

Allison Shultes
Black Liberation 1969

**From Behind Closed Doors:
The Crisis of Control within the Faculty in Response to the 1969 SASS Occupation**

On January 13th, 1969, the President of Swarthmore College delivered an address to students and faculty gathered in Clothier Hall concerning faculty action in the face of a “crisis” — the occupation of the admissions office by Black students advocating for changes to create a viable Black community on campus.

The occupation began on January 9th, when members of the Swarthmore Afro-American Student Society (SASS) peacefully gained access to the office to protest the admissions processes of the College. As ‘business as usual’ stopped, the faculty met in “long sessions,” according to Swarthmore College President Courtney Smith, “to consider conscientiously and imaginatively the best way to achieve what I believed to be the underlying concerns of SASS.”¹ Meanwhile, white students outside the admissions office mobilized around SASS demands, organizing student plenary sessions and radical and moderate caucuses to debate student power, the efficacy of direct action and the legitimacy of the decision-making organs of the College. For three days prior to Smith’s Clothier Address, the bi-weekly student newspaper, *The Phoenix*, had produced daily supplements reporting on campus events under headlines like “Radical Action Contemplated” and “Radicals Plan Direct Action.”² The academic life of the institution had only temporarily ceased, but many members of the community felt, like Professor of Religion Linwood Urban, that “no guarantee could be given of an ‘immediate return to the Kingdom of God’”³ — that, as Smith stated on the 13th, Swarthmore had “lost something precious”⁴ which would be impossible to recover in the days that followed the occupation.

On January 16th, Smith suffered a fatal heart attack; although it was quickly found by the coroner that the President had suffered from coronary heart disease, Smith’s death was attributed — both inside and outside the College — to the actions of the Black students of SASS. His final

¹ Smith, Courtney. “Smith’s Statement to the Faculty and Students, Jan. 13 1969.” Black Liberation 1969 Database, Swarthmore College Library.

² *The Phoenix Supplement*, Jan. 10 1969 and Jan. 15 1969.

³ Faculty Minutes 1/27/1969.

⁴ Smith, Courtney. “Smith’s Statement to the Faculty and Students, Jan. 13 1969.” Black Liberation 1969 Database, Swarthmore College Library.

address on the campus climate was subsequently reproduced in accounts of the protests both within and beyond the College:

We have lost something precious at Swarthmore — the feeling that force and disruptiveness are just not our way [...] if there are any that now think that direct action should eventually be used for Black Studies, or Student Week, or any proposals that might come out of Student Week, or the Sex Rule, or Dormitory Autonomy [...] I have to say that I seriously doubt their faith in education⁵

Especially when considered next to earlier statements made by the President, Smith's Clothier address expresses anxiety insofar as he saw SASS action as posing a direct threat to the College and to the faculty itself. As in news accounts where the president's death was attributed to Black student action, Smith's address casts the faculty as a body under attack, so much so that "one faculty member[']s youngest child did not recognize him when he got home for a quick meal" in between meetings.⁶ His reference not only to the takeover but to other issues over which faculty control had recently been challenged or eroded — dormitory autonomy, the sex rule, and Student Week — all suggest that the radicalization and politicization of the student population was a major source of concern during the takeover; an earlier statement made in a faculty meeting in which Smith stated that "we are now faced with the *larger problem* of student power and participatory democracy"⁷ after the Student Council declared its support of SASS further underscores the perceived threat of increased student authority at the expense of the faculty. This perception surfaced throughout the faculty meetings in the spring of 1969, as on January 24th, when a faculty member described SASS as *conservative* because the group didn't explicitly address issues of student power.⁸

Faced with this "crisis of legitimacy"⁹ in being forced to immediately address student demands, the faculty responded by regulating its channels of communication and characterizing SASS in ways that upheld its own authority. In enforcing closed meetings and negotiating with SASS only indirectly through faculty liaisons, the faculty attempted to protect its status from the threat of Black student power — and student power more generally. Refusing to acknowledge the central role played by SASS in generating institutional change at the College, it enabled the

⁵ Smith, Courtney. "Smith's Statement to the Faculty and Students, Jan. 13 1969." Black Liberation 1969 Database, Swarthmore College Library.

⁶ Smith, Courtney, "Smith's Statement to the Faculty and Students, Jan. 13 1969." Black Liberation 1969 Database, Swarthmore College Library.

⁷ Faculty Minutes 1/09/1969. *emphasis added*.

⁸ Faculty minutes 1/24/1969.

⁹ Pryor, Frederic. "An Open Letter to the Faculty." Black Liberation 1969 Database, Swarthmore College Library.

“erasure” of the Crisis of 1969 from the collective memory of the institution of Swarthmore: since faculty narratives focused exclusively on shoring up its own authority, the story of SASS’s role was never written to begin with.

“The Winds of Change Were Sweeping Swarthmore”

SASS member Russell Frisby ’72 arrived at Swarthmore College in the fall of 1968, at a time when “the winds of change were sweeping Swarthmore.”¹⁰ Although it was considered by those both within and outside to be an idyllic liberal haven, the College had been transitioning through a period of widely-felt student discontent over conservative social rules and policies even prior to Frisby’s matriculation. Students had been mobilized for close to two years around reports on student life and admissions and educational policy, which had catalyzed widespread debate over old administrative policies on dormitory autonomy, sex and alcohol alongside discussions on the relevance of the Swarthmore education itself.¹¹ In 1966, the Swarthmore Afro-American Student Society (SASS) had been founded, increasing the visibility of two of the largest classes of Black students to attend the College after the receipt of a \$275,000 Rockefeller Grant in 1964 to increase Black enrollment.¹² In the fall of 1967, classes had been suspended for a seven-day “Student Week” in which proposals relating to the teaching of Marxism and Black liberation, the awarding of credit for off-campus activities, and the involvement of students in hiring visiting faculty members had been debated in student groups.¹³ There was an awareness of “the new, uncertain time ahead” amongst the faculty and administration.

