their sense of temporality and through the way they allow discourse to move in different directions. I don't just speak to you; I speak to the public in a way that enters a cross-citational field of many other people speaking to the public" (ibid.:95). Indeed, while clearly inspired by Simms' discursive practice and form, Irving pursued a different perspective.

Irving's first interviewee was City College professor Kenneth Clark.[451] As a prominent psychologist with links to the Civil Rights movement, Clark was a perennially popular commentator on racial issues on the City College campus. While *Tech News* did not include Irving's interview of Clark in the Simms series, she nevertheless sought after several of the same themes as Simms. Importantly, however, while Irving asked after many of the same themes in her interview of Clark, and future contributions, Clark was well known to students as a leading liberal commentator on race relations and racial politics. Thus, Irving's emergence can be seen as a critical counterpoint to the diverse but generally more radical voices Simms had been reporting.

---

[451] "Professor Clark Speaks About Negroes in America," Jane Tillman Irving, *Tech News*, May 9, 1967.

Indeed, Irving first asked Clark about black power as a form of politics. According to Clark, black power was merely, "a slogan with no definition, no substantive program. If you have to qualify power, if you have to scream about it, then you don't have it."[452] Irving, like Simms, was preoccupied with the question of violence. However, Irving suggested violence was being undermined by a growing fusion of the civil rights and the peace movements on the City College campus. Clark rejected Irving's notion, asserting, "frankly, I see no fusion—Martin Luther King has shown himself to be a person of high principles and courage. The mistake is to confuse King with the civil rights movement. He is an American citizen expressing his own opinion."[453]

If Clark limited the fusing of civil rights and peace causes to the figure of Martin Luther King Jr., he nevertheless encouraged the recent uptick in student protest the City College campus had been witnessing. Clark labeled such trends as, "salutory . . . to see that (students) feel strongly enough about issues to speak out. This is more indicative of American democracy than silent sheep."[454] While Clark was generally admired as a prominent liberal voice and a moderate within the mainstream liberal press at City College, Irving noted Clark favored the rising culture of activism in line with the college's radical past to the "quiet" of the 1950's, known on campus and more widely as the silent generation.[455] However, in contrast to the

---

[452] (ibid.)
[453] (ibid.)
[454] "Professor Clark Speaks About Negroes in America," Jane Tillman Irving, *Tech News*, May 9, 1967.
[455] (ibid.)

radical voices Simms sought out, who often equated militant politics with masculine self-knowledge and self-respect, Clark depoliticized activism, suggesting it was a central aspect of psychological maturation, just "like falling in love."[456]

Irving, like Simms, also pressed on the relationship between the college and the surrounding Harlem community, in which Clark had founded two community programs, the Northside Center for Child Development and Harlem Youth Opportunities Unlimited. Clark asserts that City College and the City University of New York could be forces of good in the neighborhood, "I'm all for anything coming into Harlem that will draw people to it—theaters, other cultural attractions. I favor the establishment of a unit of the City University in Harlem, provided that it offers specialized courses with broad appeal to assure a diversified student body."[457] On the flip side, Clark suggests City College has a paradoxical relationship with the community within which it is situated: "The paradox of City College is its high standards, which prevent Negro students, who are academic casualties, from competing. Harlem cannot be viable if it is a closed community."[458] Importantly, in failing to criticize the college's standards as arbitrarily high, Clark implicitly legitimizes the exclusion of blacks from the college, suggesting the goal ought to be to bring the Harlem community, on balance, up to the college's standard.   Finally, Irving also pursues the question of political coalitions between whites and blacks, black anti-Semitism, and the place of whites within the movement for black equality.

---

[456] (ibid.)
[457] (ibid.)
[458] (ibid.)

In response to the question of black anti-Semitism, Clark claims: "it is not the same as general anti-white feeling . . . Any movement that polarized the races will lead to a mess . . . If I were white and any Negro told me I wasn't needed, I'd say I'm fighting for justice for all. What we must remember is that we are all human beings."[459] Not only does Irving's entrance into the fray mark a different perspective than the ones being cultivated by Simms, Clark himself would seem to be responding to the critical perspectives circulating within the *Tech News*. If Simms increasingly sought out standpoints that emanated from a critical understanding of the particular forms of domination and symbolic violence experienced by blacks, Clark's own intervention placed black experiences within a universal frame.

Irving's next interview occurred shortly after the assassination of Martin Luther King, an event Dyer identifies as a turning point in radical black power consciousness amongst City College students (Dyer 1990). Irving sought out Charles Mobley, the director of the Harlem neighborhood office of the Southern Leadership Conference (SCLC)'s campaign to eradicate poverty.[460] The drive was part of the Poor People's Campaign, the major anti-poverty drive Martin Luther King Jr. was spearheading at the time of his assassination. While the storefront office was "plastered with posters promoting Black awareness," including one that asserted "Black is Beautiful; And It's So Beautiful To Be Black,"[461] the Harlem office was also explicitly aligned with the mainstream of the Democratic Party, sharing office

---

[459] (ibid.)
[460] "Harlem P.P.C. Is Alive and Doing Well," Jane Tillman Irving, *Tech News,* October 23, 1968, p.1.
[461] (ibid.)

space with the local headquarters Paul O'Dwyer's Democratic Party campaign for U.S. Senate, a campaign that came under Paul Simms' rhetorical fire in a preceding issue of *Tech News*.[462] Mobley's operation distributed food to those who needed it, disseminated employment information and "self-help information," and offered tutorial services to children, especially during the 1968 New York City teacher's strike. Irving noted that the cohabitation of the Poor People's Campaign and O'Dwyer's campaign for U.S. Senate aligned nicely with the latter's voter registration drive. Furthermore, Mobley defined Harlem as a neighborhood without referring to race, according to Irving, "Mobley is following his philosophy of 'helping our people, simply because they are our people,' meaning neighborhood residents, regardless of race."[463]

Thus, in contrast to the many of the leaders Simms interviewed, who contemplated the specific needs of black communities and the specific nature of black power, according to Irving, Mobley and the Poor People's Campaign more generally were focused squarely on people's needs. "The Poor People's Campaign will go on as long as there are poor people—we'll always have marches and demonstrations, but now, let every man in his own city do his own thing," asserted Mobley.[464] For Mobley, City College itself could play an important role in meeting the needs of the community. He said, "I expect the College to really turn over and give us a hand."[465]

---

[462] On, "Paul O'dwyer: Does He Offer Blacks a Choice," Unattributed, *Tech News*, October 16, 1968, p. 7, see below.
[463] (ibid.)
[464] (ibid.)
[465] (ibid.)

For Irving, the community center seemed to thrive precisely because it existed beyond politics: "Despite its lack of written publicity, local residents know about the Harlem Poor People's Campaign, and, as a result of Mobley's person-to-person approach, seem to find the headquarters attractive. They are constantly in and out, socializing and discussing."[466]

Indeed, while Dyer argues the MLK assassination was a turning point in the radicalization of Onyx and the development of the BPRSC, Simms also sought out perspectives that deemphasized difference in the wake of the civil rights leader's slaying. Simms also turned to MLK's Poor Peoples Campaign, interviewing Cornelius Givens, the organization's New York Coordinator. According to Givens, the death of MLK signaled a change, saying, "the movement has taken a new turn—there is room for everybody."[467] Indeed, in promoting the Poor Peoples Campaign's role in an upcoming march on Washington, Givens asserted, "There is room for everybody to do his thing… All people have to be brought into focus so that they can function… I'm not talking about integration or separation, but getting off in the corner with a piece of the action."[468]

According to Warner, while classic and more recent utilizations of the concept of public have appropriately emphasized their dialogical character (Habermas 1989; Eliasoph 1998), these analyses misleadingly suggest that publics are properly oriented towards decision. In contrast, Warner argues that publics do not have a teleological

[466] (ibid.)
[467] "Poor People's Campaign Leader Says All in Nation Must Help," Paul B. Simms, *Tech News*, May 14, 1968, p.3.
[468] (ibid.)

character, but rather the defining characteristic of publics and counterpublics is that "there is no moment at which the conversation stops and a decision ensues (Warner 2002:97). Not only did Simms' interviews spread to other students, who emulated its form and thematic content while pursuing different points of view, but the prevailing themes of the anti-racist counterpublic began to be debated by the wider City College student body. For instance, *Tech News* instituted a new "Man on the Street" type interview on political controversies of the day, where a reporter stopped random pairs of students and asked them their positions on racial controversies raging on campus.

In a later chapter, I show how Simms' pillar of the anti-racist counterpublic circulated through Onyx as well. However, I turn now to Simms' editorial column where he turns away from interviews to develop his own version of a theory of internal colonialism to analyze City College and its embedding the larger institutional structure of U.S. citizenship.

Chapter 7

"From a Black Chair": Paul Simms and the Cultivation and Circulation of a Theory of Internal Colonialism Within the Anti-Racist Counterpublic

In the fall of 1968, an article by Paul Simms created a small scandal at City College. The article, in the form of a "news analysis" common to the *New York Times*, analyzed the lack of support amongst black students and the larger black community for Paul O'Dwyer, the Democratic nominee from New York for the U.S. Senate. "One of the most obvious facts regarding the O'Dwyer rally last Thursday (at City College) was that there were very few Black students in the audience. This fact was noted by many students on the campus but it should definitely not be surprising."[469] According to Simms, the lack of enthusiasm amongst blacks for O'Dwyer's campaign stemmed from the candidate's disregard for the interests of the black community. "O'Dwyer," wrote Simms, "addressed himself to many issues, but unfortunately (or fortunately, depending on your point of view) he does not address himself to the specific needs of Black people. This is a point, in fact, that cannot be over-emphasized."[470] Simms posited O'Dwyer believed he could disregard the specific interests of black voters, because like the white left, he assumed blacks

---

[469] "Paul O'dwyer: Does He Offer Blacks a Choice," Unattributed (Paul Simms), *Tech News*, October 16, 1968, p. 7.
[470] (ibid.)

would see him as the lesser of two evils when compared to his conservative Republican opponent.

Simms, however, took a different standpoint. He argued the lesser of two evils logic had failed when comparing Barry Goldwater and Lyndon Johnson in the 1964 Presidential election. According to Simms, "the only difference between Johnson and Goldwater was that although Goldwater wanted to win the election, he did not lie to the American people; he said he would bomb the hell out of the North Vietnamese. Johnson did not say what he would do. However, regarding the Vietnamese War, there is no real difference between Johnson and Goldwater."[471] For Simms, the logic of voting the "lesser of two evils" makes even less sense for black people, whose specific and particular needs, in his view, are not considered by the mainstream political system. Said Simms, "Black[472] students are gaining the insight to realize that the 'lesser of the two evils' theory is not valid for Black people. We have to become concerned with the local politics of our community before we can begin to address ourselves" to the level of the President.[473]

Simms' analysis struck a nerve with many readers. In particular, the *Tech News* published an exchange between Simms and Barry Chattman, the President of The City College Young Democrats, the organization who had sponsored the O'Dwyer rally. Chattman in particular took exception with Simms' claim that blacks had distinct and particular needs that could be considered separately from other

---

[471] (ibid.)
[472] Simms now uses the term "Black," which he capitalizes, connoting an ontological community, rather than "Negro." For more on his usage, see below.
[473] (ibid.)

voting communities: “Exactly what problems of the ‘Black’ people has Mr. O’Dwyer avoided expressing his opinion on? Maybe the author would desire a ‘Black’ candidate in a ‘Black’ country who would devote his whole campaign and term of office to ‘Black’ problems. But here in these United States a candidate must express himself to American problems.”[474] According to Chattman, Simms’ effort to cultivate a specifically black perspective was itself racist: “The best thing that can be said about your ‘analysis’ is that Black People are somehow different from the rest of Americans. This racist argument succeeds only in perpetuating more class warfare, and more problems, and more riots, and more chances to cry ‘black power’ and ‘discrimination.’”[475] In Chattman’s view, rather than anti-racist practice, the effort to take distinct account of blacks, and to ascribe to blacks a distinct form of peoplehood apart from the American people, was itself a virulent form of racism:

> Since the author endeavored to count the number of Blacks (in capital letters, in contrast to white, without caps)[476] in the audience, perhaps he should also have endeavored to count Jews, Catholics, Protestants, pygmies, and Arabians. Since Blacks (in caps) desire to count themselves (or at least the author desires) separate from the other students at this campus, perhaps these racists should exempt themselves from political commentary.[477]

Chattman concluded his letter to the editor by opposing a universalist discourse to that of separatism, suggesting that universalism is at the root of the U.S. political system: “Since we of the Young Democrats are not racists, I would like to say that any politician responsive to the needs of ALL people of ALL religions,

---

[474] “Letters, Replies, Letters, and…” *Tech News*, October 23, 1968, p. 6.
[475] (ibid.)
[476] This is Chattman’s critical observation from the original.
[477] (ibid.)

creeds, or colors, merits the vote of the American people. We shall overcome racism, but not by perpetuating it."[478]

In the space that followed the letter, Simms responded to Chattman's critique. Simms criticized the ineffectiveness of the Democratic Party and, what he saw as the misplaced satisfaction of 20th century liberalism in the U.S. "In the past," wrote Simms, "white liberals have usually found 'too little' to be sufficient. That one field worker who gets a raise, that one Black person who is allowed to integrate a white community, that one Black person you invite into your home has always been proof of your liberalism. You better get it through your head that tokenism is long dead."[479] For Simms, liberal anti-racism is merely symbolic, oriented towards appearances rather than the structural roots of inequality.

Additionally, Simms zeroed in on Chattman's notion that O'Dwyer represented a universalist politics rooted in American traditions. Simms' critique peculiarly revolved around Chattman's support of O'Dwyer's disavowal of Democratic Presidential nominee Hubert Humphrey, and Humphrey's perceived continuing support of the war in Vietnam. Chattman had argued, "Mr. O'Dwyer's non-endorsement of Humphrey is proof that he stands for *the people* (emphasis added)."[480] In response, Simms curiously, but perhaps purposefully misconstrues Chattman's words, quoting Chattman as stating, "Mr. O'Dwyer's non-endorsement of

---

[478] (ibid.)
[479] (ibid.)
[480] (ibid.)

Humphrey is proof that he stands for people."[481] Simms then argues, "You're right—he stands for some people, not all. And in my article, I said that he has not dealt with the Black people and their problems, and that's why the Black students avoided him at the rally."[482] Perhaps not a simple error, Simms' misconstrual of Chattman's words in effect asserts the universalist pretense of U.S. liberalism that Chattman attempts to represent, has in fact, in Simms' view, always minimized and excluded black experiences and perspectives. "The analysis," Simms asserted, "was not supposed to be objective news coverage, it was supposed to be an analysis from one specific (Black) point of view."[483] A point of view that was submerged at City College and beyond, according to Simms' analysis, by an ideologically false universalism.[484]

Indeed, in the very same issue as Simms responds to Chattman's universalist assertions, Simms also published the first in a line of editorial columns, unique within *Tech News*, titled "From a Black Chair."[485] In "From a Black Chair," Simms moves from interviewing prominent black figures to cultivating his own critical voice in response to issues of race and politics. Simms uses the "From a Black Chair" space to develop a critique of hegemonic liberalism from the standpoint of a theory of internal colonialism. According to Ramón Gutiérrez, the theory of internal colonialism,

---

[481] (ibid.)
[482] (ibid.)
[483] (ibid.)
[484] Indeed, in several of the interviews Simms conducted, he asked and his interviewees addressed "the real situation" of blacks in the U.S. This implies that they understood themselves to be countering a pervasive misrecognition of the place of blacks within the U.S. social structure.
[485] "From a Black Chair: The Three Lies," Paul B. Simms, *Tech News*, October 23, 1968, p.7.

adopted by a radicalizing civil rights movement in the U.S. in the late 1960's[486] from original sources in Latin American Marxist critiques of development ideologies, marked a radical break from dominant postwar social scientific and political thinking about race in the U.S. (Gutiérrez 2004). Gutiérrez writes, "far from seeking an understanding of racism in psychic structures, in an irrational fear of the 'Other,' or in the putative course of race relations cycles, Blacks and Chicanos reasoned that their oppression was not only personal, but structural, not only individual, but institutional (Gutiérrez 2004:282).

In regards to black inequality, the theory of internal colonialism flips the script. If liberal institutions in the U.S. are just, then black inequality must be a result of their individual and collective failings. As a hegemonic political tradition, liberalism coded blacks as the exception that proves the legitimacy of its own rule. However, Simms' move towards a theory of internal colonialism rejects the notion that blacks do not measure up and are in need of radical uplift to become fully American. But rather, the United States itself is corrupted to its core by structures of colonialist racism masquerading as universalist liberalism. Simms cultivated just such a critical standpoint in his *Tech News* column, "From a Black Chair."

From a Black Chair

Simms' first "From a Black Chair" analyzed the case of John Hatchett, the director of NYU's Martin Luther King Afro-American Student Center.[487] Hatchett

---

[486] Indeed, the Open Admissions crisis and campus takeover by the BPRSC in the spring of 1969 were a part of the radicalization of the civil rights movement.
[487] "From a Black Chair: The Three Lies," Paul B. Simms, *Tech News*, October 23, 1968, p.7.

had called Presidential candidates Hubert Humphrey and Richard Nixon, as well as the head of the striking United Federation of Teachers union Albert Shanker, "racist bastards," creating an uproar amongst many white NYU students, and ultimately leading to Hatchett's firing from his position.[488] In protest, Hatchett asserted that NYU's Chancellor Hester had guaranteed his right to engage freely in political speech upon his appointment, and that that promise, along with his general academic freedom and basic constitutional right to freedom of speech, were being violated. Hatchett said of the termination of his position at NYU, "I am being punished because I have spoken freely and openly of some of the ills of this society."[489] According to Hatchett, the basic American "freedom of speech" should not mean freedom from speech some may find offensive, but rather marked "a commitment to uninhibited and provocative debate. It is not to be choked off because it displeases some or even all."[490]

For Simms, the Hatchett case exemplified the "three lies" of the U.S. regime of liberal citizenship. Simms' editorial essay had a subtle but important rhetorical logic that is important to note. Simms' begins the essay with the quote:

> In America, we are told that a man cannot be attacked for his own political views. That's lie number one! In America, we are also told that universities are value-free and safe from obligations from any particular interest group in society. That's lie number two! Finally, in America, we are conditioned to think that this is the land of the free

---

[488] "Hatchett Brands Nominees Racists," Charles Grutzner, *The New York Times*, October 9, 1968; "Hatchett Ousted From N.Y.U. Post," Charles Grutzner, *The New York Times*, October 11, 1968.

[489] "Hatchett Ousted From N.Y.U. Post," Charles Grutzner, *The New York Times*, October 11, 1968.

[490] (ibid.)