Meanwhile, colleges and universities across the country were experiencing similar student movements demanding relevant educational experiences along with greater social autonomy and student power. The 1968 Orangeburg Massacre at South Carolina State College and the deaths on Bloody Tuesday during protests at San Francisco State University in December 1968 threw questions of race relations on college and university campuses into the national spotlight, as students protesting for improved conditions for Blacks and minorities sustained injuries and, in some cases, died due to police brutality. Institutes of higher education could not remain insulated from an destabilized national context, which included a steady escalation of

¹⁰ Russell Frisby, “Russell Frisby Interview Transcription.” Black Liberation 1969 Database, Swarthmore College Library.

¹¹ See *The Egg* from Dec. 1 through Dec. 7 1967, a student publication produced during the Student Week. Friend’s Historical Library, Swarthmore College, Box 96.

¹² Hargadon, Fred. “Admissions Report,” September 1968. Black Liberation 1969 Database, Swarthmore College Library.

¹³ See especially the Dec. 5 1967 issue of *The Egg*.

involvement in the Vietnam War and an increasingly vocal protest movement following the Tet Offensive in 1968; the assassination of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr. in February 1965 and April 1968; and the rise in popularity of the Black Panther Party and separatist ideology resulting from a sense that peaceful non-violence had not achieved Black Americans the equality they sought in the Civil Rights Movement. The takeover of Parrish followed in a wake of similar building takeovers, the most popular of protest strategies at colleges and universities during the Black Campus Movement — a struggle at American colleges and universities between 1965 and 1972 in which students “requested, demanded, and protested for a relevant learning experience.”¹⁴ Students at Brooklyn College occupied the registrar’s office in 1969 demanding greater enrollment of minority students,¹⁵ and at Northwestern University, students had taken over the bursar’s office for 38 hours demanding greater enrollment of Blacks from Chicago neighborhoods, more faculty of color, and better financial support for minority students.¹⁶

Amidst these larger patterns of change, Swarthmore was far from exceptional in its handling of race relations on campus. Although it had a reputation as “one of the most liberal institutions anywhere,”¹⁷ the conservative atmosphere on campus in the ‘60s and ‘70s was a rude awakening from what many Black students had experienced growing up. Joyce Frisby Baynes ’68, one of the original Seven Sisters of SASS and a co-founder of the organization, said that upon her matriculation in 1964 that she found the College to be far less integrated than her working-class neighborhood in Springfield, Massachusetts:

even though my high school was integrated and my neighborhood where I lived in Springfield was an integrated environment, I felt myself not being really a totally embraced by different groups on campus¹⁸

With no Black Cultural Center or Black Studies program, no Black administrators, and only one black faculty member (Asmarom Legesse of the Anthropology department), Swarthmore fit the “lily-white” profile of many of the other institutions across the country — particularly in the

¹⁴ Rogers, Ibram. The Black Campus Movement: Black Students and the Radical Reconstitution of Higher Education, 1965-1972. (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012). p. 2

¹⁵ Biondi, Martha. “Brooklyn College Belongs to Us: The Transformation of Higher Education in New York City,” The Black Revolution on Campus. (Berkley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2012). p. 114-142.

¹⁶ Biondi, Martha. “A Turbulent Era of Transition: Black Students and a New Chicago,” The Black Revolution on Campus. p. 79-114.

¹⁷ “SASS Sass,” *Philadelphia Magazine*. Feb. 1969. Black Liberation 1969 Database, Swarthmore College Library.

¹⁸ Joyce Frisby Baynes, “Joyce Frisby Baynes Interview Transcription.” Black Liberation 1969 Database, Swarthmore College Library.

South — facing demands for change.¹⁹ According to Rogers, the demands put forth by Black student activists at other institutions in the 1968-1969 school year shared many goals with SASS: calls for increased enrollment of Black students, the establishment of support structures for the new wave of “risk” students, the designation of BCCs and creation of Black Studies programs, and the hiring of more Black professors and administrators all situated Swarthmore not as an exceptionally liberal institution, as it liked to believe, but as fairly typical of institutions across the country that failed to see the incorporation of Black students beyond the framework of a racial paternalism.

At Swarthmore, the main catalyst for SASS’s occupation of the admissions office was the group’s interaction with the Dean of Admissions, Fred Hargadon, on issues of Black student enrollment: increasing the enrollment of Black students in order to create a “viable Black community” at the College constituted one of their central demands, along with hiring a Black Dean of Admissions and Black counselor and the dismissal of Dean Hargadon.²⁰ Throughout the implementation of these various changes, SASS requested a participatory role with decision-making powers; it also demanded the inclusion of a Black perspective at all decision-making levels of the College.