> and the home of the brave; this country, where free speech is a way of life that will not be altered, is portrayed as the bastion of freedom. And that, friends and enemies, is lie number three.[491]

Simms directly attacks the reality of, in turn, the sacred principles of the freedom of consciousness, the value free university as the institutional protector of the search for truth, and the United States as a bastion of freedom undergirded by it's unbridgeable embrace of political speech. He then turns to the Hatchett case to exemplify the unreality, in his view, of these principles in relation to African-Americans. Rather than analyze the Hatchett case as an example of the U.S. failing to live up to its liberal principles, his rhetorical structure instead uses the Hatchett case as evidence that liberal citizenship in the U.S., as applied to blacks, is a sham. In other words, Simms does not question why liberal principles were not adequately applied in the Hatchett case, he argues that they do not exist in relation to African-Americans in the first place. Indeed, compared to Simms' early embrace during his interviews of liberal ideals rooted in group uplift through education, his framing of race politics in friend/enemy terms marks a radical shift in standpoint.

Simms reasoned that because the Kerner Report[492] had "labeled" the U.S. "a racist nation" that, "if the government is of the people, by the people and for the people, then it can be inferred that the government is also racist."[493] Furthermore, for

---

[491] "From a Black Chair: The Three Lies," Paul B. Simms, *Tech News*, October 23, 1968, p.7.
[492] The Kerner Report refers to The National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders established by President Lyndon Johnson in the summer of 1967 to investigate the causes of rioting in U.S. cities throughout the 1960's. The commission was chaired by Governor Otto Kerner of Illinois and famously found that white racism was the root cause of urban unrest in the U.S. and that the country was "moving toward two societies, one black, one white—separate and unequal."
[493] "From a Black Chair: The Three Lies," Paul B. Simms, *Tech News*, October 23, 1968, p.7.

Simms, the essential racism at the heart of American "peoplehood" or "nationhood," manifest in racist political institutions and politicians, was not a recent development, but extended deep into American history: "Think back, you history majors and law majors, to the Dred Scott Decision[494] in the late nineteenth century; or to cries of 'Manifest Destiny' in the early 1800's, which really meant take this land from the Indians (savages); listen to the popular support that Wallace[495] is gaining."[496] Therefore, for Simms, because mainstream politicians participated in a system that was institutionally racist, they were also racist: "you have got to know that this is a racist country and accordingly, calling Humphrey or Nixon or Shanker a racist is only saying that these politicians are keeping in tune with the country."[497]

In essence, Simms argues the U.S. suffers from an underlying structure of racism that animates racist institutions and social dynamics. In this way, Simms' view parallels and presages both the internal colonial theory of racism (see Gutiérrez 2004; Ture and Hamilton 1992; Blauner 1972;), as well as Bonilla-Silva's structural theory of racism (Bonilla-Silva 1996). For Simms, the Hatchett case was doubly revealing of the underlying structure. For Simms, Hatchett's speech was only controversial, and in need of liberal protections, if one were ignorant of the deep structure of racism running through American history and contemporary social life. The fact that it was

---

[494] The Dred Scott decision refers to the 1857 Supreme Court case that formally deprived African-Americans of the right of citizenship in the U.S. until it was superseded by the Civil Rights Act of 1866 and the Fourteenth Amendment. Chief Justice Taney's decision infamously found blacks to be inherently inferior and to be possessing "no rights which the white man was bound to respect."

[495] The segregationist Governor of Alabama and Presidential Candidate in 1968.

[496] "From a Black Chair: The Three Lies," Paul B. Simms, *Tech News*, October 23, 1968, p.7.

[497] (ibid.)

not only controversial, but also silenced through Hatchett's firing, revealed U.S. political liberalism as both ideological mystification and structural mechanism in the enforcement of white power and privilege. Thus, for Simms, the liberal ideology at the core of American national identity does not exist side by side the deep structures of American racism, but is actually an operative mechanism by which the deep structure of racism manifests itself.

For Simms, the liberal outrage at Hatchett's speech leading to his firing in fact suppressed the standpoint of black students. Because the majority of black students supported Hatchett and thought he was performing a vital function at the university, his firing communicated loudly that their needs were not universal, but rather of secondary importance. While Simms suggests Hatchett's firing suppressed black voices and black viewpoints within the university, he also notes that some white students supported his speech, writing, "It is my opinion as it is the opinion of many students, both Black and white, that Dr. John Hatchett was satisfying the needs of all Black students and some of the white students at NYU. And if a university cannot address itself to the needs of all the students . . . by all the hounds of Hell, it should not be called a university!"[498] For Simms, far from a neutral and open incubator of truth seeking and critical debate, in firing Hatchett, NYU revealed itself as an instrument for white supremacist interests.

> Granted that there are students at NYU who did not like Hatchett, students who were in agreement with the administration on Hatchett's

[498] (ibid.) In affirming the normative status of the university as institutional pursuer of truth, Simms demands that black interests be part and parcel of any conceptualization and consideration of what the universal is.

> removal. To this, I would submit there are also students who endorse Wallace as the only meaningful candidate. In essence, someone is always seen as the villain of a conflict. This is the nature of a conflict.[499]

For Simms, the Hatchett case shows that race relations within the university are utterly entwined with power.

Simms then pivots to the Ocean Hill—Brownsville teachers strike then roiling the city, criticizing the union's opposition to community control reforms over local school districts. Simms in particular argues that the seniority system the union was striking to protect enabled more experienced, and in his mind, effective teachers to choose schools in whiter and more middle class neighborhoods, leaving the most inexperienced and ineffective teachers for poor communities of color who were in relatively greater need of effective teaching. Simms writes, "And now that a plan has been proposed to better the education of these students—and, at the same time, not jeopardize the education of white students in the same or various other communities of the City, your man Shanker decided to guarantee its failure before it was ever implemented."[500] For Simms, community control is not about special treatment, but about addressing the special needs of black communities so that they can attain equality with white communities without deleteriously affecting the latter. Indeed, Simms distinguishes the teacher's union as an institution, which he regards as acting to protect the systemic advantages of whites, from individual white teachers who genuinely want to "reconstruct the educational system in the Black and Puerto Rican

---

[499] (ibid.)
[500] (ibid.)

communities"[501] to meet the needs of those communities. Indeed, Simms references his own positive experiences with white teachers in the New York City school system to make his point.

> There are white teachers who can really teach. (I was fortunate to have some of them while in grammar school and high school, so I know they exist.) I also know that there were many teachers who did not want to strike, and who presently are teaching in the Freedom schools. I personally want to thank them. The Black and Puerto Rican communities know who their friends are.[502]

For Simms, the question of community control is not one of racial separatism or the purity of identity. Rather, for Simms, by re-distributing bureaucratic power over the school system out of the hands of Board of Education and Teacher's Union, who acted to protect white privilege, and into the hands of the community, Simms believed communities would then be able to act to meet the special needs of black students whose quality of educational experience lagged behind whites, thus granting blacks equal access to education. In other words, Simms sees community control over schools as being about equal citizenship.

Simms' second installment of "From a Black Chair" came the week following the election of Richard Nixon. Simms took the election of Nixon to be explicitly a vote against black equality, even suggesting the segregationist George Wallace would have won on the back of an anti-black vote had Nixon not turned to an anti-black campaign coded in "law and order" rhetoric.[503] "Americans are stupid," said Simms, "they are so afraid that Black people will get a little equality (and in doing so, replace

---

[501] (ibid.)
[502] (ibid.)
[503] On the efficacy of racism in such coded language politics, see (Edsall and Edsall 1992).

them) that they will go to any lengths to stop this… America would have voted George Wallace into the White House if Nixon hadn't started his law and order garbage in his campaign speeches."[504] For Simms, the racistly rooted support for Nixon and Wallace are not a fringe element, but representative of the core of American nationhood.

> …America has a problem—us. She doesn't know what to do with us, but she does know that she will not have us being equal…When we stood up for our rights in Birmingham, so-called Americans bombed a church and killed four little Black girls (the murderers still haven't been found) just to tell the Black people to stay in their place.[505]

While Simms positions American national identity as essentially racist, he also opens the essay with an epigraph from the Declaration of Independence, one of the most emancipatory (and revolutionary) strains of the U.S. political tradition. The epigraph reads:

> Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shown, that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations pursuing invariably the same object, evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and provide new Guards for their future safety.[506]

In light of his critique of American nationalism as essentially racist, Simms interestingly frames his essay, not within a separatist revolutionary tradition rooted in

---

[504] "From a Black Chair: Politics, American Style," Paul B. Simms, *Tech News*, November 13, 1968, p. 3.
[505] (ibid.)
[506] Declaration of Independence, quoted in "From a Black Chair: Politics, American Style," Paul B. Simms, *Tech News*, November 13, 1968, p. 3.

pure racial identity. But, rather within an American revolutionary tradition that he summons against the very white-supremacist forms of American nationalism he suggests are intolerable.[507]

While Simms rhetorically locates the black freedom struggle within a radical revolutionary American political tradition, he also discounts two potential progressive allies in the fight for black emancipation through his interpretation of Nixon's electoral victory. On the one hand, Simms dismisses the notion that blacks should ally with the white working class against capitalism, a notion often asserted by the rising white left on the City College campus in the late 1960's.

> There was a student in this school who was trying to convince me that it would be advantageous for the Black people to unite with all working class people to fight the capitalists. That's a laugh. There is absolutely no way that I would even think of uniting with anybody except other Black people at this point. Look what the working class elected as its President.[508]

Simms notes the white working class were the strongest supporters of Nixon and Wallace and therefore supported white supremacist interests over and against their own class interests. Theoretically, the pre-med student asserts, "you better believe that money does not change a person's racial concepts. There is only one difference between H.L. Hunt[509] and Byron De La Beckwith[510]—about a half billion dollars."[511]

---

[507] Simms' revolutionary discourse, then, fits Walzer's claim that rather than a clash between incommensurate value systems, radical critique and political practice is most effective when it unfolds from *within and over a commonly shared political tradition* (Walzer 1987, pp. 33-66).
[508] "From a Black Chair: Politics, American Style," Paul B. Simms, *Tech News*, November 13, 1968, p. 3.
[509] H.L. Hunt was a wealthy Texas oil tycoon and conservative Republican Party activist.

On the other hand, Simms brings in for critique liberal civil rights organizations, such as the NAACP and the Urban League, for practicing a politics of religious morality and respectability in the hopes of being recognized as worthy of inclusion within the mainstream of U.S. society. In Simms' view, the election of Nixon and the significant support for Wallace made a strategy focused on promoting a positive perception of the moral worthiness of blacks in the minds of the majority of whites in the U.S. ridiculous.[512] Nixon's election and the widespread support for Wallace, in Simms' view, revealed the race question to be one of pure conflict between "brothers and the enemy."[513]

In his second installment of "From a Black Chair," Simms again develops a critique of liberal forms of nationalism in the U.S. In particular, Simms argues liberal forms of citizenship are illusory in regard to the black experience in the U.S. On Simms' analysis, any politics that relies on the eventual realization of a liberal essence at the heart of American society is doomed to failure. While Simms' promotes a black-nationalist viewpoint, in writing from an explicitly black standpoint in "From a Black Chair," Simms is not constructing and promoting an essentialist black identity in his column. Rather, Simms' promotion of a black nationalist standpoint is rooted in its specific engagement with hegemonic liberal traditions, and

---

[510] Byron De La Beckwith was Ku Klux Klansman accused, and eventually convicted of the murder of Medgar Evers. The murder was committed in 1963, but Beckwith was not convicted until 1994.

[511] "From a Black Chair: Politics, American Style," Paul B. Simms, *Tech News*, November 13, 1968, p. 3.

[512] (ibid.) On the politics of worthiness within the context of welfare state policies, see (Katz 1990).

[513] "From a Black Chair: Politics, American Style," Paul B. Simms, *Tech News*, November 13, 1968, p. 3.

the manner in which, in his eyes, they simultaneously mask and enable the systemic subjugation of black Americans. Simms' critical standpoint had been cultivated through the counterpublic discussion his own journalism had made possible.

In a December 1968 "From a Black Chair," in line with the BPRSC's first demand,[514] Simms proposes the establishment an independent Black University on the City College campus.[515] Predicting that student efforts to achieve an "entire Black Curriculum" would be placated with a mere smattering of token courses, Simms proposes "brothers and sisters, let's seriously consider establishing a Black University on this campus, autonomous from the rest of the school, directed, financed and maintained by the Black students enrolled."[516] Simms emphasizes that the school should be made autonomous, and might not want to seek accreditation if it meant relinquishing autonomy. Black students, Simms proposes, would determine the courses by referendum. In particular, Simms asserts that classes about the black experience ought to be taught by black professors and instructors, including by the students themselves and community members who are not formally academics. Along similar lines, Simms also addresses the theme of racial separatism in regards to

---

[514] The BPRSC originally presented "The Five Demands" to President Gallagher sometime during the fall semester of 1968, although the exact date is unknown (Dyer 1990).

[515] The BPRSC's first of the Five Demands was originally for a School of Black and Puerto Rican Studies. By the spring, the student coalition had altered the wording of the demand to a School of Third World Studies. This change registers the effects of the public debate that animated and undergirded the BPRSC mobilization, as well as the coalitional politics among the BPRSC, which combined the forces and interests of the Onyx Society and PRISA (Puerto Rican Institute for Student Action). Further, it reflects the development of a theory of internal colonialism applied to the U.S. that linked with other forms of global colonialism by the BPRSC that they used to interpret the institutional structures and social relations at City College.

[516] "From a Black Chair: Institute for Black Students," Paul B. Simms, *Tech News*, Dedember 16, 1968, p. 6.

whether white students should be allowed to participate in a "Black University." While Simms asserts all black students who submit a paper on the black experience in the U.S. should be admitted, he suggests other students would have their papers reviewed to ascertain their commitment to black studies.[517] For Simms, the key is committing to a curriculum of serious study from black standpoints, and not to fall into the psychological boundary crossing that characterized the "Encounter Sessions" between white and black students of the Experimental College. These sessions, designed to encourage contact across ethnic boundaries had found few blacks students interested in participating, according to Simms.[518]

Simms' proposed list of courses reflected an expansive view of black studies, one mediated by a larger critique of liberal/civic nationalism in the U.S. and gesturing towards the theory of internal colonialism that would link up with a larger critique of colonialism as established by a "Third World" subject position. Simms envisioned courses on "African History, Afro-American History, Black Culture (both African and Afro-American), Black Contemporary Thought, Asian History, Garveyism, The Lives and Works of Malcolm X, Du Bois, Douglass, Fanon and Che, Coalitions with the Left, Revolutionary Actions, American Hypocricy (sic), American Atrocities, Socialism and its Relevance to Black Nationalism, and other similar courses."[519] Much like the set of interviews with leaders with different points of view, Simms' concerns reflected a range of theoretical and political positions that extended beyond

---

[517] (ibid.)
[518] (ibid.)
[519] (ibid.)

simple identarian black nationalism as well as a sensitivity to historical, cultural and political divisions within the category "black." For Simms, far from indoctrination into a purified identity, black studies intended to be a rigorous and critical pedagogical practice, one organized from the bottom up in opposition to hegemonic liberal citizenship in the U.S.

In his last "From a Black Chair" column prior to the April campus takeover by the BPRSC, Simms addresses a controversy over a slate of candidates for student government who organized themselves around a New World Coalition ticket.[520] A group called Committee for an Integrated Campus of the House Plan Association, who had been instrumental in advancing the Experimental College program of the preceding semesters, accused The New World Coalition of racism and racial separatism. Curiously, while accused of racial separatism by the House Plan group, the New World Coalition was in fact a coalition comprised of Puerto Rican students from PRISA and black students from Onyx articulating a third world political identity. The New World Coalition, headed by the Presidential candidate and PRISA leader Henry Arce, called for a school of third world studies to include, "all studies of colonized peoples—Puerto Rican, African, Latin American, and Asian."[521] It also called for City College to employ a majority of blacks and Puerto Ricans in it's administrative positions, expansion of the SEEK program so that "anyone desiring a

---

[520] "From a Black Chair: Only Whites Are Racists," Paul B. Simms, *Tech News*, February 6, 1969, p. 5; "Slate to Challenge Eligibility Standards In Senate Contests," Ken Sasmor, *The Campus*, January 27, 1969, p. 3; "Rivals Bare Teeth As Election Begins," Michele Ingrassia and William Apple, *The Campus*, February 26, 1969, p. 4.
[521] "Slate to Challenge Eligibility Standards In Senate Contests," Ken Sasmor, *The Campus*, January 27, 1969, p. 3.

college education can get it,"[522] as well as greater student voice in the policy making for the SEEK program. Finally, the student government slate called for free tuition for all students, not just the privileged Day Time Session students, and the formation of a community-student committee that would be the ultimate trustees of the college and have final say over policy creation in the Master Plan.[523]

The House Plan group, however, found the New World Coalition's politics and programs to promote racial separatism. The House Plan group distributed a pamphlet at the start of the spring 1969 semester that asserted, "A PROGRAM OF RACIAL SEPARATION IS INVALID, WHETHER INITIATED BY BLACKS OR WHITES."[524] According to the group, it was the New World Coalition who were spreading racism on campus. "We are living in a racist environment," the pamphlet asserted, "In the upcoming Student Senate election, racially separate slates have announced their intention to run."[525] Perhaps most controversially in the eyes of the Committee for an Integrated Campus of the House Plan Association, whose pamphlet arguing against the New World Coalition Simms quoted directly, was the proposal for a separate orientation for white students and students of color. "Separate orientation programs for black and white students have been proposed. THIS IS NOT THE

[522] (ibid.)
[523] (ibid.)
[524] Pamphlet distributed by "Committee for an Integrated Campus of the House Plan Association," January 30, 1969, as quoted in "From a Black Chair: Only Whites Are Racists," Paul B. Simms, *Tech News*, February 6, 1969, p 5, original emphasis.
[525] Pamphlet distributed by "Committee for an Integrated Campus of the House Plan Association," January 30, 1969, as quoted in "From a Black Chair: Only Whites Are Racists," Paul B. Simms, *Tech News*, February 6, 1969, p 5.

ANSWER."[526] For the House Plan group, while racial *problems* may have existed on the City College campus, it was in the politics of the New World Coalition where racism resided. Instead, the House Plan group argued working beyond identities, and not racial politics, was the key to challenging racial problems on campus: "Reaching across differences and struggling together to attain common goals is the only alternative. An integrated committee has been formed to deal with implementing this alternative on campus."[527]

Simms disputes the definition of racism on which the House Plan pamphlet relies, arguing with Stokely Carmichael and Charles Hamilton, that blacks by definition cannot be racist.

> First of all, let's clear the air about something that apparently has many, if not all, White people confused. Black people cannot be racists; it is a generic impossibility. For to be racist means one is involved in the predication of decisions and policies on considerations of race for the purpose of subordinating a racial group and maintaining control over that group (definition from **Black Power**, Carmichael & Hamilton, p. 3).[528]

For Simms, racism is not a matter of negative subjective beliefs about other groups, or even a supremacist identity for one's own group, but is rather defined by power relations. "To be racist means that one has a certain **power** over another group of

---

[526] (ibid.) original emphasis.
[527] (ibid.)
[528] Ture (né Carmichael) and Hamilton 1992, quoted in, "From a Black Chair: Only Whites Are Racists," Paul B. Simms, *Tech News*, February 6, 1969, p 5.

people."[529] For Simms, racism is an attribute of a structure of social relations and not of an individual and her subjective make up or isolated practices.

From this perspective, Simms criticizes the House Plan group's argument in favor of an ethic of integration, suggesting they misunderstood the political meaning of integration. "Secondly, I think you should reexamine certain of the events that have involved Black people and their struggle for self-determination. The goal was never integration for integration's sake. The goal was to get **some** of what you White people had—nothing more."[530] For Simms, integrationist politics are not properly understood as an assimilationist attempt to take a place alongside accomplished whites, but rather was a struggle over access to resources and the achievement of collective autonomy.

> The end (of integrationist politics) was to get some of that 'White education' so that we could begin to think for ourselves. All we wanted was a chance to teach our own children. The end was not to get next to you, on the contrary, it was to learn as much as we could from you—and I suppose that is still a thought that is kept alive by many Black students.[531]

Indeed, integration is necessarily a struggle over resources and community autonomy according to Simms, rather than an attempt to be admitted into the mainstream of the national community, because, as he saw it, blacks are permanently defined by the structures of racism as the other of American nationhood. "And make no mistake, if a

---

[529] "From a Black Chair: Only Whites Are Racists," Paul B. Simms, *Tech News*, February 6, 1969, p 5, original emphasis.
[530] (ibid.) original emphasis.
[531] (ibid.)

White nation could do it to Jewish people in WW II, you better believe it could happen here to us."[532]

For Simms, the House Plan Group's integrationist politics missed the mark in a second manner exemplified by the need for separate freshman orientations for black and white students. Simms asserted blacks faced special problems adjusting to the majority white City College campus; most importantly, the problem of how to navigate and negotiate the various forms of everyday racism[533] they would encounter from the majority white student body.

> I would also like to know what is really wrong with separate orientation programs for Black students, given the fact that the present freshman orientation structure does not deal with the adjustments that Black students have to make coming to City College. They are going to have to get used to naïve little White students running up to them, asking to integrate with them until it's time to go home, or integrating to feel the Black experience, or integrating to find out what we really want. They want to know where you were during the riots, do you like LeRoi Jones, Bayard Rustin or George Schuyler, and what about the Black Panthers?[534]

For Simms, one of the manifestations of the racist structure of social relations at City College was that whites had the privilege of engaging in efforts "to reach across difference" on their own terms, integrating "until it's time to go home," all the while leaving behind the persistent consequences of institutional racism. Moreover, for Simms, while practices like the encounter groups may have appeared as good faith efforts to make personal connections across group differences, these rituals in fact

---

[532] (ibid.)
[533] On everyday racism, see (Essed 1990, 1991), (Feagin and Vera 1995), (de la Torre 1999).
[534] (ibid.)

carried a paternalistic mode of racism that marked students of color as an exotic oddity within the social space of City College.

Integration, for Simms, had reached its limits as a political strategy precisely because it was interpreted by whites within a subjectivist-psychologizing frame that erased the reality, in his view, of power: "the change of events in the past ten years, which has stimulated the Black nation to devise methods of **taking** some of that power from White America has forced a bunch of Whites to get together and say 'Let's Integrate.' That might be the funniest thing I have heard this year."[535] To exemplify the contrast between a subjectively rooted definition of racism with its integrationist political analogue that the House Plan favored, and one rooted in asymmetric structure of power relations, Simms quoted Frederick Douglass:

> Those who profess to favor freedom yet deprecate agitation, are men who want crops without plowing up the field; they want rain without thunder and lightening…Power concedes nothing without demand. It never did and it never will. Find out just what any people will quietly submit to and you have found out the exact measure of injustice and wrong which will be imposed upon them and these will continue till they are resisted with words or blow or both. The limits of tyrants are prescribed by the endurance of those whom they oppress.[536]

For Simms, writing in the wake of the initial submission of the Five Demands to President Gallagher by the BPRSC, the political logic of the demand, with its attendant conflict and potential for physical and symbolic violence, was most adequate to the task of confronting racism as a social structure.

---

[535] "From a Black Chair: Only Whites Are Racists," Paul B. Simms, *Tech News*, February 6, 1969, p 5, original emphasis.

[536] Frederick Douglass, quoted in, "From a Black Chair: Only Whites Are Racists," Paul B. Simms, *Tech News*, February 6, 1969, p 5. This quotation appears in the preface to *Black Power*, by Ture and Hamilton.

Chapter 8

The Onyx Society and the Making of the Black and Puerto Rican Student Community at The City College of New York

"We concern ourselves with members of the Black community. They are our concern because we are a part of them." Edwin Fabre—Onyx Society[537]

Paul Simms' journalistic career at City College represents one significant nodal source of the circulation of anti-racist counterpublic discourse at City College in the late 1960's. Yet, Simms' journalistic practice was far from a lone voice. Indeed, we can track Simms' internal colonialist critical discourse on race and race relations at City College and the wider U.S. through larger black and Puerto Rican communities at City College. While Dyer argues The Onyx Society underwent a transformation of kind, from a social club to a political organization, and that this ontological transformation was due to the underlying influence of demographic changes within the black and Puerto Rican student body in the late 1960's at City College brought about by the implementation of the SEEK program, this chapter spotlights the role of the development of an anti-racist counter-public on the City College campus in this process.

As shown above, Onyx was founded in political opposition to the stigmatizing logic of the Zimbardo report, and to counter the patterns of extracurricular

---

[537] Edwin Fabre, quoted in "Onyx: Of Black People, by Black People, for Black People," Ralph Levinson, *The Campus*, November 16, 1967, p. 1.

segregation and exclusion black students felt at City College. According to Onyx member Sheila Davis, in contrast to other extracurricular activities and clubs where many black students reported they felt unwanted and excluded, “Onyx is a place where black students know they are welcome.”[538] In addition to providing a social space free from the stigmatizing dynamics on much of the college’s campus, Onyx also became an institutional pillar of the anti-racist counter-public that developed at City College in the late 1960’s. This anti-racist counter-public developed pari passu with an anti-racist political consciousness that would come to define Onyx, and, in turn, the BPRSC itself. Furthermore, tracing the circulation of critical discourse and debate within the anti-racist counter-public reveals the changes in interpretation and critical consciousness, as well as political and communal practices amongst members of Onyx.

In addition to its social functions, Onyx immediately began organizing political and intellectual talks and discussions regarding race and racism. For instance, as noted above, in it’s very first full semester of existence, Onyx organized a talk on South African apartheid.[539] Importantly, the themes of the talk, which were publicized in advance, showed Onyx’s interest in international framings of race and politics, as well as a radical comparison of South African apartheid with the “white power structure” in the U.S.[540] During the following semester, just a year after it’s chartering, Onyx organized and sponsored an all day conference at City College on

---

[538] Sheila Davis, quoted in “Onyx: Of Black People, by Black People, for Black People,” Ralph Levinson, *The Campus*, November 16, 1967, p. 1.
[539] “Apartheid Policy To Be Discussed,” Paul Simms, *Tech News*, October 25, 1966, p. 2.
[540] (ibid.)

Black Power.[541] The conference was headlined by Roy Innis, a local and national leader of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), and was to convene workshops designed to bring City College students and members from the majority African-American Harlem community into close working relationships on questions of politics, economic development, education and the improvement of racial self-image.[542] According to Onyx leader Edwin Fabre, the purpose of the conference was to be more than academic, aiming to develop "programs to aid the community" rather than mere "dialogue for dialogue's sake."[543] Indeed, members of Onyx hoped the conference would result in the institutionalization of the student group's ties to the Harlem community in "an ad-hoc committee composed of Onyx members and community members."[544]

Such conferences helped organize the group's practices as Onyx more and more came to define their role beyond the college. "Relevance to the community, relevance to Black people, this is Onyx's by-word," reported *The Campus* in the fall of 1967.[545] Onyx came to define their role broadly, making fuzzy the boundary between the college campus and the world beyond. According to Edwin Fabre, Onyx' organizational purpose was "to provide for the cultural, educational and social well-

---

[541] "College Will Host All-Day Meeting on 'Black Power,'" *The Campus*, April 11, 1967, p. 1.
[542] "College Will Host All-Day Meeting on 'Black Power,'" *The Campus*, April 11, 1967, p. 3.
[543] "College Will Host All-Day Meeting on 'Black Power,'" *The Campus*, April 11, 1967, p. 1.
[544] "College Will Host All-Day Meeting on 'Black Power,'" *The Campus*, April 11, 1967, p. 3.
[545] "Onyx: Of Black People, by Black People, for Black People," Ralph Levinson, *The Campus*, November 16, 1967, p. 5.

being and advancement of all black people."[546] One way Onyx defined their relevance to black communities was through service programs. For instance, in March of 1967, the group organized a clothing drive for a group of families who lost their homes and belongings in a fire in Harlem.[547] The group also instituted more durable service programs. One such program, carried out by the all student voluntary association (meaning students did not receive credit for such activities), was the Tutorial program. According to Fabre, the purpose of the program was to "bring those students who are behind their grade up to grade level. In the process we try to give the children a realistic sense of identification with their Black heritage."[548] Onyx's tutorial program combined three elements, practical educational services, community building through positive identity construction, and a developing critique of the pedagogical effectiveness of the Education program, and other departments at City College more generally. In this last vein, according to Onyx member Gail Powell, "the departments here (City College), particularly in Education and Sociology, are far from reality. What they do is teach you theory. But theory doesn't help you when you face an actual classroom. This is particularly true in Harlem where the kids come from a completely different background," than the majority of education professors, students and practicing educators throughout the city.[549]

---

[546] Edwin Fabre, quoted in "Onyx: Of Black People, by Black People, for Black People," Ralph Levinson, *The Campus*, November 16, 1967, p. 1.
[547] "Onyx: Of Black People, by Black People, for Black People," Ralph Levinson, *The Campus*, November 16, 1967, p. 5.
[548] Edwin Fabre, quoted in "Onyx: Of Black People, by Black People, for Black People," Ralph Levinson, *The Campus*, November 16, 1967, p. 5.
[549] Gail Powell, quoted in "Onyx: Of Black People, by Black People, for Black People," Ralph Levinson, *The Campus*, November 16, 1967, p. 5.

Powell's incisive critique of what she saw as the excessively abstract nature of the education program at City College was rooted in her own practical experience within the Onyx tutoring program. Out of her practical experience, Powell lent her voice to the rising chorus of critique levied at the New York City public school system by communities of color in the late 1960's, a chorus that would eventually manifest itself practically in the issue of community controlled schools in the Ocean Hill-Brownsville teacher strike of 1968. According to Powell's experiences:

> There is no dialogue with black students or the parents of those students, the mothers and fathers of the kids in Harlem. You can't just have theory you've got to get right down to the community level if you want to teach. That's what isn't done (in the pedagogical training at City College). That's what we need. The community must take part in the programming. What is taught must be relevant to the community.[550]

If Powell's critique of the gap between the theoretical and bureaucratic logics of New York City's Department of Education and the actual needs of communities of color presaged the underlying principles of the conflict of the Ocean Hill-Brownsville teachers strike, Onyx members also developed a broad critique of people of color's disproportional access to public goods that would, years later, concretize locally in the Five Demands. "We don't have any piece of the pie," said Onyx leader Edwin Fabre, "We want our share. In a city that is fifty percent Negro and Puerto Rican we deserve half and we are going to get."[551] Similarly, the critique of the Eurocentric

---

[550] (ibid.)
[551] Edwin Fabre, quoted in "Onyx: Of Black People, by Black People, for Black People," Ralph Levinson, *The Campus*, November 16, 1967, p. 5.

curriculum at City College that would manifest with the BPRSC's First Demand for a School of Third World Studies, can also been seen in nascent form:

> There is a lack of curriculum here at the College which has real relevance for Black students. There has also been no meaningful attempt to secure Black professors for teaching here. There are very few Black teachers here. Just think, if you did have such educators you'd be able to plan courses which would study intelligently Black culture—This is what the Black community needs.[552]

Thus, Onyx thought of equality in both materialist and symbolic terms, as equal material and institutional access as well as a right to cultural self-understanding and cultivation.

In addition to sponsoring speakers and conferences open to the City College community and beyond, as a voluntary association with public meetings, the Onyx society itself was a significant institutional pillar of the anti-racist counter-public. For instance, Onyx held weekly forums in which students vigorously debated the issues and events of the day relating to race and politics as well as the position of blacks in the United States and around the world. At one such forum, held in the fall of 1967 and reported on by *The Campus*, members of Onyx debated the political significance of the urban rioting that had occurred in several U.S. cities during the preceding summer months. In particular, the open forum debated whether the urban uprisings were "signs of a Revolutionary movement or just individual non-coordinated incidents?"[553] According to *The Campus* report on the discussion, the more than 50

---

[552] "Onyx: Of Black People, by Black People, for Black People," Ralph Levinson, *The Campus*, November 16, 1967, p. 5.
[553] "Onyx: Of Black People, by Black People, for Black People," Ralph Levinson, *The Campus*, November 16, 1967, p. 5.

students present believed the riots were isolated activities, "where groups of Blacks were being shot down senselessly in the streets."[554] While the members of Onyx suggested the urban unrest of the summer of 1967 was "senseless" and counterproductive because it was unorganized, according to *The Campus'* reporter, many agreed that a revolution did need "to take place before the Black man could achieve his destiny in the United States."[555]

Much like the series of interviews carried out by Paul Simms in the pages of *Tech News*, members of Onyx debated *the form* such a revolution should take. For instance, one student asserted, "We can't just sit here and be passive and intellectual. People were dying this summer, we have got to get organized. You can't win by throwing bricks."[556] Another student argued that change would require activists putting their bodies in harm's way. "You have got to get out there and risk your necks, we have got to be ready to die."[557] Another student suggested the possible effectiveness of tight organization and economically disruptive action, "Do you know what one hundred determined, well-trained people can do to the economy of this country? They can wreck it. We should really be thinking about that."[558] As students debated the nature of power, much like as in the pages of *Tech News*, the question of political and racial violence was an underlying preoccupation. According to Onyx's

---

[554] Unattributed member of Onyx quoted in, "Onyx: Of Black People, by Black People, for Black People," Ralph Levinson, *The Campus*, November 16, 1967, p. 5.
[555] "Onyx: Of Black People, by Black People, for Black People," Ralph Levinson, *The Campus*, November 16, 1967, p. 5.
[556] Unattributed member of Onyx quoted in, "Onyx: Of Black People, by Black People, for Black People," Ralph Levinson, *The Campus*, November 16, 1967, p. 5.
[557] (ibid.)
[558] (ibid.)

President, Edwin Fabre, black and white unity was unlikely, and instead, “If you see a white man being beat up by forty Blacks you don’t go and help that white man. You become the forty-first Black beating up that white man.”[559]

The question of violence preoccupied *The Campus’* reporter, Ralph Levinson, as well. He reported, “Violence is not implied in Onyx’s demands. Nevertheless, the Society is perfectly willing to admit there are many in its ranks who maintain militant attitudes towards, what they call the “White Power Structure.”[560] As if translating his feelings to a broader public, Fabre justified his violent metaphor quoted above, in favor of black solidarity, as a reaction to white racial violence.

> This is the reaction of the Black man who sees his brothers shot down in the streets. This is the reaction of the Black man to being subjected to a racist war against non-white peoples in Vietnam. This is the reaction of Black people whose very existence is being threatened. To some it’s a question of whether we’ll accept an inevitable American Auschwitz. Is it going to be safe for me tomorrow?[561]

While Fabre maintains his fantasy of black communal solidarity as anti-white violence is a response to white racial terror, for Levinson, Fabre’s violent metaphor represented a bitterness that was a significant, if not exclusive strand running through the Onyx Society. “Such comments,” Levinson writes of Fabre’s fantasy of anti-white

---

[559] Edwin Fabre, quoted in “Onyx: Of Black People, by Black People, for Black People,” Ralph Levinson, *The Campus*, November 16, 1967, p. 5.
[560] “Onyx: Of Black People, by Black People, for Black People,” Ralph Levinson, *The Campus*, November 16, 1967, p. 5.
[561] Edwin Fabre, quoted in “Onyx: Of Black People, by Black People, for Black People,” Ralph Levinson, *The Campus*, November 16, 1967, p. 5.

racial violence, “are not made with great frequency. But the bitterness behind them is impossible to ignore.”[562]

The general preoccupation with violence amongst black and white students is usually paired with the question of racial separatism. As we have seen, the question of who was responsible, black or white students, for the severe patterns of racial segregation on the City College campus, structured the context of Onyx’s emergence (in the debate amongst students in the years leading up to the chartering of Onyx, Zimbardo’s belief that Onyx amounted to a kind of separatist form, and black City College students feelings of exclusion from extracurricular activities on the college’s campus.) The question of separatism in relation to Onyx would continue to preoccupy students. For instance, *The Campus* continuously pointed out that Onyx was an “all-Black organization.”[563] At the same time, in the same report cited above, Levinson relates Onyx’s efforts at serving black communities are “not intended to shut out the White Community from the interests or the goals of Black people.”[564] Levinson goes on to quote Fabre again, but this time striking an entirely different tone:

> We recognize that there are common goals which both White and Black people share. However, what we wish to make clear is that White people must not come to us and say ‘this is the way to improve yourselves’. We must find our own way. We’ll build our half of the Brooklyn Bridge, and you, (the White Community) build your half and then we’ll meet in the center and work from there.[565]

---

[562] “Onyx: Of Black People, by Black People, for Black People,” Ralph Levinson, *The Campus*, November 16, 1967, p. 5.
[563] “Onyx: Of Black People, by Black People, for Black People,” Ralph Levinson, *The Campus*, November 16, 1967, p. 1.
[564] (ibid.:5).
[565] Edwin Fabre, quoted in “Onyx: Of Black People, by Black People, for Black People,” Ralph Levinson, *The Campus*, November 16, 1967, p. 5.

The logical contradictions of Fabre's positions towards the role of whites in anti-racist struggles is comprehensible when placed in the context of the deep debate students were carrying out regarding the meaning of racial and political solidarity as well as violence. For instance, during the same Onyx discussion forum cited above, while there was a consensus amongst students that a revolution in race relations is necessary to achieve racial justice, students advanced competing definitions and conceptualizations of this revolution. For instance, Serge Mullery, the Chairman of the Society's Education Committee, advanced a theory of revolution that focused on culture and subjectivity, arguing that Onyx, and by extension African-Americans in general, needed to "think black. We have to be able to think for ourselves, to start a new way of thinking. We can organize an intellectual revolution."[566] Yet another student disputed Mullery's ideological approach, criticizing it as elitist and removed from the community:

> …you've got to go all the way back to the grass roots and get support. Don't start all this intellectualizing. Unity is a 'good morning' to your brother in the street. You're just up there as far as the white man wants you to get up. You have to have unity on the most basic level. You've got to get up for your women on the subway. The white man ain't going to get up![567]

The debates regarding the form revolutionary action ought to take would continue all the way through the campus occupation, and in one account, would eventually lead to a schism within the BPRSC.