The publication of a working paper on Black admissions at the College, which had been compiled without consulting SASS — despite a proposal by the student group the previous year that the Admissions Committee collaborate with the student group in compiling the report — triggered SASS’s early attempts to work within the power structure of the College to address concerns relating to Black admissions. The group had first publicly raised concerns relating to Black student enrollment in a *Phoenix* article written by Chairman Clinton Etheridge and Vice-Chairman Don Mizell in early October, which requested that administrators account for the Rockefeller Grant the College had been awarded considering the stagnant enrollment figures for Black students in recent class years.²¹ Additionally concerning to SASS was the publication of confidential and identifying information concerning current Black students at the College and the placement of the report on reserve in McCabe, the College’s main library. Even after SASS objected to the placement of the report in an October 18th letter to the Dean of Admissions and

¹⁹ See Turner, Jeffery A. “Southern Campuses in 1960,” *Sitting In and Speaking Out: Student Movements in the American South 1960-1970*. (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2010). pp. 13-43.

²⁰ SASS, “Demands,” Dec. 23 1969. Black Liberation 1969 Database, Swarthmore College Library.

²¹ Etheridge, Clinton and Don Mizell, “Letters to the Editor: Open Letter,” *The Phoenix Supplement*, Oct. 15 1968.

demanded a joint role with the Admissions Policy Committee in reformulating the report, Hargadon refused to remove the document or to engage with the group.²² This drove SASS to publish a second letter criticizing Hargadon's management of Black admissions — after first seeking redress through other channels — in December; ten days later, after failing to hear from the administration, they issued a set of clarified demands to President Smith. After an unsatisfactory meeting with the president on January 7th, which they had previously declared as their set deadline for an acceptable administrative response to their December demands, the Black students entered the admissions office, and the faculty was called to respond.

“They refused to listen, refused to see, refused to hear”: The Faculty “Responds”

As the faculty struggled to respond to SASS demands, its initial attempts to protect itself from student criticism depended on regulating and controlling narratives of its actions in meetings. Without set policies in place, faculty reporting to the student body was haphazard during the first three days of the crisis: comments to student reporters interested in the “tone” of the meetings were frequently made anonymously, and individuals freely expressed personal — and oftentimes controversial — views during student meetings.²³ After a conflict over the agenda of the January 10th faculty meeting, the circulation of “differing accounts” of the controversy spurred Dean of Men Robert Barr to a “defense of recent faculty meetings” in a student plenary the next day.²⁴ Meanwhile, white students were calling for increased communication from the faculty,²⁵ requesting that meetings be open to student reporters or recorded to increase transparency at the same time that they were looking for an excuse to engage in direct action in support of increased student power.²⁶ The faculty was pressed to demonstrate a commitment to transparency beyond its issued statements expressing its concern with communication.

²² SASS, “[SASS’ Statement, 10/18/1968].” Black Liberation 1969 Database, Swarthmore College Library.

²³ For example, on the first day of the occupation, Russian professor Thompson Bradley spurred student action and activism by insisting that “business cannot go on as usual” and recommending that plenaries and caucuses focus on “the expanded role of student power in college structures and decisions.” (“Meeting Shifts to Clothier,” *The Phoenix Supplement*, Jan. 10 1969.)

²⁴ “Barr Speaks at Afternoon Plenary Session,” *The Phoenix Supplement*, Jan. 12 1969.

²⁵ See, for example, the motion passed by the student plenary on January 13th:

The students believe the injustice of barring student observers from faculty meetings has become especially obvious in the recent crisis. We feel that this faculty action violates the stated desire to increase student-faculty communication on the issues. We therefore protest the faculty’s decision in favor of closed meetings, and we urge that the faculty meetings in the future be open to observers. (“Resolutions of the Student Body,” *The Phoenix Supplement*, Jan. 16 1969. p. 2.)

²⁶ See, for example, “Radical Action Contemplated,” *The Phoenix Supplement*, Jan. 10 1969; “Radicals Plan Direct Action,” *The Phoenix Supplement*, Jan. 15 1969.

January 1969 wasn't the first time Swarthmore students had requested access to the faculty meetings and the faculty had moved to protect their privacy: two months earlier in November 1968, Student Council pushed for student observers to meetings dealing with the recent reports of the Student Life Committee (SLC) and Student Affairs Committee (SAC).²⁷ Faculty opposition was explained as "the possibility of being identified — perhaps unclearly or unfairly — with particular views," which "might prevent some faculty members from participating fully."²⁸ However, in the spring of 1969, the fear of being identified with racist or socially conservative views doesn't seem to have motivated many of the faculty of the College: some of the most explicit statements on the ill-suited fit between Black students and Swarthmore College were openly relayed to the campus community. Professor of astrology Peter van de Kamp referred to January's "impertinent, inexcusable and unforgettable events" in a Chaplin seminar, where he felt comfortable stating his view that

any student, or group of students [...] who issue demands, or carry out, support, or condone any action which interferes with the functioning of the College *do not belong here*. They [...] have obviously been misled, or brainwashed, or do not understand the spirit and meaning of Swarthmore.²⁹

Similar sentiments of Black students' "unbelonging" were issued in open letters by Professor Raymond Hopkins, who stated that SASS's "unconstitutional actions are not justified,"³⁰ and Professor Elisa Aseusio, who insisted that "there are thousands of colleges in the country to choose from if they [members of SASS] don't agree in some aspects of our college" and recommended that SASS members "continue their studies peacefully if they want to get their degrees."³¹ Professor Pryor, meanwhile, criticized the "slave mentality" of white student activists in front of a meeting of the student plenary,³² and following the crisis, Classics Professor Helen North and Vice President of the College Joseph Shane each wrote letters to the *Wall Street Journal* insisting that an article on the occupation had given the Black students of SASS too

²⁷ See "SC Acts on Faculty Meeting, Drafts Observer Resolution," *The Phoenix*, Nov. 5 1968.

²⁸ Roberts, Ken, "Vote on Student Observers Tabled at Faculty Meeting," *The Phoenix*, Nov. 5 1968.

²⁹ van de Kamp, Peter. "Statement by Peter van de Kamp," Feb. 11 1969. Black Liberation 1969 Database, Swarthmore College Library. *Emphasis added*.

³⁰ Hopkins, Raymond. "Open Letter from Raymond Hopkins, Jan. 15 1969," Jan. 15 1969. Black Liberation 1969 Database, Swarthmore College Library.

³¹ Aseusio, Elisa. "Some Thoughts Regarding Asmarom Legesse's Open Letter, Elisa Aseusio." ND. Black Liberation 1969 Database, Swarthmore College Library.

³² "Faculty Reports to Morning Plenary," *The Phoenix Supplement*, Jan. 14 1969.

much credit for inciting change.³³ Many of the more outspoken members of the faculty within its meetings thus seemed to feel no qualms about making their opinions public.

Rather than fearing identification with certain beliefs, anxiety over faculty reporting in January hinged on individuals' criticisms of meeting proceedings. This issue was most clearly demonstrated in a series of plenary and faculty discussions on January 11th, the day after conflicting reports on the 10th's agenda had been issued. In a morning meeting of the student plenary, Professor Alburt Rosenberg and Professor Victor Novick offered differing perspectives on faculty progress in discussions over the hiring of a Black Assistant Dean of Admissions; whereas Rosenberg reported to the assembled students that "the faculty had moved with great speed" in addressing "the high concerns for and awareness of problems involved," Novick offered his opinion that the faculty was "still reluctant to consider the problems as broadly and as quickly as it should."³⁴ In an afternoon plenary session, Professor of Philosophy Richard Schuldenfrei challenged Dean of Men Robert Barr's "defense of recent faculty meetings" by stating that "not a single demand of SASS, per se, had been accepted" by the faculty — an issue which Schuldenfrei protested in the previous day's meeting, when the faculty moved to discuss the recommendations of the Admissions Policy Committee (APC) rather than the SASS statements themselves. Although Barr "denied any significance" of the "lack of 'word for word' passage of SASS' demands" and "alleged that the goals of faculty resolutions were the same,"³⁵ Smith felt the need to further intervene in defense of the faculty, encouraging secretary of the agenda committee to the faculty Helen North and secretary to the faculty David Cowden to read over a list of passed motions from January 9th onwards³⁶ following the disagreement between the two men.

In the faculty meetings following the plenary sessions, the President and assembled professors explicitly debated issues of communication, hinting at the anxiety triggered by the day's events. In a meeting following the morning plenary session,

Questions were raised as to the accuracy of reports of faculty attitudes and actions that are being made by individual faculty members to students or groups of students. The President deplored the negative nature of some reports made by faculty members to

³³ See Helen North, "[Letter from Helen North to the WSJ]," Mar. 26 1969 and Joseph Shane, "[Letter from Joseph Shane to the Wall Street Journal, 3/24/1969]." Black Liberation 1969 Database, Swarthmore College Library.

³⁴ "Saturday Morning Plenary," *The Phoenix Supplement*, Jan. 12 1969.

³⁵ "Barr Speaks at Afternoon Plenary Session," *The Phoenix Supplement*, Jan. 12 1969.

³⁶ See "Faculty Report 11 Jan. 1969." Black Liberation 1969 Database, Swarthmore College Library.

students, and urged faculty to indicate that they were speaking for themselves and not for the faculty as a whole.³⁷

Although Smith's direction suggests that generalized statements regarding the faculty meetings was the perceived problem, neither the criticism issued by Schuldenfrei or Novick was presented as being representative of faculty opinion; rather, it seems that Smith was subtly attempting to address what would surface on the 12th, when the discussion became "intemperate, especially when the question of the propriety of individual faculty members reporting faculty discussion to the students was raised."³⁸ Rather than encouraging individuals to speak for themselves, he seems to have been attempting to warn individuals not to speak negatively — or not to speak at all.

While the faculty never voted to ban discussion of its meetings, the refusal to admit student observers and the establishment of a bureaucratic communication channel on the 11th limited the threat of reporting outside approved networks. Motions for admitting reporters from *The Phoenix* or WSRN, the College's radio station, were introduced by Barr following the afternoon plenary at the request of the students; unsurprisingly, both failed to pass, and Barr's pledged "investigation" of the possibilities of taping or live-broadcasting the meetings³⁹ never made it to the floor. A motion calling for two student observers to the meetings while the faculty was in continuous session also failed to pass, while the problem of transparency was instead addressed by appointing a committee of assistants to the secretary to prepare reports of faculty action for circulation — after passing through the secretary for final approval.⁴⁰

During the same period that observation and reporting was being regulated, student presentations to the faculty were also being limited by the establishment of the new faculty liaison group. Initially, efforts were made to bring SASS representatives into direct contact with faculty members: in the first January 7th faculty meeting, Professor Richard Terdiman put forward a motion calling for six SASS representatives to be present at all meetings dealing with Black admissions, and Professor David Rosen proposed that SASS members be invited to the following Friday's faculty meeting, if not earlier at their convenience.⁴¹ While Terdiman's

³⁷ Faculty Minutes 1/11/1969.