---

[566] Serge Mullery, quoted in "Onyx: Of Black People, by Black People, for Black People," Ralph Levinson, *The Campus*, November 16, 1967, p. 5.
[567] Unattributed member of Onyx quoted in, "Onyx: Of Black People, by Black People, for Black People," Ralph Levinson, *The Campus*, November 16, 1967, p. 5.

According to student journalist Tom Ackerman's long report on the campus occupation, BPRSC unity frayed during the 1969 campus takeover because of a divide between members who prioritized achieving assent to the Five Demands and in particular the School of Third World Studies in order to educate successive generations of critically conscious anti-racist intellectuals (Mullery's position above), and those who saw the campus takeover as part of a larger project of grass-roots community control over significant institutions within Harlem.[568] Ackerman also suggests that divisions within the BPRSC were reflections of splits within the larger ideological climate of the Black Power movement between black cultural nationalists, symbolized by Stokely Carmichael, and the Black Panther party's efforts towards community control, symbolized by Elridge Cleaver.[569]

Reporting in the weeks immediately following the campus occupation, before a deal was made to institute Open Admissions, Ackerman viewed the campus takeover as a political failure. A failure Ackerman in part attributed to the ideological split between the two camps. Yet, while not achieving their exact demands, the BPRSC campus action did achieve a radical transformation of the CUNY system in line with the spirit of the Five Demands. Moreover, following the circulation of discourse within the anti-racist counter-public on the City College campus shows how student debate altered interpretations of the U.S. and larger global political structures and transformed political identities in ways that aided practical group formation

---

[568] "The South Campus Seizure," Tom Ackerman, *The City College Alumnus*, October 1969, Vol. 65, 1:3-32.
[569] (ibid.:29.)

rather than paralyzed it. For instance, it was Tom Soto, a Puerto Rican City College student, not an African-American student, who would ultimately lead a storefront office in Harlem whose aim was to make a permanent community presence in Harlem.[570] The very name BPRSC (Black and Puerto Rican Student Community) is not a separatist identity, but the synthesis of Black and Puerto Rican students. Puerto Rican students originally gravitated towards Onyx because they felt it was the only organization on campus where they were welcome. In this way, Onyx operated as incubator of Puerto Rican student autonomy while simultaneously strengthening the coalition between black and Puerto Rican students on campus.

From afar, the competing theories that circulated through the anti-racist counterpublic at City College may seem a hodgepodge of critical perspectives incoherently reflecting a broad ideological climate. However, with closer examination, we can see that students vigorously and continuously debated their different critical positions. While black and Puerto Rican City College students did not form any singular or fixed political identity through their public debate, they nevertheless made themselves into ever more powerful political actors through the process of critical discussion. Moreover, the effects of critical public discussion and debate can be tracked in the development political consciousness amongst Onyx, PRISA and the BPRSC. For instance, by 1967, Onyx was claiming the categorical identity “Black” over and against the category “Negro.” *The Campus* reported to the City College community:

---

[570] (ibid.)

> Onyx makes a sharp distinction between the term ‘black’ and ‘negro’. ‘The word Negro,’ stated Edwin Fabre ’68, the Society’s president, ‘is an American fabrication. It refers to blacks as if they started their cultural heritage here in the United States. The word Black refers to people who were brought from Africa; who recognize their origins and appreciate them. Members of the Onyx Society are Black—not Negro.’[571]

According to Paul Simms, quoted in *The Campus*, “Onyx has come to stand for Black nationalism at the College. By Black nationalism I mean finding a black heritage and identity.”[572] Fabre agreed with Simms, however emphasizing that Black Nationalism was a political project. “We have concerned ourselves with the political aspects of black people in this American society,” said Fabre, “where politics affects us we become involved.”[573]

Alamac Dorm and the Inversion of Stigma

While the developing theory of internal colonialism the BPRSC increasingly applied to make sense of the position of blacks at City College articulated with a global vision of racist domination rooted in colonial and imperial dynamics, this critical perspective had a particular inflection in relation to the position of students of color on campus. As discussed in previous chapters, the social science reasoning behind The College Discovery and SEEK programs, and in particular the program at the Alamac Dorm, constructed the special admissions students from deprived

---

[571] “Onyx: Of Black People, by Black People, for Black People,” Ralph Levinson, *The Campus*, November 16, 1967, p. 5.
[572] Paul Simms, quoted in “Onyx: Of Black People, by Black People, for Black People,” Ralph Levinson, *The Campus*, November 16, 1967, p. 5. Reflecting the preoccupation with racial separatism, *The Campus* assured, “He said that a desire for separation should not be inferred from his remark” (ibid.)
[573] Edwin Fabre, quoted in “Onyx: Of Black People, by Black People, for Black People,” Ralph Levinson, *The Campus*, November 16, 1967, p. 5.

neighborhoods as culturally deficient and psychologically damaged. Such a construction articulated with existing dynamics of racial exclusion on campus, intersecting to stigmatize all black and Puerto Rican students. According to Ramón Gutiérrez, the theory of internal colonialism, adopted by a radicalizing civil rights movement in the U.S. in the late 1960's[574] from original sources in Latin American Marxist critiques of development ideologies, marked a radical break from dominant postwar social scientific and political thinking about race in the U.S. (Gutiérrez 2004). Gutiérrez writes, "far from seeking an understanding of racism in psychic structures, in an irrational fear of the 'Other,' or in the putative course of race relations cycles, Blacks and Chicanos reasoned that their oppression was not only personal, but structural, not only individual, but institutional (Gutiérrez 2004:282).

In developing and circulating a theory of internal colonialism within the anti-racist counter-public at City College, black and Puerto Rican students developed the symbolic means by which they would reject the psychological theories of mal-adaptation and damage, and, in turn, invert the stigma and symbolic violence imposed on them by the college's administration and majority white student body. While Dyer notes the importance of the Alamac Dorm as a network hub of movement activity that mutually animated SEEK students at various branches of CUNY, including City College, the dorm was also a vital site of intellectual exchange, debate and fervent critique that energized the political practice of the bourgeoning BPRSC. As discussed above, the Alamac Dorm was devised by academic psychologists on City College's

[574] Indeed, the Open Admissions crisis and campus takeover by the BPRSC in the spring of 1969 were a part of the radicalization of the civil rights movement.

faculty as a theoretically ideal environment by which young students from ghetto environments could be psychologically reconstructed. Rather than subject themselves to psychological reform however, SEEK students transformed their academic dorm into an intensive learning space as well as a dynamic place of intellectual debate and political critique.

The Campus profiled the dorm's lively atmosphere and dynamic intellectual and political culture in the fall of 1968, just six months prior to the campus takeover.[575] *The Campus* noted the dorm mirrored the giddy social atmosphere typically associated with college dorms in many ways, describing common meals in shared kitchen areas, evening "bull-sessions," and scattered references to jam packed dorm rooms full of young revelers. However, the student reporter for *The Campus* also framed the dorm within its experimental function as part of the SEEK program, noting the "dormitory rooms provide," for the mostly black and Puerto Rican students, "the atmosphere of academic work often not present in their homes."[576] Indeed, the article recounted the origins of the dorm, crediting the idea to Leslie Berger, a City College Social Psychologist, calling Berger the "pioneer architect of the pre-bac program."[577] According to *The Campus'* report, the dorm was meant to counter the pervasive negative environment Berger said he found in predominantly black and Puerto Rican neighborhoods. "Dr. Berger found that many students were

---

[575] "SEEK Dorms: Black Culture and Red Carpet." George Murrell, *The Campus*, October 16, 1968, p. 5.
[576] (ibid.)
[577] There is some dispute over the origins of Pre-Bac, the precursor to SEEK, with Leslie Berger, Kenneth Clark, and then City College economist Allen Ballard, all taking some credit for the origin of the program.

hindered in their studies by overcrowded or family-strife ridden homes," wrote *The Campus*. "Others who were on their own were living in fleabag hotels," the newspaper continued.[578] The aim of the dormitory was to totally reconstruct the residents, as *The Campus* wrote, "the effect of the residence upon the students is what its director, Dr. Herbert Deberry refers to as 'an educational experience' in itself."[579]

Yet, as *The Campus'* report shows, the students living at the Alamac Dorm gained a different sort of education than had been aimed. According to *The Campus'* reporter, the Alamac dorm rooms would never be confused with dorm rooms at NYU. In room 408 for instance, where they were playing Dionne Warwick records during their nightly "bull-session," *The Campus* wrote, "the walls blast you with Afro-American culture posters proclaiming, 'Why I Won't Serve, Whitey'[580] and 'How Do You Become a Black Revolutionary?'"[581] The young women of color living in the dorm organized a sorority called "Tamudata (Swahili for sweet sister),"[582] based on their floor of the building. *The Campus* reported that the members of Tamudata, "read James Baldwin and organized projects to aid ghetto children."[583] The sorority also proudly claimed an alternative style of dress to the dominant Greek college sorority.

---

[578] "SEEK Dorms: Black Culture and Red Carpet." George Murrell, *The Campus*, October 16, 1968, p. 5.
[579] (ibid.)
[580] The phrase refers both to a general conviction to confront and challenge relations of subservience and subordination imposed by whites in the U.S., as well as an implied critique of the Vietnam War as a campaign waged disproportionately by people of color in the interests of a white dominated society.
[581] "SEEK Dorms: Black Culture and Red Carpet." George Murrell, *The Campus*, October 16, 1968, p. 5.
[582] (ibid.)
[583] (ibid.)

Said one Tamudata member, “we wear our dashikis and not Greek letters. I see these white chicks wearing a dashiki and I feel like ripping it off them.”[584]

The student reporter for *The Campus* was careful to note that the largely black and Puerto Rican student dorm did not push students into militancy, but it nevertheless had clear consequences, writing, “the Alamac atmosphere may not make them militant but it does create ‘black consciousness.’”[585] On the one hand, black consciousness could emerge at The Alamac because it provided a space apart from the stigmatizing gaze of the majority white City College campus.

> But racial friction dissolves when they’re on their own. Ed Cruz ‘from down the hall’ interrupts the Dionne Warwick album and enters. ‘Que pasa, Amigo?’ (What’s happening baby) asks someone. Ed replies “Que pasa, negra?’ and the room roars with relaxed laughter. Racism is a joke when you’re together.[586]

More than a place where “middle class values” could be inculcated within a putatively damaged student population, The Alamac created a space relatively free of racism, a space from which racism’s pernicious effects could be grappled.

Yet, the Alamac did not simply provide a space where students could laugh and joke about racism in relative safety. The dorm was also a place of intensive study. *The Campus* described the studious atmosphere, writing:

> About eleven o’clock you enter 407 and find Reuben Cooke laying on his bed reading while his roommate Virgilio Rodriguez studies at his desk. In 435 Ed Cruz is trying out a new typewriter. On the door of one room, a sign reads “Unless it’s very important do not disturb. We have too much work to B.S. around.”[587]

---

[584] (ibid.)
[585] (ibid.)
[586] (ibid.), translations of Spanish phrases in original.
[587] (ibid.)

Indeed, study hours often spilled over into late night discussions, as one student described, "Most of the guys hit the sack about midnight, but it depends on who is discussing what in his room that night."[588] As *The Campus'* reporter noted, the late night debates were filled with passion, writing, "down the hall a floor counselor and two student aides make sure the discussion is held down to a roar."[589]

The administrative intention for the Alamac Dorm was to create a space where those who had been inculcated with, what they saw as pathological values and habits, could be broken down and reconstructed as mainstream middle class Americans. The official logic of the dorm coded its black and Puerto Rican inhabitants as unworthy of equal treatment, but potentially amenable to rehabilitation. The dorm was intended to assimilate blacks and Puerto Ricans, to make them like the "meritorious" white students who were overrepresented in City College's regularly admitted population. In a pleasing irony, the dorm did in fact transform its occupants by operating as an intensive node within an increasingly dynamic anti-racist counterpublic at City College. While the academic dynamism of the dorm perhaps does suggest that challenging conditions in depressed neighborhoods hampered academic achievement, the combination of scholarly and political dynamism in a space relatively free of racism itself empowered, and thus transformed its inhabitants. One student reported of the Alamac and its effects, "Black is a state of mind. When they (black students) stay here (the Alamac Dorm) they become able to accept themselves for what they

---

[588] (ibid.)
[589] (ibid.)

are, black, and nothing to be ashamed of."[590] Far from bearing blackness as a mark of shame, or shedding it through a process of assimilation into "mainstream" whiteness, students were able to transform the meaning of blackness into agency, power and pride.

This, the shift from recognizing the category "Negro" to identifying as "Black" that occurred at the Alamac, in the pages of the *Tech News*, and in the debating forums of the Onyx Society, signals a larger process of group formation on the part of students of color at City College. While black students experienced symbolic violence, stigmatization, and exclusion at City College, it was not until they critically reflected on these experiences, and linked them to larger social dynamics of race and racism in the United States and the world beyond, within an ongoing process of critical counterpublic discourse, that students were able to grasp the political meaning of their disparate experiences. In this way, the identity "Black" does not simply draw lines of descent back to Africa, but as Fabre notes, makes a political point of both *marking and confronting* the context of violence and exclusion that lineage represents. If the term "Negro" marks blacks as the pathological little brother of American liberalism, the term "black," in the symbolic practices of the BPRSC, confronts American liberalism with its underlying racist structure.

While students still clashed over the exact meaning of their individual and collective oppression, as well as the proper course of action to confront it, by debating the meaning of cultural nationalism and self-recognition, the burgeoning BPRSC also

---

[590] (ibid.)

deepened their critical stance towards hegemonic liberal notions of U.S. society. In adopting a Third World standpoint that commonly positioned students of color at City College in relation to an overarching structure of racist colonialism, the BPRSC brought together a critical view of the war in Vietnam, the exclusion and subjugation of blacks and Puerto Ricans in New York City, as well as post-colonial relations around the world, into a single interpretive framework that rooted the subjugated fates of people of color within a common set of socio-political dynamics. The BPRSC constructed themselves as a practical actor through the critique of the dominant liberal understandings of American citizenship, nationhood, and the U.S.' position in the world made possible by the open critical debate running through the anti-racist counter-public. Importantly, this anti-racist critical debate was generally open to the entire City College community, as discourse circulated freely through general newspapers, club discussion forums, on-campus symposia, and everyday interactions on and off campus.

Indeed, the move towards a Third World standpoint, both in the altering of the first demand from a school of Black and Puerto Rican Studies to that of Third World Studies, as well as the Third World Student Senate slate that ran at the beginning of the spring 1969 semester, came on the heels of a jam packed City College speech by Stokely Carmichael in December of 1968. According to the report in *The Campus*, in the speech organized and sponsored by the Onyx Society, Carmichael called for a political coalition "of the colonized peoples of the world," and in citing Frantz Fanon, Carmichael "depicted a worldwide struggle of non-white peoples that 'know no

geographical boundaries' and have an 'internationalized perspective.'"[591] In a similar vein, as analyzed above, Paul Simms adopted Carmichael's structural definition of racism from *Black Power* in his own "From a Black Chair "column in *Tech News* following the latter's December 1968 speech at City College. While the anti-racist political interests of the BPRSC did not spring automatically from the structurally determined experiences of stigma and exclusion of students of color at City College, through critical public discourse many black and Puerto Rican came to interpret themselves as denigrated by the dominant symbolic logics of hegemonic liberalism, and organized to imagine and pursue alternative social worlds for City College and beyond.

---

[591] "Carmichael Tells Shepard Crowd of an 'Armed Struggle' by Blacks," Steve Markin and Libby Marcus, *The Campus*, December 5, 1968, p. 1.

Chapter 9: Conclusion

The University of Harlem: The BPRSC's Claim to Equality and Its Aftermaths

The Five Demands of the Black and Puerto Rican Student Community (BPRSC) were originally presented to the City College Administration in October of 1968.[592] The original BPRSC demands included:

1. Establishment of a separate school of Black and Puerto Rican Studies.

2. A Separate orientation for Black and Puerto Rican freshmen.

3. A voice for students in the setting of all guidelines for the SEEK program, including hiring and firing of all personnel.

4. The racial composition of all entering classes should reflect the Black and Puerto Rican population of the New York City high schools.

5. Black and Puerto Rican history and the Spanish language should be a requirement for all education majors.[593]

By the following spring semester in February of 1969, after having received no response from the college's administration, the BPRSC organized a discussion and rally that filled the Grand Ballroom of the Finley Student Center to capacity, to publicize their demands (Dyer 1990:105). In line with the counterpublic discussion on campus, by February the BPRSC's first demand had been altered to a School of Third

---

[592] Press Release of The Black and Puerto Rican Student Community, June 5, 1969, located in Open Admissions Collection, Box 1, City College of the City University of New York, Archives and Special Collections.
[593] "Chronology of Events," Unattributed, Open Admissions Collection, Box 1, City College of the City University of New York, Archives and Special Collections; (Dyer 1990:93-4).

World Studies. In resubmitting their demands to President Gallagher, the BPRSC called for a negotiating structure with the administration to engage the demands.[594]

Writing in an official press release, decrying the lack of progress on meeting their Five Demands in June of 1969, more than a month after the secession of the campus occupation, the BPRSC described the escalation of their tactics.

> Since October 1968, when the 5 demands were first presented to the administration, a series of games has been played on the BPRSC. We were sent running by President Gallagher through a bureaucratic maze in continual attempts to get a positive answer to our demands. Complete disregard for our legitimate demands was the administration's only response. During the period from October to April the students' disillusionment mounted as the administration heightened its stalling tactics by constantly referring us to 'legitimate' channels.[595]

In the face of what they saw as active denial by bureaucratic immobilization, the BPRSC planned to escalate their confrontation with the college's administrative structure in support of the Five Demands.

Following the Grand Ballroom rally, students, led by the BPRSC, marched to Gallagher's office, pushing their way in when discovering he was out of town, and plastering the Five Demands to his office walls. In addition to the specific Five Demands, the BPRSC left a message on Gallagher's walls stating:

> The Black and Puerto Rican Student Community hereby gives notice to university officials at large, and President Gallagher in particular, that we are wholly dissatisfied with racist conditions currently existing

---

[594] "Chronology of Events," Unattributed, Open Admissions Collection, Box 1, City College of the City University of New York, Archives and Special Collections

[595] Press Release of The Black and Puerto Rican Student Community, June 5, 1969, located in Open Admissions Collection, Box 1, City College of the City University of New York, Archives and Special Collections.

> on the City College Campus—conditions that deny the very existence of the black and Puerto Rican community.[596]

The BPRSC, as well as some white students, returned a week later to receive Gallagher's response.

While in many ways attempting to concede to the demands as best he could, after several months of neglect on the part of Gallagher and the administration, the BPRSC was in no mood for diplomacy. Gallagher emerged from his office with a carefully crafted statement that he read to the gathering student group. In it, he touted the hiring of Wilfred Cartey, an Afro-Caribbean literature scholar, to head and plan the programs of black and Hispanic studies. He announced that he had directed administrators to address the structure of the Freshman Orientation, noted the hiring of a new SEEK director at the college, Dean Robert Young, and called on the School of Education's faculty to implement a requirement for Spanish language facility for all its graduates.[597] Finally, he asserted that the larger City University had achieved proportional representation of the ethnic composition of city high schools in the fall of 1968.[598] The President was at pains to point out, "On not one of the demands can anyone leave here and say they've gotten a 'no' answer."[599]

---

[596] "Admin. Building Occupied, Dr. Gallagher Pre-Occupied," Evelyn Watson, *Tech News*, p. 1; "The South Campus Seizure," Tom Ackerman, *The City College Alumnus*, October, 1969, Vol. 65:1, p. 6; Dyer (1990:106).
[597] "The South Campus Seizure," Tom Ackerman, *The City College Alumnus*, October, 1969, Vol. 65:1, p. 7.
[598] However, note, that Gallagher implicitly acknowledges that the senior colleges remained highly segregated. "The South Campus Seizure," Tom Ackerman, *The City College Alumnus*, October, 1969, Vol. 65:1, p. 7.
[599] Buell Gallagher, quoted in, "The South Campus Seizure," Tom Ackerman, *The City College Alumnus*, October, 1969, Vol. 65:1, p. 7.

However, as Gallagher attempted diplomacy, the students demanded clear-cut answers, interrupting his letter with the chant, "answer yes or no!"[600] Unsatisfied, again students pushed into the administration building, occupying it for four hours. While the BPRSC occupied the administration building, plastering the walls with signs reading "Free Huey," "Che Guevara," and "Malcolm X University," white leftist students clashed with more conservative white students outside, the latter of whom threatened to raise "an army of students" to evict the occupying BPRSC (Dyer 1990:107). In a symbolic response to the "conditions that deny the very existence of the black and Puerto Rican community" on the City College campus, the BPRSC refused to allow whites entrance to the administrative building throughout their brief occupation. After occupying the administrative offices for about four hours,[601] the BPRSC quietly left through a side entrance, avoiding the attention of journalists, but signaling to the wider City College community that they could "shut this College down if we want to. We'll be back if necessary" (student quoted in Dyer 1990:108).

As Dyer notes, the BPRSC selectively made common cause with white leftists on the City College campus in the late 1960's (1990). Indeed, predominantly white leftists groups such as the Du Bois Club and Students for a Democratic Society, had put similar sets of demands to the college's administration prior to the BPRSC mobilization. In fact, the BPRSC likely drew inspiration for their own Five Demands from the Du Bois Club's six demands. Indeed, dating back to October of 1967, the

---

[600] (ibid.); Dyer (1990:107).
[601] "The South Campus Seizure," Tom Ackerman, *The City College Alumnus*, October, 1969, Vol. 65:1, p. 7.

Communist Party linked and predominantly white Du Bois Club made opposition to racism on and off campus their central organizational agenda.[602] The Du Bois Club's anti-racist agenda included demanding changes in admissions policies and expansion of physical facilities to increase the proportion of "minority group students" at the college, financial subsidies for minority students, and a curriculum for black and Puerto Rican history.[603] In November of 1968, the Du Bois Club amassed 1,600 signatures in support of six demands that would look similar to the Five Demands of the spring of '69. The demands called for a massive expansion of SEEK, in order to attain more proportional representation of minority groups at City College, the rapid building of Senior Colleges to meet the demand for higher education of all high school graduates in the city, stipends for students who needed them.

The broad success of the Du Bois club's signature campaign suggests that many whites on campus were sympathetic to the injustice of the under-representation of black and Puerto Ricans at CUNY. However, the major difference between the six demands of the Du Bois Club and the subsequent Five Demands of the BPRSC was in the demands relating to curriculum. The leftist DuBois Club demanded "that Black, Puerto Rican and labor history be integrated into the curriculum at all levels."[604] According to the most comprehensive contemporary report on the campus takeover

---

[602] Du Bois Clubs were linked to the Communist Party of the USA and existed on campuses all over the country. In 1966, Attorney General Nicholas Katzenbach labeled the Du Bois Club a subversive organization, initiating a movement of students from the Du Bois club to Students for a Democratic Society (SDS); "SDS Take Lead Among Leftists." *The Campus*, October 11, 1966, p. 3.
[603] "Leftist Groups to Stress Campus-Centered Issues." *The Campus*, October 4, 1967, p. 3.
[604] *The Campus*, November 14, 1968, p. 8.

from student journalist Tom Ackerman, the Onyx Society invited a leader from the Du Bois Club to speak before them regarding Du Bois' six demands. Significantly, they did not attempt to make common cause with the communist associated group, simply thanking the Du Bois Club leader after his presentation and letting him go about his way.[605] The BPRSC curricular demand initially called for a School of Black and Puerto Rican Studies, which they conceptually amended to a School of Third World Studies. Thus, the black and Puerto Rican student activists clearly rejected the confluence of interests and conditions the Du Bois Club drew amongst blacks, Puerto Ricans and the working class.

A similar split between white leftists, white liberals and the BPRSC unfolded in the weeks prior to the 1969 campus occupation over the yearly threat of budget cuts from Albany. When Governor Nelson Rockefeller threatened to cut CUNY's budget, Chancellor Bowker threatened a 20% cut in the size of the incoming freshman class university wide, including the College Discovery and SEEK programs. President Gallagher of City College went even further, suggesting the college would be entirely unable to operate on Rockefeller's budget, threatening that the entire academic year would have to be cancelled if more funds were not forthcoming.[606] Students split on strategy, with the predominantly white University Student Advisory Council attempting to mobilize students. On the other hand, the

---

[605] "The South Campus Seizure." Tom Ackerman, *The City College Alumnus*, October, 1969, located in the "Open Admissions," box 2, Archives and Special Collections, The City College of New York.
[606] "Gallagher Threatens Shutdown Because of State Cut in Budget," Tom Ackerman, *The Campus*, February 26, 1969, p. 1.

BPRSC split with the predominantly white student group, calling for a mobilization of the entire community on behalf of funding for higher education. Paul Simms, speaking on behalf of the BPRSC and not as a reporter, stated that disagreements between the BPRSC and the University Student Advisory Council were rooted in the fact that the latter group was committed simply to mobilizing students with tactics that "were far beneath the scale that we were ready to move on."[607]

The BPRSC organized a Saturday rally on March 15, 1969. The rally held on the corner of 125th St. and 7th Ave. in Harlem, brought together close to 1,000 black and Puerto Rican students and community residents, according to Paul Simms' report in the *Tech News*, to protest the Governor's budget cuts.[608] The speakers at the rally included a wide swath of community and activist leaders, most prominently Harlem Congressman Adam Clayton Powell Jr. As Powell accused the Governor and the Mayor of attempting to "perpetuate educational genocide" for threatened cuts to the SEEK program, members from Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) attempted to join the rally, after a parallel rally across the street garnered little support.[609] Simms reported:

> As it became apparent to the SDS leaders that there would be no joint rally, they began their rally as planned, on the opposite corner, for about 20 minutes; then they marched across the street and joined the crowd listening to the speakers of the Coalition (BPRSC). It was generally thought that the presence of the Black Panthers plus other

---

[607] "Other Plans," Unattributed, *The Campus*, February 26, 1969, p. 1.
[608] "Rally in Harlem Hits State Budget Cuts," Paul B. Simms, *The Tech News*, March 19, 1969, p. 1.
[609] (ibid.)

> very militant-looking groups that helped SDS reach their decision to stay on the southwest corner.[610]

Within the intolerable context of racist stigmatization and exclusion that denied their existence at City College, as quoted above, the BPRSC rejected the simple mobilization of students as students. For the BPRSC, the budget cuts that threatened the SEEK program necessitated the mobilization of larger grass roots communities beyond the college's walls as a collective agents to represent within the public sphere the *specific harm* being perpetrated on the black and Puerto Rican Communities.

While the radical white left championed the cause of the BPRSC, even promoting many of the specific demands before the BPRSC formed, the BPRSC also rejected the interpretive conflation of racial and class oppression the predominantly white left made. According to Simms' report:

> During the rally, one spokesman for the Coalition (BPRSC) advised SDS marchers, who were predominantly white, to 'Go into your white neighborhood and try to hold nonviolent seminars for the Northeast regional KKK, because we don't want you coming uptown. We cannot ally ourselves with people we know not to trust.[611]

Within the terms of the budget crisis that threatened to narrow the already very narrow path black and Puerto Ricans had into CUNY in 1969, the BPRSC refused to fold their interests into a coalition that did not recognize the specific workings of racism in the unequal construction of educational citizenship.

The Symbolics of the BPRSC Campus Takeover

---

[610] (ibid.)
[611] (ibid.)

When the BPRSC amassed outside City College's gates in the early morning hours of Tuesday, April 22, 1969, they did not intend to initiate an occupation that would stretch for two weeks. Having steadily amplified their confrontational tactics, beginning with presenting the Five Demands to President Gallagher in the fall of 1968, to rallying outside his office, to occupying his office, to engaging in "hit and run" activities that disrupted classes, to organizing a student strike that was 30% successful. On the BPRSC, organized by the Committee of Ten, intended to test the reaction of campus security, the administration and city police to a takeover action. The students' intention was to lockdown the campus for half a day, again signaling their capacity to disrupt. The disruption would also act as a rehearsal for a sustained campus occupation that would come later in the semester, as long as the Five Demands continued to be unmet. (Dyer 1990:116)[612]

However, as the black and Puerto Rican City College students padlocked themselves inside the college's South Campus, they realized that neither security guards, nor police, nor the college's administration was going to move to evict them. Their aggressive claim over the space would be respected especially by the school's administration. While Gallagher had diplomatically voiced support for the Five Demands for several months, in occupying the campus, the BPRSC forced CUNY's bureaucratic structure to the negotiation table.

---

[612] While Gallagher had since the beginning of the semester voiced support for the general principles of the Five Demands, the power to implement the most radical demand of proportional representation, as he readily acknowledged, lay in the hands of the Mayor and the Governor, the former of whom was in the midst of a reelection campaign. The demand for proportional representation was completely undermined by the budget cuts then being imposed by Rockefeller.

The campus occupation would last two weeks, after which a group of liberal arts students would combine with the Anti-Defamation League and the Jewish Defense League to acquire a legal injunction against the campus occupiers, a legal injunction with which the BPRSC would comply peaceably. While the initial takeover stunned and bewildered faculty, many white students confronted the campus occupiers demanding to be let in, while another group of white students protested the administration's seeming acquiescence to the campus takeover in front of an administrative building on the North Campus. (Dyer 1990:118)

The campus occupation inverted the typical dynamics of exclusion, physically, spatially and symbolically, between the academically elite campus on the hill overlooking Harlem. First, the BPRSC renamed City College, The University of Harlem. Additionally, the BPRSC opened up the campus to the community of Harlem while locking out white students, and most whites in general. More than symbolic gesture, students sent cars through the Harlem neighborhood equipped with speakers calling members of the community to come to The University of Harlem to receive shelter, sustenance, education and medical care.[613] The protesters issued a statement to the press touting the fact they had "fed and sheltered the hungry and the sick of Harlem."[614] Furthermore, the BPRSC, much in line with Simms' vision for a Black

---

[613] "Gallagher Terms Talks With Dissidents 'Useful,'" M.A. Farber, *The New York Times*, April 25, 1969. On the broad array of community services the Black Panther Party and other Black Power groups engaged in beyond the symbolic politics of power for which they are generally remembered, see Nelson (2013).
[614] "Gallagher Terms Talks With Dissidents 'Useful,'" M.A. Farber, *The New York Times*, April 25, 1969.

University, held impromptu classes and tutoring sessions for both college students and neighborhood children in a broad curriculum of Third World Studies.[615]

Indeed, not having planned explicitly to occupy the campus, the BPRSC faced logistical problems that they solved through their integration of the larger community of Harlem into the space of the occupied campus. According to Dyer, "the problem of food was solved by a steady flow of supplies from the surrounding community. Participants gave much of the credit for organizing the food supply to the mother of activist Henry Arce, who in his turn 'could not believe we were getting that much support from our parents and community people'" (Dyer 1990:120). Students set up a daily agenda throughout the occupation that included college lessons to keep up with their studies, and a walk in clinic, where pre-med students gave medical check ups and referrals to Harlem community members. (ibid.:121)

In addition to service, the BPRSC opened up The University of Harlem to the Harlem community in a celebration of black political thought and expression. *The Campus* reported of the two Sundays during the campus occupation: "Crowds of 200 people assembled on the South Campus Lawn heard speeches by outside celebrities, and strike leaders and attended ceremonies of the renaming of the College and its buildings."[616] The BPRSC called such gatherings, "Open House at the University of Harlem."[617] At the fist such open house, Emory Douglas, the Minister of Culture of the Black Panther Party, "called for the restructuring of society and cited the need for

---

[615] (ibid.)

[616] "It May Not Be the Place You Knew…" Ken Sasmor and Tom Foty, *The Campus*, May 6, 1969, p. 5.

[617] (ibid.)

college students to relate to the problems of society."[618] At the same gathering on the South Campus lawn, Mrs. Eldridge Cleaver affirmed the occupation action as "beautiful," and called for a similar action be taken in Central Park. The following Sunday, H. Rap Brown addressed the community, articulating support for the takeover action and appreciation for the BPRSC's renaming of Wagner Hall the H. Rap Brown Hall of Political Thought.[619] James Forman of the National Economic Development Conference, denounced U.S. institutions for unjustly dominating the lives of blacks, Puerto Ricans, Indians and Mexicans. *The Campus* reported of Forman's analysis: "He said the main controls were the military and police, but he emphasized the influence of the Christian church and the 'profit motive' of the corporations on the lives of members of ethnic minorities."[620] Forman went on to urge blacks to "exercise revolutionary leadership," calling on them to "control all facets of American life…" Forman envisioned four groups providing the base for revolutionary action, "students, workers, women, and the unemployed."[621] Also in attendance at the Open Houses were Betty Shabazz, Malcolm X's widow, and Congressman Adam Clayton Powell Jr., who addressed the community from just outside the campus through the campus gates.[622]

---

[618] (ibid.)
[619] (ibid.)
[620] (ibid.)
[621] (ibid.)
[622] Other politicians expressing support for the action included Manhattan Borough President Percy Sutton, and Bronx Borough President Herman Badillo. The latter would become an ally of Mayor Giuliani's in the effort to terminate the Open Admissions policy in the late 1990's, although the policy was already gutted in during the mid 1970's New York City fiscal crisis.

Much like in the lead up to the campus takeover, the BPRSC created a counterpublic space in which the nature of racial oppression, the legitimacy of hegemonic liberalism in the U.S., and the proper enactment and expression of collective power were debated in a format open to the entire black and Puerto Rican communities of Harlem and beyond. While the restriction on the participation of whites limited the broader circulation of discourse, signifying a kind of racial separatism, it also dramatized through inversion the very structures of exclusion the BPRSC were acting to bring down through their Five Demands. The BPRSC also enacted this inversion of political symbols by ritually renaming the buildings on the South Campus for anti-racist and anti-colonial intellectuals and political heroes: "Other buildings were named after Che Guevara (Finley), Malcolm X (Cohen Library), Pedro Albizu Campos (Eisner), Marcus Garvey (Mott), Mao Tse Tung, and Patrice Lumumba. The South Campus Lawn is called Muhammed Ali Field."[623] Thus, through political practice, the BPRSC projected the meanings generated through the critique of civic liberalism that students developed through public discussion in the anti-racist counterpublic in the years leading up to the campus takeover over the meaning of City College as an institution.

In the midst of a broader institutional culture that had labeled many of the BPRSC as too pathological to gain entry to City College without extraordinary measures, the BPRSC rejected the terms of their stigmatization by signifying a revolutionary transformation of the college's meaning. In occupying the City College

---

[623] (ibid.)

campus, valorizing political heroes of anti-colonial and anti-racist struggle, transforming the institution into a community hub while shutting the doors to whites, the BPRSC dramatically recoded the meaning of the space. According to one activist, the opening up of the University of Harlem to the wider Harlem community, occasioned the first time many of the folks living directly across from Finley Hall had ever set foot on campus. (Dyer 1990:119) If the academic arbitrariness of the College's admissions standards systematically excluded blacks and Puerto Ricans, by making The University of Harlem, the BPRSC rejected the legitimacy of that exclusion. But, if the BPRSC dramatized the specificity of their exclusion by excluding whites from The University of Harlem, how can the Five Demands be understood as a claim to equality?

The Nature of the Claim to Equality in the Five Demands

In July of 1969, as a way to resolve the crisis brought on by the BPRSC's campus occupation, the Board of Higher Education formally advanced the target date for universal admission of all New York City High School graduates into CUNY from 1975, as originally set by the 1966 Master Plan,[624] to the fall of 1970. The BHE promulgated six broad aims for the Open Admissions policy:

(a) offer admission to some University program to all high school graduates of the City.
(b) provide for remedial and other supportive services for all students requiring them.
(c) maintain and enhance the standards of academic excellence of the colleges of the University.
(d) result in the ethnic integration of the colleges.

---

[624] In fact, the policy was set in the 1966 revision to the 1964 City University Master Plan (Karabel 1983:33).

(e) provide for mobility for students between various programs and units of the University.
(f) assure that all students who would have been admitted to specific community or senior colleges under the admissions criteria which we have used in the past shall still be so admitted. In increasing educational opportunity for all, attention shall also be paid to retaining the opportunities for students now eligible under present board policies and practices.[625]

The Open Admissions policy represented a compromise solution to the demands for increased access made by the BPRSC and the many forces within the city that found the ethnic quota required to achieve proportional against (as distinct from universal access) reprehensible.

The way in which Open Admissions was structured instantiated a specific logic of educational citizenship. First, and most importantly, Open Admissions ended pernicious zero-sum competition between individuals and ethnic groups over a limited supply of coveted positions within the CUNY system. To resolve the rising inter-group competition, the policy radicalized access, making higher education a universal right of citizenship within the bounds of New York City, rather than an individually or ethno-racially distributed privilege. The policy shift to universal access operated at the boundary of the university, ending the effects of social closure performed by selective admissions. Other aspects of the policy worked to shift the boundary effects operating *within* the institution, altering the categories the university employed to define different segments of its student body. Under the initial structure of Open Admissions, CUNY would no longer make categorical distinctions between admitted students that would be consequential for their pathways within the uiversity.

[625] The Board of Higher Education, Minutes of Meeting, July 9, 1969, quoted in (Gordon 1975:226).

In contrast to the Open Admissions policy, the BPRSC's fourth demand demanded that "the racial composition of all entering classes" at City College "should reflect the Black and Puerto Rican population of New York City high schools" (Dyer 1990:93). In other words, the BPRSC demanded proportional representation, or what was labeled a quota system by its opponents, at City College, the most prestigious senior college within the CUNY system. The Du Bois Club, a mostly white communist linked student group, had already demanded an open admissions policy in conjunction with a massive expansion of SEEK and the necessary increase of senior college branches to accommodate all city residents, especially those from the black and Puerto Rican communities. In view of the Du Bois Club's demand, the BPRSC's demand for proportional representation rather than open admissions has to be understood as neither random nor accidental. In fact, through analysis of the institutional structure of the university, they had concluded that a major danger of increased access would be the ghettoization of black and Puerto Rican students in terminal vocational programs within the junior colleges. (Dyer 1990:122-139) They understood that such an outcome would continue to deny the vast majority of black and Puerto Rican college goers the financial rewards associated with the Bachelors Degree. During negotiations the BPRSC rejected proposals that merely increased access to CUNY without redressing the unequal distribution of prestigious degrees. (ibid.) Thus, the eventual university wide policy that combined open admissions with a commitment to all necessary remedial education that would enable a student to

successfully complete a four-year program, was caused by the BPRSC's combined political praxis.