³⁸ Faculty Minutes 1/12/1969.

³⁹ "Barr Speaks at Afternoon Plenary," *The Phoenix Supplement*, Jan 12 1969.

⁴⁰ Ibid. Courtney Smith appointed Linwood Urban, Steven Piker, James Wood, and Asmarom Legesse as the designated faculty reporters. This would become the Faculty-SASS Clarification Committee three days later.

⁴¹ Faculty Minutes 1/07/1969.

motion was withdrawn after a counter-proposal for a SASS-sponsored open forum received criticism,⁴² Rosen's motion passed,⁴³ and on the 9th, a motion inviting "independent"⁴⁴ Black students, along with SASS chairman Clinton Etheridge, to address the faculty at their next meeting on the 10th also receive majority approval.⁴⁵ Clinton Etheridge was again invited to present on behalf of SASS on the 11th and 12th,⁴⁶ with the establishment of a liaison committee between the faculty and SASS on the 14th, however, Black student voices disappeared from meetings of the faculty. Smith appointed Steven Piker, Linwood Urban and James Wood — alongside Asmarom Legesse — to the "SASS-Faculty Clarification Committee,"⁴⁷ which was charged with the "clarification of SASS and its position."⁴⁸ From this point forward, Black voices reached the faculty primarily through the voices of committee members rather than through direct interaction.

Even as SASS was invited to present to the faculty in the early days of the crisis, certain professors chose to leave the meetings rather than be addressed by a representative of the Black student group. According to Philosophy Professor Thompson Bradley,

some of the faculty members who were most grievously affronted by this got up and walked out when [Etheridge] came in. This is really a very, very sad commentary —they refused to listen, refused to see, refused to hear, and they did that every time he came into the meetings [...] I don't even know if they could *see* him. They may have been able to see the color of his skin, I have absolutely no idea, but they knew where he was from. [...] he'd lay out the things they had to say, and then he would leave. And the people who walked out would come back and the discussions would begin.⁴⁹

This refusal represents a deliberate misunderstanding of SASS's role in the negotiations during the crisis: in refusing to listen to Etheridge, certain faculty members refused to acknowledge both the legitimacy of SASS demands and the need to respond directly to them. That there is no documentation of this behavior in the faculty minutes suggests that similar racist behaviors and responses have most likely also been lost from the historical record.

⁴² Faculty opposition was explained as relating to low faculty attendance at an open SASS-StuCo forum that morning.

⁴³ Faculty Minutes 1/07/1969.

⁴⁴ This refers to Black students who did not self-identify as members of SASS at the time of the takeover.

⁴⁵ Faculty Minutes 1/09/1969.

⁴⁶ Faculty Minutes, 1/11/1969; Faculty Minutes, 1/12/1969.

⁴⁷ Faculty Minutes 1/12/1969; term used in minutes from 1/27/1969.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Thompson Bradley, "Thompson Bradley Interview Transcription." Black Liberation 1969 Database, Swarthmore College Library.

As meetings progressed throughout the spring, increased discussion over the role of students in faculty meetings demonstrated the anxiety and discomfort generated by these participants in January within the record of the minutes itself. When student representatives were permitted to address and observe meetings in February over a proposed Student Week⁵⁰ and the expanded reports of the Student Life Committee and Expanded Student Affairs Committee in March,⁵¹ members worried that “if students are invited to attend these meetings, they will ask to attend other meetings in the future, and that to invite student participants to faculty meetings would in effect be pre-judging complex issues involved in the governance of the College.”⁵² These discussions included explicit reference to January 1969:

It was noted that the faculty had invited students to address its meetings several times during the recent crisis, with satisfactory results, although several faculty members questioned the degree of satisfaction obtained.⁵³

Concern over the precedent set in January continued into May, when a motion to invite students on a Special Committee of University Science Center sparked the discussion of “a more general question of whether student members of all standing committees should be invited to faculty meetings when committee reports are presented.”⁵⁴ There was obviously anxiety on the faculty’s part over establishing a pattern that could be used to justify student involvement, demonstrating the felt need to control the meeting space and “protect” the faculty from student observers in the future.

All discussions of student participation seemed to contain implicit concerns with authority and legitimacy, as was revealed in the meeting minutes from March 11th:

it was argued that the presence of students would give the decisions reached by the faculty more “legitimacy.” On the other hand, it was urged that “legitimacy” could not be considered a point at issue, for faculty decisions reached by the faculty are by definition “legitimate.”⁵⁵

The conflation of status and legitimacy — *because* faculty decisions were “reached by the faculty,” they “are by definition ‘legitimate’” — was a tenant of the faculty that had been challenged throughout the semester, and over the past few years, by white students’ agendas of

⁵⁰ Faculty Minutes 2/18/1969.

⁵¹ Faculty Minutes 3/11/1969.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Faculty Minutes 5/20/1969.

⁵⁵ Faculty Minutes 3/11/1969.

student power, but also by SASS's demands that the Black perspective be incorporated into the decision-making structure of the College. Although SASS was careful to distance itself from demands for student power,⁵⁶ its demands did call for Black student representation and decision-making powers at the College; additionally, in the very possibility of setting the meeting agenda, it too posed direct challenges to the "supremacy" of the faculty as a decision-making body.

The inability of certain faculty members to listen to Etheridge address early meetings was reproduced in the inability of certain faculty members to listen and respond to SASS demands systematically during the first four days of the crisis. Barr's "defense of the faculty" on the afternoon of January 11th stemmed from differing stories concerning the faculty agenda as determined in meetings on the 10th and 11th: whereas there had been an understanding that SASS demands would be addressed directly on the 10th, secretary of the agenda committee Helen North instead presented an agenda prepared by the Council on Educational Policy based on the December report by the APC. Schuldenfrei raised an objection to this schedule, arguing that "this agenda does not address itself specifically to those demands;" subsequently, "[o]ther faculty members agreed and were disappointed that this agenda does not include essential points made by SASS."⁵⁷ A vote by the faculty, however, called for the consideration of the schedule prepared by the CEP. Although it was recommended — and frequently stated afterwards — that both the report of the APC and the SASS demands be considered in conjunction during the continuous meetings of the faculty, North presented motions over the course of January 10th — January 13th taken verbatim from the APC report while other faculty members struggled to propose and pass amendments incorporating SASS demands. The seemingly-manic motion passing by North demonstrated a felt need to control the discussion over issues of Black admissions, rather than let it be dictated by the Black students who incited discussion in the first place.

While it was claimed that the SASS demands and the APC report were similar in intent, the influence of Hargadon's⁵⁸ report the latter, which was used as the working basis for the APC

⁵⁶ See Clinton Etheridge's statement in "SASS Position Paper: Etheridge Interview," *The Phoenix Supplement*, Jan. 12 1969: "'Student power,' as it is defined here, has not addressed itself to our demands and to our goals; and is, therefore, a separate issue."

⁵⁷ Faculty Minutes 1/10/1969.

⁵⁸ Hargadon was also the chair of the Admissions Policy Committee, and thus oversaw the production of the recommendations issued by the Committee in December.

proposals, was evident in key assumptions throughout the document, such as its apologetic assertion that

Swarthmore may not be well suited to deal directly, as an institution, with those problems in society which our education makes us best suited to recognize. In all probability, the greatest impact which Swarthmore may have on social problems, such as the education of Negro students, will be the result of individual efforts and achievements of our graduates, in contrast to those efforts which the College can hope to undertake on its own campus.⁵⁹

Equally troubling, the proposals of the APC were ambiguous, non-specific, and non-urgent, especially when compared with SASS demands: for example, in recognizing the need for Black “adults” in the College community (the report makes no recommendation whether these “adults” should be employed on a professional, administrative, or other level), it

recognizes that the College is making efforts to seek qualified Negroes for available or expected future openings in both the faculty and administration, and it recognizes the difficulties involved. It hereby goes on record as recognizing this urgent need.⁶⁰

North sought to pass similarly vague and non-descript motions: obviously drawn from the APC report, her first motion that the College vow not to lower its academic standards was challenged by Legesse as being “irrelevant to the demands of SASS;” her second, that “the College take positive steps to increase the enrollment of Black students,” was tabled and sent to a committee for stronger rewording. Later, Schuldenfrei proposed an amendment to adopt SASS demands and actually include a specific “positive step” in the appointment of an Assistant Dean of Admissions; however, his amendment failed to pass,⁶¹ as did a later direct wording adoption proposed in relation to the number of risk students.⁶² This suggests that the faculty, like North, was content to give preference to the concerns of the APC, either out of respect of the committee’s perceived legitimacy or to maintain a sense of its own legitimacy and authority over SASS.

Because the faculty had been led by North, it had failed to systematically address the proposals put forward by SASS when it declared itself done addressing the demands on the 12th. SASS, therefore, refused to leave the admissions office until the faculty addressed the underlying principle of its demands: that the Black perspective be incorporated at all decision-making levels

⁵⁹ “Admissions Policy Committee Report,” p. 9. Black Liberation 1969 Database, Swarthmore College Library.

⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 10.

⁶¹ Faculty Minutes 1/10/1969.

⁶² Faculty Minutes 1/11/1969. Thompson Bradley suggested redefining a “significant” enrollment of “risk” students as 10-20, which was the figure given in SASS demands. North’s original motion defined “significant” as “approximately 10.” Bradley’s amendment failed to pass.

of the College.⁶³ The incorporation of a Black perspective when one didn't exist beyond Legesse at the professional or administrative levels led to heated discussions over Black representation and SASS's role in fulfilling it, particularly in reference to the Ad Hoc Black Admissions Committee (AHBAC) established during the crisis: since SASS demanded a role in selecting a new assistant Dean of Admissions, questions arose over the "representativeness" of the group. Dean Hargadon, for example, argued that

there is more than one 'black perspective' and that many blacks in society have decided not to join the militant, separatist party. Thus he hoped that a black admissions officer would admit some of these latter⁶⁴

— a statement which not only reveals his characterization of SASS, but his fear that students could effectively control the College community in their role as decision-makers. Other faculty members stated this anxiety more explicitly, revealing a fear of SASS control not only over applicants and the student community, but over the professional staff:

faculty members pointed out that the issue involved was one of student control over admissions by one group of students, and that giving students a say in the appointment of administrative officers is comparable to giving them a say in the appointment of faculty members.⁶⁵