Because of the BPRSC's rejection of a ghettoized and ghettoizing university, the original Open Admissions policy was quite serious about eliminating accumulated educational inequalities through remedial training *within* the boundaries of CUNY. If educational citizenship is structured unequally on the primary and secondary levels of schooling, CUNY would attempt to wipe out or correct these inequities. The provision for fluid transfer between the different programs and divisions of CUNY (policy goal e, above), articulated with the provision for remedial education was to elimine *internal boundaries* within CUNY that could effect social closure. Prior to Open Admissions, students transferring from Junior Colleges, or even the Night Session at City College were subject to academically stringent admission criteria. The Open Admissions policy attempted to institute seamless transfers from a junior to senior colleges within the CUNY system, making admission to a CUNY junior college a realistic stepping-stone to the ultimate goal of the BA degree.[626] These policy principles combined to make a four-year college degree an equal right of citizenship, one based on the ideal of equal outcome not equal opportunity.

The commitment to "maintain and enhance the standards of academic excellence of the colleges of the University" (policy goal c, above), addressed both the "traditional constituents'" concern with academic excellence as well as the

---

[626] Indeed, as Lavin and Hyllegard show, many Open Admissions students continued past four-year degrees, successfully completing graduate and professional degrees (Lavin and Hyllegard 1996).

BPRSC's interest in gaining access to the genuine cultural and symbolic capital endowed in a City College degree. The BPRSC feared, as much as the so-called traditional constituents of the college and university, the possibility of CUNY becoming a diploma mill. In fact, The Five Demands concerned the equalization of substantive education experiences rather than a simple equalization of the distribution of credentials. The Five Demands did not, as many have suggested, create a conflict between the values of democratic access and academic excellence, or access and merit; from the perspective of the BPRSC, access without excellence would defeat the purpose. In fact, seeking cultural autonomy for blacks, Puerto Ricans, and other Third World subjects, the BPRSC sought rigorous academic training understanding it as the precondition for autonomous cultural production.

In addition, the Open Admissions policy stipulated that any student who would have been admitted to a senior college under competitive admissions would still be so admitted under Open Admissions (policy goal f, above). Thus, although a matter of fairness, the policy made sure that those who already benefited from CUNY would continue to do so, discouraging existing constituents of the university from interpreting the policy in zero-sum terms. As a universal policy, Open Admissions would not require tradeoffs from anyone or any group.

From the standpoint of its institutional logic, Open Admissions was to eliminate the social closure effects performed by selective admissions. The policy's commitment to remedial education for those who needed it, fluid articulation between the different divisions facilitating student progress towards the BA degree, and the

overall commitment to academic excellence was to bring down internal boundaries drawn between types of students pre-defined as differently endowed with "merit" depending on their mode of access to the college. Not only was access to a BA degree defined as a right of citizenship for all New Yorkers, institutionally, CUNY would assume that every student *should* achieve a BA degree unless they themselves chose otherwise. The institution would no longer draw boundaries between its students, endowing them differently with "merit." The goal of Open Admissions was to produce substantive educational equality.

Thus, against separatist understandings of their actions, more than equal access to higher education, the BPRSC demanded the right to be *educated equally*. They were concerned with Open Admissions that Black and Puerto Rican Students would be segregated into junior or community colleges, while the four-year colleges would remain lily white. The BPRSC's doggedly held demand for equal outcomes, rather than a mostly symbolic broadened access,[627] resulted in one of the most radical aspects of the Open Admissions policy, at least in its first five years of existence, the institutional commitment on the part of CUNY to remedial education such that a four-year degree would be attainable by all CUNY students. Thus, with CUNY and City College embracing not only equal access in higher education, but equal outcomes, the BPRSC, through its critical and political practice, was able to accomplish one of the

[627] On the "cooling-out" function of junior and community colleges, that give disadvantaged youth an institutional space after high school graduation that in fact offers few tangible benefits in increased life chances, but rather functions to suck up their potentially disruptive and rebellious energies as they came to readjust their life-expectations, see Clark (2008:18-49).

most radical democratizations of educational opportunity and outcomes in U.S. history.

Currents of White Student Reaction

In the months and years leading up to the South Campus takeover, the BPRSC had critically engaged with a hegemonic liberal political culture and structure of citizenship that coded blacks and Puerto Ricans as pathological and unworthy of equality because of their own inabilities to measure up. In refusing the terms of their own pathologization, and the encompassing regime of citizenship that legitimated itself by marking them as deficient, the BPRSC's enactment of The University of Harlem imaginatively built an alternative world in which black and Puerto Rican students' agencies would be realized as ideal citizens.

As the political theorist Linda Zerilli argues, political claims, or in this case, claims for and about citizenship, "have a fundamentally *anticipatory* structure: we posit the agreement of others, that is, we perform an act of closure" (Zerilli 2005:171). As Zerilli emphasizes, political action is fundamentally risk bound, because, "whether others do agree" with our claims and the meaningful world which they imply, "is another matter and part of the openness of democratic politics itself" (ibid.) In theorizing "acts of citizenship," Isin (2008) affirms the riskiness of political action by emphasizing its *dialogical* character. Isin writes, "The moment of the enactment of citizenship, which instantiates constituents, also instantiates other subjects from whom the subject of a claim is differentiated. So an enactment inevitably creates a scene where there are selves and others defined in relation to each

other" (Isin 2008:18). Acts of citizenship then are *events* that constitute a scene of regard in which claims realize their force only when the meaningful world they imply is acknowledged and counted as a common world by those others who look on. (Zerilli 2005:178)[628] The imaginative claims are only one side of the question, as Isin writes: "If indeed acts of citizenship are fundamental ways of being with others, how do beings *decide* between solidaristic (generous, magnanimous, beneficent, hospitable, accommodating, understanding, loving), agonistic (competitive, resistant, combative, adverse) and alienating (vengeful, revengeful, malevolent, malicious, hostile, hateful) acts towards others?" (Isin 2008:19).

Indeed, the Five Demands and the BPRSC campus occupation enacted a scene of regard, where onlooking actors could either affirm or reject the desire to live in a world in which The University of Harlem existed, and black and Puerto Rican New Yorkers had the right to be educated equally. While the BPRSC imagined an alternative world of educational citizenship where they had an equal right to be educated, they did not make their demands or claims to this world in a political-cultural vacuum. Even though the BPRSC's imaginings resulted in a universalist policy, within the scene of regard they constituted through their acts, the world they imagined in which they could be equal agents, was ultimately misrecognized and denied. Importantly, the rejection of this projected world of equal educational

[628] Zerilli writes, following Arendt, "If an argument has 'force,' it is more as the vehicle of an imaginative 'seeing' (to stay with Arendt's own language) than an irrefutable logic" (2005:144).

citizenship undermined the legitimacy of the Open Admissions policy, regardless of its implementation as public policy.

While the symbolic undermining of Open Admissions would cement quickly, initial white student reaction to the campus occupation was mixed. One portion of the white student left linked to SDS and socialist and communist groups, affirmed the principles of the occupation from afar, even pushing for an open admissions policy rather than the proportional representation implied in the logic of the fourth demand. However, some members of SDS warned that the campus occupation risked a larger white student backlash.[629] Another strand of the white left who called themselves The City College Commune, attempted to join the BPRSC occupation. However, when they were rebuffed and told to do their own thing by the BPRSC, the Commune found adjacent campus buildings to occupy. (Dyer 1990:121-2). While the BPRSC occupation was based on collective discipline and established a daily agenda and structures for communal space and living, the mostly white City College Commune, used the occupation to party and make press releases claiming, "we are all niggers (sic), that so long as some people are the victims of oppression, none of us are free."[630]

Additionally, a strong current of students not associated with the left at City College also supported the BPRSC takeover. For instance, during a meeting of students and faculty, which lasted for eight hours in the Great Hall on the second day

---

[629] "SDS Sits it Out," Mark Brandys, *The Campus*, April 25, 1969, p. 3.
[630] "Engineers Plan Classes as Talks Continue," *The Campus*, April 25, 1969, p. 2; "Klapper Hall: The Inside Story," *The Campus*, April 25, 1969, p. 3.

of the campus occupation, white students cheered the arrival of 200 members of the BPRSC.[631] *The Campus* described the dramatic scene:

> At the meetings outset, approximately 200 members of the Black and Puerto Rican Student Community (BPRSC) marched two abreast down the center aisle of Great Hall, raising their fists and chanting, 'Black Power, Black People,' while white students in the audience applauded them. They seated themselves on the steps of the podium, flanked by two students holding the green, black and red Third World flag and the single-starred red white and blue Puerto Rican flag.[632]

However, the students present at this meeting were likely liberal arts and humanities majors of the South Campus. Amongst the majority of engineering majors and faculty of the North Campus, President Gallagher's response to close the school entirely while the BPRSC occupied the South Campus was firmly rejected.

While some engineering students expressed sympathy with the BPRSC cause, citing the need to keep up with demanding classes as the reason for defying Gallagher's order to cancel classes,[633] a spokesperson for the engineering students described the BPRSC as, "a small neo-Nazi minority is depriving us of our education."[634] Indeed, an attorney for the Jewish Defense League, one of the groups who brought the injunction against the BPRSC that brought an end to the campus occupation before a conclusion to negotiations over the Five Demands could be reached, expressed a similar sentiment. He was quoted by *The Campus* as stating of

---

[631] "Great Hall Debate: The Long Hot Simmer," Bill Apple and Michele Ingrassia, *The Campus*, April 25, 1969, p. 4.
[632] (ibid.)
[633] "700 Engineering Students Ignore C.C.N.Y. Closing," Murray Schumach, *The New York Times*, April 26, 1969.
[634] "Gallagher Terms Talks With Dissidents 'Useful,'" M.A. Farber, *The New York Times*, April 25, 1969.

the occupying students, "it's obvious that the militants are trying to destroy the university that they're part of. These are the lawbreakers and Dr. Gallagher is conferring with them."[635]

While white student reaction to the BPRSC action was mixed, the racial encoding of the event would become entrenched in the volatile weeks that followed the cessation of the occupation. On May 7th, two days after the resumption of classes, and after a morning of sporadic violence, some of which was likely instigated by local high school students, Buell Gallagher again closed the college. However, this time many white students refused the order from Gallagher to vacate the campus. *The Times* reported that white students pushed against the college's security guard who was attempting to close the campus gate. One student yelled, "We could keep this open if we wanted to," as another asserted, "It's our campus, why doesn't everybody move onto the campus. It's our campus. Come on in."[636]

As white students poured onto the campus in protest of its closing by the administration, some seized the BPRSC's posters, tearing them apart. As white students chanted, "We want it open, we want it open," black students arrived on the scene and, according to the *Times'* report, a tense standoff ensued that was finally broken by a violent "free-for-all."[637] The *Times* labeled the melee a "racial fight," describing it as a "bloody pitched battle between club-swinging black youth and

---

[635] "South Campus Seizure Ends After 2 Weeks," *The Campus*, May 6, 1969, p. 3.
[636] "C.C.N.Y. Shut Down, Then Racial Clash Injures 7 Whites," Sylvan Fox, *The New York Times*, May 8, 1969.
[637] (ibid.)

white counterprotesters."[638] In all, according to the *Times*, at least seven students, all of whom were white, were injured in the incident.[639] Many white students cheered Gallagher's announcement that the college would be open for classes the following day with adequate police presence to insure that further violence did not erupt. According to the *Times* the incident and its fallout suggested, "there was strong evidence that large numbers among the college's 20,000 students had reached a point of angry frustration about events at the college and were determined to keep the school open even at the price of further violence."[640] One student was quoted as saying, "the general consensus is that everybody is sick and tired of this. We want the college open."[641]

While the *Times'* report framed black students as the aggressors in the violent melee, subsequent discussions on campus revealed a sharp divide between whites and blacks. In a remarkable report on the way the New York City press covered the fight, *The Campus* found, "Accounts of what occurred near Wagner continue to depend on whether the eyewitness describing the event is black or white."[642] According to Betty Rawls, an English Professor associated with the SEEK program and spokesperson for the black and Puerto Rican faculty at City College, "the coverage" of the violent brawl by "the general press wasn't fair at all. Every time the press refers to the black

---

[638] (ibid.)
[639] (ibid.)
[640] (ibid.)
[641] (ibid.)
[642] "Blacks on Press: Still Yellow," David Seifman, *The Campus*, May 16, 1969, p. 7.

and Puerto Rican students at the College, they call them dissidents."[643] For Rawls, the way in which the mainstream press made black protesters into extremists mirrored the disrespect it showed for black academics. She asserted, "they referred to a white faculty member and called him by his right title, assistant professor. But when they refer to Professor Cartey they don't use his title."[644]

Indeed, according to insider sources for *The Campus*' story on the media coverage of the melee, the city's press had minimized the reciprocal nature of the violence between blacks and whites. *The Campus* quoted one journalist as noting, "At Wagner Hall, in all the stories, the fact that the whites were armed was buried. It was buried in my story, too."[645] According to black reporters for *The Times* interviewed for *The Campus*' story, the paper of record's reporting signaled dissension in the newsroom between white and black reporters about the nature of the story. According to *The Campus*, white reporters at *The Times* rejected that their reporting did or could exhibit a racial bias. Sylvan Fox asserted he, as a white reporter, could objectively cover racial politics, stating, "If I didn't think so I would quit my job."[646] To Fox, it was not the bias of the reporter that was at issue, but rather the biases of the political actors being covered. After being told by members of the BPRSC, "go away pig," when he tried to interview them, Fox concluded, "Newspapers and newspapermen (sic) are always misunderstood by any partisan group. A misunderstanding exists on

[643] (ibid.)
[644] (ibid.)
[645] (ibid.)
[646] (ibid.)

their (the BPRSC's) part. They believe that there exists some institutional hostility towards them . . ."[647]

While one black reporter for the *Times*, Tom Johnson, agreed that a good reporter could and would minimize the biases in her reporting, even suggesting that some black journalists were skewing their coverage in favor of the BPRSC, based on her reading of the coverage Betty Rawls dismissed Johnson's claim. For Rawls, fundamentally, "there's a difference" in perspective between white and black observers.[648] Another black reporter agreed with Rawls, arguing that black reporters were sensitive to the prevailing anti-black bias because they had to learn to navigate it in order to advance their careers. He said, "Black reporters are more sensitive. They have to be. It's their professional survival."[649] According to this unnamed source, black and Puerto Rican students were wise to be suspicious of the objectivity of the coverage they would receive in the mainstream press. *The Campus* wrote, "He added that the suspicions of the black students is justified," and, moreover, "nearly every reporter interviewed agreed that there was some basis for the hostility between the black students and white reporters."[650] Indeed, one unnamed white reporter from the *New York Post* confirmed this view, stating of white reporters in general, "There is a built in bias, it's widespread; more among the older reporters, less among the younger ones. We make a whole bunch of mistakes. More than we'll admit."[651]

---

[647] (ibid.)
[648] (ibid.)
[649] (ibid.)
[650] (ibid.)
[651] (ibid.)

In this way, the mainstream press framed the BPRSC as violent militants attempting to achieve particularistic and separatist aims via illegitimate means. While the mainstream press' reporting and editorializing on events underestimated the extent of broader currents of white student support for the Five Demands,[652] they encoded the events purely within the terms of racial conflict. According to Tom Johnson, what the mainstream media coverage lacked was a deeper sense of historical trends and context. He said, "We need a new kind of journalist for this kind of thing. The press should deal in terms of concepts and trends instead of covering crisis after crisis separately. Generally we react to crisis. We react to CCNY the same way we do to a fire. We count the bodies."[653] Indeed, rarely if ever did appeared the BPRSC's basic claim to the right of equal access to higher education for black and Puerto Rican New Yorkers that underlay the Five Demands and the campus occupation appear in the New York press.

The Paradoxical Success of Open Admissions

In a series of meticulous studies, sociologist David Lavin and colleagues have shown the Open Admissions policy, especially in its radically democratic structure in its first few years of existence, vastly increased associate's and bachelor's degrees awarded amongst all segments of the population, especially Blacks and Latinos. In offering genuine pathways to a college degree, Open Admissions significantly increased the lifetime earnings of thousands of people who otherwise would have

---

[652] Compare, "A Balance Sheet on Campus Turmoil as Blacks Now Battle Whites," Fred Hechinger, *The New York Times*, May 11, 1969; "Watching and Waiting Mark White Reaction," Mark Brandys, *The Campus*, May 16, 1969, p. 3.
[653] "Blacks on Press: Still Yellow," David Seifman, *The Campus*, May 16, 1969, p. 7.

been shut out of a college education, furthermore passing on the cultural capital earned through education to the next generation. Importantly, according to Lavin, Open Admissions achieved its radical expansion of opportunity without affecting the academic standards applied to students subsequent to admission (see Lavin et al. 1981, Lavin and Hyllegard 1996). As public policy, while perhaps expensive, Open Admissions was remarkably successful, making a decisive difference in the lives of thousands of New Yorkers who would never have set foot inside a college classroom otherwise.

However, in contrast to its remarkable achievements, Open Admissions came to be perceived by many as "the death of City College," an institution once known as the "proletarian Harvard" because of its talented student population made up largely of working class students of Eastern European Jewish origins. In spite of radically democratizing access and outcomes in higher education, Open Admissions was greatly curtailed in 1975 when pathways from the two year Junior Colleges to the four year Senior Colleges, were significantly narrowed within the CUNY system. The new two-tiered system effectively blocked many students from minority backgrounds from pursuing the bachelor's degree, completely undermining the radical expansion of citizenship the policy had initially instantiated (Lavin and Hyllegard 1996:238).

Indeed, studies like the several conducted by Lavin and colleagues rarely if ever entered the public's imagination, as a discourse of failure immediately emerged around the policy (Biondi 2012:139-40). Writing in 1970, with no information about the outcomes, or any other objective facts of a policy not yet implemented, Nathan

Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan labeled acceding to the BPRSC's demands for increased access to CUNY, a "disaster." Glazer and Moynihan assumed that those not admitted to City College were not worthy of admission, and that relaxing admissions standards, let alone universalizing admission, would completely undermine the purpose of the school. Of Open Admissions they wrote:

> It would destroy a major resource by which poor groups in the past had improved themselves. That resource, the City College of New York, was created not by a distinguished faculty, or lavish resources, or prestige based on class and connections but by only one thing—a student body selected on the basis of academic qualifications alone. Destroy that, and City College would mean no more for those who attended it than a hundred community colleges around the country. (Glazer and Moynihan 1970:liv)

The backlash against the policy mounted quickly, as various authors, securing the authority of their knowledge through their credentials as professors within CUNY, and not through objective analysis of policies and outcomes, argued Open Admissions meant the downfall of CUNY, and more broadly, the entire system of higher education in the United States (Heller 1973; Wagner 1976).

Echoing the administrators of Columbia, who a half-century earlier objected to City College directly admitting students into the college with no high school diploma, Vice President Spiro Agnew labeled CUNY's credentials in the era of Open Admissions, "bargain basement diplomas," predicting that the university would be turned into a "four-year community college" (Agnew, quoted in Karabel 1972:38). As noted above, the majority of City College students, during the year the policy was

announced but before it was implemented, opposed the Open Admissions policy.[654] And indeed, the Chancellor who did so much to help bring about Open Admissions, Albert Bowker, argued racial resentment drove white flight out of CUNY during the era of Open Admissions, and the "traditional constituents" of City College and the larger university, the largely Jewish alumni, drove the perception of the institution's precipitous decline. Bowker stated, "most of the people who write about this (the exodus from the institution of its "traditional constituents") are City College graduates who are mad" (Bowker, quoted in Biondi 2012:139). As extraordinary numbers of black and Puerto Rican students who otherwise would have had no opportunity to attend a college or university entered CUNY, a wider public perception locked in that a City College degree, once seen as the legitimate mark of the intellectual elite, was now worthless. One observer articulated the conventional wisdom that "Open Admissions killed City College" by stating the policy, "shuffles its poor students through four years of over-crowded and under-taught classes—then pushes them out the door with a worthless diploma" (Frank Rich, quoted in Biondi 2012:139).

Although, in fact a universal policy that objectively offered opportunity to whites in addition to blacks, Puerto Ricans, and other ethno-racial minorities, the Open Admissions policy was widely understood in racial terms. For instance, City College graduate Irving Kristol wrote, "open admissions had precious little to do with education itself, and almost everything to do with ethnic and racial politics" (quoted

---

[654] "Poll: Students Oppose Open Admissions." *The Campus*, November 19, 1969, p. 1.

in Karabel 1972:38). Indeed, as the rising discourse of failure engulfed the policy, undermining its legitimacy in the minds and memories of the broader public (especially the white portions of the public), the increasingly pervasive idea that Open Admissions ruined the once great “proletarian Harvard,” became another way of saying “blacks and Puerto Ricans ruined City College.”

Conclusion

In the midst of negotiations over the BPRSC’s Five Demands, before the agreement on Open Admissions, various parties suggested a two tiered admission system, one tier operating according to established procedures, the other tier proportionally targeting students representing various underrepresented ethnic groups within the City College student population. The two-tier proposal was quickly branded a quota system, and resonating with the long history of anti-Semitic Jewish quotas in higher education in the Northeast, the admission scheme was quickly rejected by the New York City Mayoral candidates. However, before its rejection, Howard Adelson, a doggedly conservative faculty member, who had been acting concertedly for years to undermine expanded enrollment and decreased selectivity at City College, criticized the proposed scheme as un-American. Adelson wrote, “A quota system is not only alien to the American way of life but is particularly distasteful to the citizens of New York City who struggled so long against it.”[655]

At first blush, Adelson’s critique of the proposed quota system appears to be a straightforward defense of the color-blind ideals of the United States’ bedrock civic

[655] “Open Admissions” box 2, Archives and Special Collections, The City College of New York.

nationalism, of its exceptionally liberal creed. Adelson rhetorically establishes civically liberal political culture and institutions as the timeless essence of America, securing color-blind meritocracy as "the American way of life" beyond the temporal workings of politics. Adelson calls on people to reject ethno-racially conscious policies because to be against color-blind liberalism is to violate the very essence of America and thus be un-American. Yet, in the very same sentence, in referring to the admissions quotas that depressed the number of Jews, blacks and other ethno-racial minorities in elite colleges, Adelson suggests that New Yorkers in particular should be outraged by ethno-racially conscious policies because they had to struggle so ferociously to defeat them. Thus, on the one hand, Adelson attempts to remove the question of meritocracy to a timeless and unquestionable symbolic place, the cultural value that is the very origin and foundation of American life, while simultaneously celebrating the fact that whatever institutions operate in a formally color-blind way do so because of the great political struggles of ethno-racial minorities in the United States; political struggles to achieve particular visions of democracy and citizenship. Thus, Adelson readily admits that the color-blind meritocracy at the core of liberal regimes of citizenship has not been an essential fact of social organization for all of the USA's history. While Adelson attempts to remove the question from politics, closer examination reveals, that for better or for worse, the contemporary regime of educational citizenship was in fact the direct product of political struggle.[656]

---

[656] There's a doubling of the effect of the profits of the universal in this rhetorical move in that it places what Adelson covets, the continuation of current admissions practices, beyond

In disregarding both the pathetically short supply of positions in CUNY relative to the skyrocketing postwar demand for higher education, and how this fact resulted in the particular exclusion of communities of color from institutions of higher education, Adelson's statement ignored and erased a double crisis in postwar citizenship. Moreover, by positioning the defenders of (arbitrary) academic standards at City College as quintessentially American in their liberal ideals, Adelson drew doubled the material boundary of social closure excluding most blacks and Puerto Ricans from higher education in New York, with a symbolic boundary that positioned such communities outside the putative liberal consensus. At first glance, a straightforward defense of civic liberalism in the United States, Adelson's statement in fact is a quintessential example of *color-blind racism* (Bonilla-Silva 2003), defining the defenders of meritocracy as ideal American citizens, while reinforcing the symbolic and material boundaries against blacks and Puerto Ricans, all while never mentioning race.

As acts of citizenship (Isin 2008) the Five Demands and campus occupation constituted a scene in which the claim of black and Puerto Rican students to equality would be evaluated, and either recognized or denied. Indeed, Jewish students at City College did not enter this scene of regard unencumbered by history. Once having been positioned similarly to blacks by the structures of educational citizenship in the United States, Jews ascended to a privileged position in the postwar reconstruction of

---

the pale of history, on the one hand, while simultaneously suggesting that all "citizens" have an interest in preventing a quota system.

the field of higher education around principles of meritocracy (Karabel 2005). However, acts of citizenship still have the power, in principle, to make the world anew. Jewish students could interpret the BPRSC's claims to be educated equally either as a new world of radically democratic citizenship, or as a threat to their ethno-racial interests.

What changed most significantly for City College students from the 30's to the 60's, was the space of political-cultural meaning within which students came to understand controversies and events, and within which they interpreted their own identities and interests. Compared to the 30's and 40's, the politics and tactics of the BPRSC were not so exceptional. However, what was transformed was the ability of both Jewish and black students to see a world in which the radical expansion of educational access for everyone represented a democratic achievement of the highest order. A once broad, creative, and robustly critical political culture at City College drastically narrowed in the 1950's, depriving students of an expansive political imagination. Where students once battled fiercely over, but also within, a common political imaginary, struggling to define the meaning of democracy, the narrowed political culture of the 1950's left very few student who could recognize the claim to equality enacted by the BPRSC. While structurally, the BPRSC was successful in radically altering CUNY, making it accessible, at least for five short years, to the vast majority of college aged New Yorkers. Symbolically, Open Admissions was stillborn. Bereft of legitimacy, Open Admissions is most often remembered today as a misguided educational handout to an undeserving population. In fact, it should be

remembered as a remarkably successful realization of a radically democratic vision of citizenship.

References

Abbott, Andrew. 1988. *The System of Professions: An Essay on the Division of Expert Labor*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Alexander, Jeffrey. 2004. "Cultural Pragmatics: Social Performance Between Ritual and Strategy," *Sociological Theory* vol. 22(4):527-73.

Alba, Richard. 2006. "On the Sociological Significance of the American Jewish Experience: Boundary Blurring, Assimilation, and Pluralism," *Sociology of Religion* 67, December: 347-58.

Alba, Richard, and Victor Nee. 2005. *Remaking the American Mainstream: Assimilation and Contemporary Immigration*. Harvard University Press.

Anderson, Benedict. 1991. *Imagined Communities, Revised Edition*. London, UK: Verso.

Anthony, David. 2006. *Max Yergan: Race Man, Internationalist, Cold Warrior*. annotated edition. NYU Press.

Armstrong, Elizabeth A., and Mary Bernstein. 2008. "Culture, Power, and Institutions: A Multi-Institutional Politics Approach to Social Movements." *Sociological Theory* 26(1):74-99.

Arnesen, Eric. 2012a. "Civil Rights and the Cold War at Home: Postwar Activism, Anticommunism, and the Decline of the Left," *American Communist History*, Vol. 11:1, pp. 5-44.

Arnesen, Eric. 2012b. "The Final Conflict? On Scholarship of Civil Rights, the Left and the Cold War," *American Communist History*. Vol. 11:1, pp. 63-80.

Attewell, Paul and David E. Lavin. 2007. *Passing the Torch: Does Higher Education for the Disadvantaged Pay Off Across the Generations?* New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation.

Auyero, Javier. 2001. *Poor People's Politics: Peronist Survival Networks and the Legacy of Evita*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Ballard, Allen B. 1973. *The Education of Black Folk: the Afro-American Struggle for Knowledge in White America.* New York, NY: Harper & Row.

Bender, Thomas. 1987. *New York Intellect: A History of Intellectual Life in New York City, from 1750 to the Beginnings of Our Own Time*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Benford, Robert D., and David A. Snow. 2000. "Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment." *Annual Review of Sociology* 26:611-39.

Bell, Daniel. 1976. *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society: A Venture in Social Forecasting*. New York, NY: Basic Books, Reissue Edition.

Bell, Daniel. 2000 *The End of Ideology: On the Exhaustion of Political Ideas in the Fifties*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2nd Edition.

Bendix, Reinhard. 1964. *Nation-Building and Citizenship*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Berger, Peter L. and Thomas Luckmann. 1966. *The Social Construction of Reality*. New York, NY: Anchor Books.

Berkowitz, David S.; E. Franklin Frazier; Robert D. Leigh. 1948. "Inequality of Opportunity in Higher Education; A Study of Minority Group and Related Barriers to College Admission," published by New York State, Temporary Commission on the Need for a State University, Albany, NY: Williams Press.

Berrol, Selma C. 1989. *Getting Down to Business*. New York, NY: Greenwood Press.

Biondi, Martha. 2003. *To Stand and Fight: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Postwar New York City.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Biondi, Martha. 2012. *The Black Revolution on Campus*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Blau, Peter M.; and Otis Dudley Duncan. 1967. *The American Occupational Structure*. New York, NY: Free Press.

Blauner, Robert. 1972. *Racial Oppression in America.* New York, NY: Harper & Row, Publishers.

Block, Fred L. 1987. *Revising State Theory: Essay in Politics and Postindustrialism*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.

Bloemraad, Irene; Anna Korteweg and Gökce Yurdakul. 2008. "Citizenship and Immigration: Multiculturalism, Assimilation, and Challenges to the Nation-State." *Annual Review of Sociology*, 34:153-79.

Bonilla-Silva, Eduardo. 1997. "Rethinking Racism: Toward a Structural Interpretation," *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 62:3, pp. 465-480.

Bonilla-Silva, Eduardo. 2003. *Racism Without Racists*. New York, NY: Rowman & Littlefield.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1988. *Homo Academicus*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1990a. *The Logic of Practice*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1990b. *In Other Words*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1991. *Language and Symbolic Power*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1993. *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1996. *The Rules of Art.* Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1998a. *Practical Reason*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1998b. *The State Nobility: Elite Schools in the Field of Power*. 1st ed. Stanford University Press.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 2000. *Pascalian Meditations.* Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Brint, Steven G.; and Jerome Karabel. 1989. *The Diverted Dream: Community Colleges and the Promise of Educational Opportunity in America, 1900-1985*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Brodkin, Karen. 1998. *How Jews Became White Folks and What That Says About Race in America*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Brubaker, Rogers. 1989. *Immigration and the Politics of Citizenship in Europe and North America.* Lanham, MD: University Press of America.

Brubaker, Rogers. 1992. *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Brubaker, Rogers. 1996. *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe.* Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Brubaker, Rogers. 2004. *Ethnicity without Groups*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Calhoun, Craig. 1991. "The Problem of Identity in Collective Action," Pp. 51-75 in *Micro-Macro Linkages in Sociology*, edited by Joan Huber. Newbury Park, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.

Calhoun, Craig. 1997. *Nationalism*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Calhoun, Craig. 2005. "Introduction" to, *The Idea of Nationalism: A Study in Its Origins and Background*, by Hans Kohn, New York, NY: Transaction Publishers.

Calhoun, Craig. 2012. *The Roots of Radicalism*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Chen, Anthony. 2006. "'The Hitlerian Rule of Quotas': Racial Conservatism and the Politics of Fair Employment Legislation in New York State, 1941-1945." *The Journal of American History* 92(4): 1238-1264.

Chen, Anthony S. 2009. *The Fifth Freedom: Jobs, Politics, and Civil Rights in the United States, 1941-1972*. Princeton University Press.

Clark, Burton R. 2008. *On Higher Education*. Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins Press.

Clark, Kenneth Bancroft. 1965. *Dark Ghetto: Dilemmas of Social Power*. New York, NY: Harper & Row.

Cohen, Jean L. 1985. "Strategy or Identity: New Theoretical Paradigms and Contemporary Social Movements." *Social Research* 52(4):663-716.

Cohen, Robert. 1997. *When the Old Left Was Young: Student Radicals and America's First Mass Student Movement, 1929-1941*. Oxford University Press, USA.

Collins, Randall. 1979. *The Credential Society*. Waltham, MA: Academic Press Inc.

Collins, Randall. 2004. *Interaction Ritual Chains.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Crossley, Nick. 2002. *Making Sense of Social Movements*. Philadelphia, PA: Open University Press.

Dawson, Michael C. 2003. *Black Visions: The Roots of Contemporary African-American Political Ideologies*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Dawson, Michael C. 2013. *Blacks In and Out of the Left*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Denning, Michael. 1997. *The Cultural Front*. London, UK: Verso.

Dobbin, Frank. 1994. *Forging Industrial Policy: The United States, Britain, and France in the Railway Age.* Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Dobbin, Frank. 2001. "Why the Economy Reflects the Polity: Early Rail Policy in Britain, France, and the United States." In *The Sociology of Economic Life*, ed. Mark Granovetter and Richard Swedberg. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing.

Dyer, Conrad M. 1990. "Protest and the Politics of Open Admissions: The Impact of the Black and Puerto Rican Students' Community (of City College)." Dissertation located at Archives and Special Collections, The City College of New York, New York.

Edsall, Mary, and Thomas Byrne Edsall. 1991. *Chain Reaction*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company.

Eliasoph, Nina. 1998. *Avoiding Politics: How Americans Produce Apathy in Everyday Life*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Ellingson, Stephen. 1995. "Understanding the Dialectic of Discourse and Collective Action: Public Debate and Rioting in Antebellum Cincinnati." *American Journal of Sociology* 101(1):100-44.

Emirbayer, Mustafa. 1992a. "The Shaping of a Virtuous Citizenry: Educational Reform in Massachusetts, 1830-1860," *Studies in American Political Development* 6: 391-419.

Emirbayer, Mustafa. 1992b. "Beyond Structuralism and Voluntarism: The Politics and Discourse of Progressive School Reform, 1890-1930," *Theory and Society* 21: 621-64.

Emirbayer, Mustafa and Ann Mische. 1998. “What is Agency?” *The American Journal of Sociology* 103(4):962-1023.

Emirbayer, Mustafa and Mimi Sheller. 1999. Publics in History,” *Theory and Society*, 28:145-197.

Espeland, Wendy Nelson and Mitchell L. Stevens. 1998. “Commensuration as a Social Process.” *Annual Review of Sociology* 24:313-43.

Feagin, Joe R. 2006. *Systemic Racism: A Theory of Oppression*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Feagin, Joe R. 2013. *The White Racial Frame: Centuries of Racial Framing and Counter-Framing, 2nd Edition*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Ferguson, Roderick A. 2004. *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Foner, Nancy. 2000. *From Ellis Island to JFK*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Fourcade, Marion. 2009. *Economists and Societies: Discipline and Profession in the United States, Britain, and France, 1890’s to 1990’s.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Fox, Cybelle and Thomas A. Guglielmo. 2012. “Defining America’s Racial Boundaries: Blacks, Mexicans and European Immigrants, 1890-1945.” *American Journal of Sociology*, 118:2, pp. 327-379.

Fraser, Nancy. 1989. *Unruly Practices*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Fraser, Nancy. 1997. *Justice Interruptus.* New York, NY: Routledge.

Fraser, Steven, and Gary Gerstle. 1989. *The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order, 1930-1980*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Freeman, Joshua B. 2000. Working Class New York. New York, NY: The New Press.

Friedland, Roger and John Mohr. “The Cultural Turn in American Sociology,” Pp. 1-68 in *Matters of Culture: Cultural Sociology in Practice*, edited by Roger Friedland and John Mohr. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Gellner, Ernest. 1983. *Nations and Nationalism*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Gerteis, Joseph and Alyssa Goolsby. 2005. "Nationalism in America: the Case of the Populist Movement." *Theory and Society* 34:197-225.

Gitlin, Todd. 1993. "From Universality to Difference: Notes on the Fragmentation of the Idea of the Left," *Contention* vol. 2/2.

Gitlin, Todd. 1996. *Twilight of Common Dreams,* New York, NY: Owl Books.

Glazer, Nathan. 1978. *Affirmative Discrimination: Ethnic Inequality and Public Policy*. New York, NY: Basic Books, 2nd Edition.

Glazer, Nathan and Daniel Patrick Moynihan. 1970. *Beyond the Melting Pot, 2nd Edition*. Boston, MA: MIT Press.

Gleason, Philip. 1980. "American Identity and Americanization," in *Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups*, ed. Stephan Thernstrom, Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press.

Glenn, Evelyn Nakano. 2004. *Unequal Freedom: How Race and Gender Shaped American Citizenship and Labor.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Glenn, Evelyn Nakano. 2015. "Settler Colonialism as Structure: A Framework for Comparative Studies of U.S. Race and Gender Formation." *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity.* 1:1, pp. 52-72.

Goldberg, Chad Alan. 2003. "Haunted by the Specter of Communism: Collective Identity and Resource Mobilization in the Demise of the Workers Alliance in America." *Theory and Society* 32:725-773.

Goldberg, Chad Alan. 2008. "T.H. Marshall Meets Pierre Bourdieu: Citizens and Paupers in the Development of the U.S. Welfare State." *Political Power and Social Theory*, Vol. 19:83-116.

Goldstein, Eric L. 2007. *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race, and American Identity*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Gorelick, Sherry. 1975. *Social Control, Social Mobility and the Eastern European Jews: Public Education in New York City, 1880-1924*. Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University.

Gorelick, Sherry. 1981. *City College and the Jewish Poor*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Gordon, Sheila C. 1975. "The Transformation of The City University of New York, 1945-1970." Doctoral Dissertation, United States -- New York: Columbia University.

Gramsci, Antonio. 1971. *Selection from the Prison Notebooks*. New York, NY: International Publishers.