Here, the anxiety expressed is Black student control over the faculty itself: although this doesn't explicitly reveal itself until February, this concern may have had its origins in the clarified SASS demands from December, in which the group insists that Dean Hargadon be dismissed for racism. As the minutes reveal, Hargadon was not far and away the most racist employee of the College at the time, and other professionals may have worried what the precedent of Hargadon's

⁶³ See, for example, Clinton Etheridge's address to the faculty, Jan 11th: "There must be no confusion what we mean by having black people on all decision-making levels of the college. The interests of black people can only be represented at Swarthmore by black students and other black people whom we deem qualified to serve in this way"; Don Mizell's statement in "Evening Plenary Meeting Votes," *The Phoenix Supplement*, Jan. 14 1969; Sam Shepard '68's statement on behalf of SASS in "SASS-Faculty Meeting Reported to Plenary Session," *The Phoenix Supplement*, Jan. 15 1969; the document "Concerning SASS's Priorities in the Faculty Minutes 1/24/1969: "IN ORDER THAT THE BLACK PERSPECTIVE OPERATE IN ALL THAT RELATES TO THE INTERESTS OF BLACK PEOPLE AT SWARTHMORE, BLACK PEOPLE SHALL PARTICIPATE IN POLICY SHAPING AND DECISION MAKING ON ALL LEVELS OF THE COLLEGE COMMUNITY RELATING TO THE SPECIAL INTERESTS OF BLACK PEOPLE. This principle requires that there be black representation in all decisions affecting black people; that black people choose or participate in choosing their representatives; and that policies affecting black people be subject to ultimate approval by black people." Black Liberation 1969 Database, Swarthmore College Library.

⁶⁴ Faculty Minutes 1/31/1969.

⁶⁵ Faculty Minutes 2/05/1969.

firing would mean for their own positions and their “intellectual freedom,” which was frequently described as being threatened at the time of the takeover.

This anxiety further manifests itself over the issue of appointment to the AHBAC. Since a joint resolution reached between SASS and the Faculty-SASS Clarification Committee demanded that one Black professor and one Black administrator be present on the committee, and that in the case that a Black professor and/or administrator is not available, appointment must be made with the approval of SASS,⁶⁶ the faculty debated a host of different measures to ensure its selection of its own representative of SASS without approval of SASS “or any student group.”⁶⁷ Suggestions that a committee of the faculty evaluate potential Black candidates from other institutions to serve on the AHBAC rather than submit their representative choice to SASS demonstrated the need felt to maintain its own control.⁶⁸ Meanwhile, comments that SASS was “conservative” because it didn’t address issues of student power reveal that SASS’s demands for inclusion in decision-making structures were interpreted as relevant only in the context of the lack of Black professionals; in fact, SASS’s agenda included a protest against the College’s “unjust polarization of decision-making power: complete power for the Administrators [and] none for the collective student body.”⁶⁹ Although the group would later assert its independence from student power demands, it seems to have done so largely out of defense of its goals of attaining *Black* student power in the face of white radicals’ “attempt[s] to co-opt the black student activists”⁷⁰ rather than out of its own disinterest in greater student power; however, this was clearly misinterpreted not only by the faculty at large, but by Bennett of the liaison committee, who issued the conservative label in January.

As questions regarding representation of Black students at the College arose, SASS was progressively reduced from a collaborative partner in clarifying and shaping demands to a group under observation, a change which reflects the intent of certain administrative and faculty members to regain control following the crisis. This took place on an organizational level: on January 24th, it was announced that Daniel Bennett and Tom Sherman had joined the Faculty-SASS Clarification Committee as informal liaisons, with the understanding that they would

⁶⁶ “Faculty Communications Committee-SASS Clarifications,” *The Phoenix Supplement*, Jan. 16 1969, p. 2.

⁶⁷ Faculty Minutes 2/5/1969.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ SASS, “[SASS Statement ND] (9th January 1969),” Jan. 9 1969. Black Liberation 1969 Database, Swarthmore College Library.

⁷⁰ Piker, Steven. “Steven Piker Interview Transcription.” Black Liberation 1969 Database, Swarthmore College Library.

“attempt to interpret SASS’s thinking to the faculty.”⁷¹ The appointment of these men embodies a similar type of racism as Dean Hargadon’s report on Black student admissions, which SASS described in its clarification of demands from December:

His is the most dangerous kind of paternalistic racism, *that kind which would deny blacks the legitimacy of their self definition, the legitimacy of their right to self definition — while at the same time seeking to impose its own viewpoint* [...] At a time when black people all over the world are proclaiming their rights and abilities to define themselves and to have a voice in all decisions which affect them, blacks at Swarthmore will settle for nothing less than the same.⁷²

Hargadon’s approach to the Black student population as an object of study was explicitly stated in his report on admissions that triggered the SASS takeover of Parrish⁷³; from early reports made to the faculty by the liaison committee, it seems that SASS was submitted to the same sort of observation and analysis by some of its purported liaisons — perhaps with less invasion of privacy, but nonetheless seeking to characterize them apart from how they were presenting themselves. In a discussion of the goals of SASS and their means of achieving them at the end of January,

Piker admitted that there are a number of ‘black perspectives,’ but the one that the faculty should address itself to is that of SASS, *which includes a relative militancy and a degree of black separatism* on campus. Asmarom Legesse added that SASS has chosen to be a separatist body because it has been disappointed with the results of the integrationist approach. SASS believes that its goal of self-definition and self-identity for blacks can be achieved only if they organize as a separatist organization [...] When several faculty members objected to the separatist tendencies of black students, it was urged that their separatist tendencies were a means of achieving an ultimately integrated position [...] ⁷⁴

Legesse’s interjected explanation is especially telling — throughout the record of the faculty meetings, he seems to speak up primarily in the hopes of explaining SASS’s position when most other faculty members are presented as behaving particularly irrationally: in this case, incorrectly

⁷¹ Faculty Minutes 1/24/1969.