Greenfeld, Liah. 1993. *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Greenstone, J. David. 1993. *The Lincoln Persuasion*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Guglielmo, Thomas A. 2003. *White on Arrival.* Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Gumport, Patricia J. ed. 2007. *Sociology of Higher Education*. Philadelphia, PA: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

Gutiérrez, Ramón A. 2004. "Internal Colonialism: An American Theory of Race," *Du Bois Review*, 1:2, pp. 281-295.

Habermas, Jürgen. 1989. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Hall, Jacquelyn Dowd. 2005. "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past." *The Journal of American History* 91(4):1233-1263.

Hart, Stephen. 1996. "The Cultural Dimension of Social Movements: A Theoretical Reassessment and Literature Review." *Sociology of Religion* 57(1):87-100.

Hartz, Louis. 1955. *The Liberal Tradition in America*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company.

Hattam, Victoria. 2004. "Ethnicity: An American Genealogy." In *Not Just Black and White: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on Immigration, Race, and Ethnicity in the United States*, eds. N. Foner and G. Frederickson. New York, NY: Russel Sage Foundation.

Hattam, Victoria. 2007. *In the Shadow of Race: Jews, Latinos, and Immigrant Politics in the United States*. Chicago, IL: University Of Chicago Press.

Heidenheimer, Arnold J. 1981. "Education and Social Security Entitlements in Europe and America" in *Development of Welfare States in Europe and America*. ed.Peter Flora and Arnold J. Heidenheimer. Livingston, NJ: Transaction Publishers.

Heller, L.G. 1973. *The Death of the American University*. New Rochelle, NY: Arlington House.

Herman, Ellen. 1995. *The Romance of American Psychology: Political Culture in the Age of Experts.* Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Hofstadter, Richard. 1989. *The American Political Tradition: And the Men Who Made It*. New York, NY: Vintage, Reissue Edition.

Holy, Thomas C. 1962. "A Long-Range Plan for the City University of New York, 1961-1975," published by, *Board of Higher Education, City of New York*, New York, NY: Local Government Publication.

Honig, Bonnie. 2001. *Democracy and the Foreigner*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Higham, John. 1984. *Send These to Me: Immigrants in Urban America*. Revised. Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

Higham, John. 1988. *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925*. 2nd ed. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Hunter, Ian. 1996. "Assembling the School." In *Foucault and Political Reason*, New York, NY: Routledge.

Isin, Engin F. 2008. "Theorizing Acts of Citizenship," in *Acts of Citizenship*, edited by Engin F. Isin and Greg M. Nielsen, London: Zed Books.

Jacobson, Matthew Frye (1998) *Whiteness of a Different Color*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.

Jencks, Christopher and Riesman, David. 1968. *The Academic Revolution*. The University of Chicago Press.

Jenkins, Richard. 2004. *Social Identity, 2nd Edition.* New York, NY: Routledge.

Joppke, Christian. 1999. *Immigration and the Nation-State: The United States, Germany, and Great Britain.* Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Joppke, Christain. 2005. *Selecting by Origin: Ethnic Migration in the Liberal State*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Kane, Anne E. 1997. "Theorizing Meaning Construction in Social Movements: Symbolic Structures and Interpretation during the Irish Land War, 1879-1882." *Sociological Theory* 15(3):249-76.

Karabel, Jerome. 1972a. "Open Admissions: Toward Meritocracy or Democracy?" *Change*, Vol. 4:4, pp. 38-43.

Karabel, Jerome. 1972b. "Perspectives on Open Admissions." *Educational Record*, Vol. 53:1, pp. 30-44.

Karabel, Jerome. 1983. "The Politics of Structural Change in American Higher Education: The Case of Open Admissions at the City University of New York," in Hermanns, Harry, et al. ed. *The Compleat University.* Cambridge, MA: Schenkman Publishing Company.

Karabel, Jerome. 1984. "Status-Group Struggle, Organizational Interests, and the Limits of Institutional Autonomy." *Theory and Society* 13(1): 1-40.

Karabel, Jerome. 2006. *The Chosen: The Hidden History of Admission and Exclusion at Harvard, Yale, and Princeton*. Boston MA: Mariner Books.

Katz, Michael B. 1987. *Reconstructing American Education*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Katz, Michael B. 1989. *The Undeserving Poor*. New York, NY: Pantheon Books.

Katznelson, Ira and Margaret Weir. 1985. *Schooling for All: Class, Race, and the Decline of the Democratic Ideal*. New York, NY: Basic Books.

Kaufman, Jason. 2004. "Endogenous Explanation in the Sociology of Culture," *Annual Review of Sociology*, vol. 30:335-57.

Kaufmann, Eric P. 2004. *The Rise and Fall of Anglo-America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Knotterus, J. David. 1987. "Status Attainment Research and Its Image of Society." *American Sociological Review*. 52(2):113-21.

Kohn, Hans. 1957. *American Nationalism: An Interpretation*. New York, NY: MacMillan.

Kolchin, Peter. 2002. “Whiteness Studies: The New History of Race in America,” *The Journal of American History,* Vol. 89:1, pp. 154-173.

Lamont, Michéle. 1992. *Money, Morals, Manners: The Culture of the French and American Upper Class*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Lamont, Michéle. 2000. *The Dignity of Working Men: Morality and the Boundaries of Race, Class, and Immigration.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Lamont, Michéle and Virág Molnár. 2002. “The Study of Boundaries in the Social Sciences.” *Annual Review of Sociology* 28:167-95.

Lassiter, Matthew D. 2006. *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Lavin, David E., Alba, Richard D. and Silberstein, Richard A. 1981. *Right Versus Privilege: The Open Admissions Experiment at the City University of New York*. Free Press

Lavin, Professor David E., and David Hyllegard. 1996. *Changing the Odds: Open Admissions and the Life Chances of the Disadvantaged*. 1st ed. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Lee, Orville. 1999. “Social theory across disciplinary boundaries: Cultural studies and sociology,” *Sociological Forum* vol. 14(4):547-581.

Levine, David O. 1986. *The American College and the Culture of Aspiration, 1915-1940*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Levine, Steven B. 1980. “The Rise of American Boarding Schools and the Development of a National Upper Class.” *Social Problems* 28: 63-94.

Lichterman, Paul. 1998. “What Do Movements Mean? The Value of Participant Observation.” *Qualitative Sociology* 21(4): 401-18.

Lieberson, Stanley, and Mary C. Waters. 1988. *From Many Strands: Ethnic and Racial Groups in Contemporary America.* New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Lipset, Seymour Martin. 1979. *The First New Nation: The United States in Comparative Perspective*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company.

Loss, Christopher. 2012. *Between Citizens and the State: The Politics of American Higher Education in the 20th Century.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Loveman, Mara. 1999. “Is ‘race’ Essential?” *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 64:6.

Luker, Kristin. 1985. *Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

McAdam, Doug. 1982. *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

McAdam, Doug. 1996. “The Framing Function of Movement Tactics: Strategic Dramaturgy in the American Civil Rights Movement” in *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements*, edited by Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy and Mayer Zald. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

McAdam, Doug, Sidney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly. 2001. *Dynamics of Contention*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

McDermott, Monica and Frank L. Samson. 2005. “White Racial and Ethnic Identity in the United States.” *Annual Review of Sociology*, 31:245-61.

Marshall, T.H. 1964. *Class, Citizenship, and Social Development: Essays by T.H. Marshall*. Westport, CN: Greenwood Press.

Melucci, Alberto. 1985. “The Symbolic Challenge of Contemporary Movements.” *Social Research* 52(4):789-816.

Melucci, Alberto. 1994. “A Strange Kind of Newness: What’s ‘New’ in New Social Movements?” Pp. 101-130 in *New Social Movements*, edited by Enrique Laraña, Hank Johnston, and Joseph R. Gusfield. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.

Melucci, Alberto. 1995. “The Process of Collective Identity,” Pp. 41-63 in *Social Movements and Culture*, edited by Hank Johnston and Bert Klandermans. Minneapolis MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Moyn, Samuel. 2014. “Imaginary Intellectual History,” ch. 6 in *Rethinking Modern European Intellectual History*. Ed. Darrin M. McMahon and Samuel Moyn. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Myer, John W. 1977. "The Effects of Education as an Institution." *The American Journal of Sociology*. Vol. 83:1, pp. 55-77.

Meyer, John W. et al. 1979. "Public Education as Nation Building in America: Enrollments and Bureaucratization in the American States, 1870-1930." *The American Journal of Sociology*. 85: 591-613.

Meyer, John W., Francisco O. Ramirez, David John Frank, and Evan Schofer. 2007. "Higher Education as an Institution." In *Sociology of Higher Education: Contributions and their Contexts*, ed. Patricia J. Gumport, Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Nelson, Alondra. 2013. *Body and Soul: The Black Panther Party and the Fight against Medical Discrimination*. Minneapolis, MN: The University of Minnesota Press.

Neumann, Florence Margaret. 1984. "Access to Free Public Higher Education in New York City: 1847-1961." Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Sociology, City University of New York.

Ngai, Mae M. 2004. *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Offe, Claus. 1985. "New Social Movements: Challenging the Boundaries of Institutional Politics." *Social Research* 52(4):817-68.

Oliver, Pamela E. and Hank Johnston. 2000. "What a Good Idea! Ideologies and Frames in Social Movement Research." *Mobilization: An International Journal* 4(1):37-54.

Ortner, Sherry B. 1994. "Theory in Anthropology since the Sixties." Pp. 372-411 in *Culture/Power/History*, edited by Nicholas B. Dirks, Geoff Eley and Sherry B. Ortner. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Perrin, Andrew J. 2006. *Citizen Speak: The Democratic Imagination in American Life*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Podair, Jerald E. 2002. *The Strike That Changed New York: Blacks, Whites, and the Ocean Hill-Brownsville Crisis*. New Have, CT: Yale University Press.

Polletta, Francesca. 2006. *It Was Like a Fever*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Polletta, Francesca. 2008. "Culture and Movements." *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*. 619:78-96.

Polletta, Francesca and James M. Jasper. 2001. "Collective Identity and Social Movements." *Annual Review of Sociology* 27:283-305.

Rana, Aziz. 2010. *The Two Faces of American Freedom*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Readings, Bill. 1996. *The University in Ruins*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Reed, Isaac Ariail. 2011. *Interpretation and Social Knowledge: On the Use of Theory in the Human Sciences*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Rieder, Jonathan. 1987. *Canarsie: The Jews and Italians of Brooklyn Against Liberalism*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Roediger, David. 1991. *The Wages of Whiteness*. London, UK: Verso Books.

Roediger, David. 2002. *Colored White*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Roediger, David R. 2005. *Working Towards Whiteness*. New York, NY: Basic Books.

Rogin, Michael. 1987. *Ronald Reagan the Movie*. Berkeley, CA: The University of California Press.

Rogin, Michael (1996) *Blackface, White Noise*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Rosanvallon, Pierre. 2013. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Rudy, Willis. 1949. *The College of the City of New York: A history, 1847-1947*. New York, NY:City College Press.

Schrecker, Ellen. 1986. *No Ivory Tower: McCarthyism & The Universities.* Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Scott, Daryl Michael. 1997. *Contempt and Pity: Social Policy and the Image of the Damaged Black Psyche, 1880-1996*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press.

Scott, James C. 1998. *Seeing Like a State*. New Haven, CT: Yale University.

Scott, Joan W. 1991. “The Evidence of Experience,” *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 17:4, pp. 773-797.

Sewell, William H. Jr. 1980. *Work and Revolution in France*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Sewell, William H., Jr. 1990. “Collective Violence and Collective Loyalties in France: Why the French Revolution Made a Difference.” *Politics & Society* 18(4):527-52.

Sewell, William H., Jr. 1992. “A Theory of Structure: Duality, Agency, and Transformation.” *American Journal of Sociology* 98(1): 1-29.

Sewell, William H., Jr. 2005. *Logics of History*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Sherwood, Daniel A. 2014. “Pierre Bourdieu as Social Movement Theorist,” paper presented at the *Junior Theorists Symposium*, Berkeley, California, August 15, 2014.

Shklar, Judith. 1991. *American Citizenship*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Skocpol, Theda. 1985. "Cultural Idioms and Political Ideologies in the Revolutionary Reconstruction of State Power: A Rejoinder to Sewell." *The Journal of Modern History* 57(1):86-96.

Skocpol, Theda. 1995. *Social Policy in the United States: Future Possibilities in Historical Perspective.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Skrentny, John D. 1996. *The Ironies of Affirmative Action: Politics, Culture, and Justice in America.* Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Sleeper, Jim. 1991. *The Closest of Strangers: Liberalism and the Politics of Race in New York.* New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company.

Smith, Wilson; and Thomas Bender. 2008. *American Higher Education Transformed, 1940-2005: Documenting the National Discourse*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Snow, David A. 2004. “Framing Processes, Ideology, and Discursive Fields.” Pp. 380-412 in *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements*, edited by David A. Snow, Sarah A. Soule, and Hanspeter Kriesi. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.

Snow, David A., E. Burke Rochford Jr., Steven K. Worden, and Robert D. Benford. 1986. "Frame Alignment Processes, Micromobilization, and Movement Participation." *American Sociological Review* 51:464-81.

Snow, David A. and Robert D. Benford. 1992. "Master Frames and Cycles of Protest." Pp. 133-155 in Frontiers in Social Movement Theory, edited by Aldon D. Morris and Carol McClurg Mueller. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Somers, Margaret R. 2008. *Genealogies of Citizenship: Markets, Statelessness, and the Right to Have Rights*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Soysal, Yasemin. 1994. *Limits of Citizenship: Migrants and Postnational Membership in Europe.* Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Smith, Rogers. 1997. *Civic Ideals*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Smith, Rogers. 2003. *Stories of Peoplehood*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press

Spillman, Lynette. 1997. *Nation and Commemoration: Creating National Identities in the United States and Australia.* Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Steinberg, Marc W. 1998. "Tilting the Frame: Considerations on Collective Action Framing from a Discursive Turn." *Theory and Society* 27:845-72.

Steinberg, Marc W. 1999. "The Talk and Back Talk of Collective Action: A Dialogic Analysis of Repertoires of Discourse among Nineteenth-Century English Cotton Spinners." *American Journal of Sociology* 105(3):736-80.

Steinberg, Stephen. 1977. *The Academic Melting Pot*. New York, NY: Transaction Publishers.

Steinberg, Stephen. 1989. *The Ethnic Myth*. *Updated and Expanded Edition*. Boston MA: Beacon Press.

Strayer, Joseph. 1944. "Legislative Document No. 60." State of New York.

Stevens, Mitchell L.; Elizabeth A. Armstrong; and Richard Arum. 2008. "Sieve, Incubator, Temple, Hub: Empirical and Theoretical Advances in the Sociology of Education." *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol. 34:127-51.

Sugrue, Thomas J. 2008. *Sweet Land of Liberty*. New York, NY: Random House.

Swidler, Ann. 1986. “Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies.” *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 51, April, pp. 273-86.

Synnott, Marcia Graham. 1979. *The Half Opened Door*. Westport, CN: Greenwood Press.

Takaki, Ronald. 1987. “Reflections on Racial Patterns in America.” Pp. 24-35 in *From. Different Shores*, edited by Ronald Takaki. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Tarrow, Sidney. 1998. *Power in Movement, 2nd Edition*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Tavory, Iddo; and Nina Eliasoph. 2013. *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 118(4):908-942.

Taylor, Charles. 1971. “Interpretation and the Sciences of Man.” *The Review of Metaphysics* 25(1):3-51.

Taylor, Charles. 1994. “The Politics of Recognition,” Pp. 25-73 in *Multiculturalism*, edited by Amy Gutman. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Taylor, Charles. 2004. *Modern Social Imaginaries*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Taylor, Verta and Nella Van Dyke. 2004. “’Get Up, Stand Up’: Tactical Repertoires of Social Movements.” Pp. 263-93 in *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements*, edited by David A. Snow, Sarah A. Soule, and Hanspeter Kriesi. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.

Thelin, John R. 2004. *A History of American Higher Education*. Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

Theoharis, Jeanne; and Komozi Woodard. 2003. *Freedom North: Black Freedom Struggles Outside the South*, *1940-1980*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.

Tilly, Charles. 1978. *From Mobilization to Revolution*. New York, NY: Random House.

Tilly, Charles. 1998. *Durable Inequality*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Tilly, Charles. 2006. *Regimes and Repertoires*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Touraine, Alain. 1985. "An Introduction to the Study of Social Movements." *Social Research* 52(4): 749-87.

Traub, James. 1994. *City on a Hill: Testing the American Dream at City College*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.

Trow, Martin. 2010. *Twentieth-Century Higher Education: Elite to Mass to Universal*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Tsay, Angela; Michéle Lamont, Andrew Abbott, Joshua Guetzkow. 2003. "From Character to Intellect: Changing Conceptions of Merit in the Social Sciences and Humanities, 1951-1971", *Poetics*, 31:23-49.

Ture, Kwame and Charles V. Hamilton. 1992. *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation.* New York, NY: Vintage.

Vaisey, Stephen. 2009. "Motivation and Justification: A Dual-Process Model of Culture in Action." *American Journal of Sociology* 114(6): 1675-1715.

Von Eschen, Penny M. 1997. *Race Against Empire, 1937-1957*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Wacquant, Loïc. 1995. "The Pugilistic Point of View: How Boxers Think and Feel About Their Trade", *Theory and Society*, vol. 24(4):489-535.

Wagner, Geoffrey. 1976. *The End of Education*. South Brunswick and New York: A.S. Barnes and Company.

Walzer, Michael. 1987. *Interpretation and Social Criticism*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Warner, Michael. 2002. *Publics and Counterpublics.* Cambridge, MA: Zone Books.

Weber, Max. 1946. *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Wedeen, Lisa. 2002. "Conceptualizing Culture: Possibilities for Political Science." *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 96(4):713-28.

Wedeen, Lisa. 2008. *Peripheral Visions: Publics, Power, and Performance in Yemen.* Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

Wechsler, Harold S. 1977. *The Qualified Student: A History of Selective College Admission in America*. Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press.

Williams, Rhys H. 2004. "The Cultural Contexts of Collective Action: Constraints, Opportunities, and the Symbolic Life of Social Movements." Pp. 92-115 in *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements*, edited by David A. Snow, Sarah A. Soule, and Hanspeter Kriesi. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.

Wilson, William Julius. 1987. *The Truly Disadvantaged*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Wimmer, Andreas. 2013. *Ethnic Boundary Making: Institutions, Power, Networks*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Yack, Bernard. 1996. "The Myth of the Civic Nation." *Critical Review: A Journal of Politics and Society*. Vol. 10:2, pp. 193-211.

Young, Michael P. 2002. "Confessional Protest: The Religious Birth of U.S. National Social Movements." *American Sociological Review* 67(5):660-88.

Zald, Mayer N. 2000. "Ideologically Structured Action: An Enlarged Agenda for Social Movement Research." *Mobilization: An International Journal* 5(1):1-16.

Zerilli, Linda. 2005. *Feminism and the Abyss of Freedom*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

Zerubavel, Eviatar. 1996. "Lumping and Splitting: Notes on Social Classification." *Sociological Forum* 11(3):421-33.