⁷² SASS, “Demands,” Dec. 23 1969. p. 3. Black Liberation 1969 Database, Swarthmore College Library.

⁷³ Releasing confidential information regarding family status, parental income, and grades attained at the College, the Dean of Admissions submitted the entire Black student population to examination, although his initial stated concern was only those who received funding under the Rockefeller grant:

we now have the opportunity to gather a certain amount of data [...] on the experiences of four classes of “Rockefeller” students [...] Not all of the [Negro] students since 1964 have been “Rockefeller grant” students [...] It was because of the grant, however, that we became especially concerned with all of the Negro students who applied, were admitted, and enrolled between 1964 and 1968, and we have therefore treated them as a group for purposes of research.

See Hargadon, Fred, “Admissions Report No. 1, Sept. 1968,” Sept. 1968. Black Liberation 1969 Database, Swarthmore College Library.

⁷⁴ Faculty Minutes 1/29/1969

characterizing or misunderstanding Black students' political aims. Notably, this first comes from Steven Piker of the liaison committee. The desire to submit SASS to definition by others is most poignant, however, in the faculty's "objection" to the separatism of Black students: as seen in an open letter from Raymond Hopkins in which he argues that SASS's political ideology is an "instance" in which the students *and the faculty* "might desire greater participation,"⁷⁵ the faculty seemed to sincerely believe that it deserved a voice in determining the role and place of Black students at the College. Hopkins' letter is especially revealing of his views since he advocates "increased participation by students" in the decision-making processes of the College, but nonetheless denies the right of SASS to articulate its own sociopolitical stance: it would seem that the conservatism of this man, who taught a course on the Politics of Africa during the '68 – '69 academic year, was more evident in regards to Black student power than student power more generally.⁷⁶

That characterizations of SASS ultimately functioned to shore up the legitimacy of the faculty can be seen in arguments concerning "legitimacy" as applied to other actors in the Crisis of 1969: namely, SASS and the institution of Swarthmore itself. The issue of legitimacy surfaces in the faculty meetings and in statements published by professors; however, it is most tellingly addressed in a Crisis Report drawn up by a committee of faculty and (white) students at the suggestion of the Council on Educational Policy (CEP) following the January 24th faculty meeting. The report, which consisted of a general text and two dissenting position papers written by the students, was designed to recommend procedures to ensure it "must never be governed by demands or moved by threats;"⁷⁷ briefly outlining possible actions to be taken in the case of student protest but primarily conveying its final point that "the best way to deal with trouble is not to have any" and encouraging all members of the campus community to "avoid excessive

⁷⁵ Hopkins, Raymond. "Open Letter from Raymond Hopkins, Jan. 15 1969," Jan. 15 1969. Black Liberation 1969 Database, Swarthmore College Library.

⁷⁶ While Hopkins's open letter suggests anxiety over Black students' self-definition in SASS, members of SASS at the time of the takeover have positive memories of their relationship with him. Russell Frisby '72 said in his October 2014 interview:

"I had a lot of support from the faculty [during his time at the College], and even if they didn't support they didn't make an issue of it. But I had strong support from some of the — it was a very radical White faculty, so we had strong support there. Again, particularly those who saw the struggle in economic terms, and linked this struggle with the struggle against the war [in Vietnam...] for instance David Smith and Ray[mond] Hopkins, two of my political science professors. I had great relationships with them."

Frisby, Russell, "Russell Frisby Interview Transcription," Maria Mejia and Allison Shultes, Oct. 6 2014. Black Liberation 1969 Database, Swarthmore College Library.

⁷⁷ Smith, Courtney, "[Memorandum from Courtney Smith to students and faculty, 1/03/1969]," Jan. 3 1969. Black Liberation 1969 Database, Swarthmore College Library.

preoccupation with incidentals.”⁷⁸ Tellingly, of the nine members of the Joint Committee on Crisis Principles, only two students recognized that the corruption of the College itself provides justification for action: in their dissenting position, Michael Greenwald ’70 and Bertrand Yourgrau ’70 wrote that “as a crisis by definition indicates that the institution is not functioning to the satisfaction of all of its members, the legitimacy of the institution is thus called into question” and “[t]he *legitimacy* of the institution of Swarthmore College — the question of whether it adequately represents involved parties — should be the first concern of any discussion of crises and their resolution.”⁷⁹ This same sentiment would be expressed in a statement written by Bennett on behalf of the philosophy department:

we declare the rights of any group within the community [...] to challenge and disrupt normal, established routines of the community, when and where such routines are unresponsive to or repressive of that groups [sic] legitimate aspirations or needs and when the challenge or disruption are genuine efforts to gain redress.⁸⁰

When the Draft Report was presented, however, “[s]everal faculty members questioned the rather broad conception of ‘legitimacy’ that was apparently being employed by the students, pointing out that the term has slight relevance to the conditions to which the report is addressed.”⁸¹ It would appear that in conditions of crisis, the possible fault of the institution could not be considered by the professionals who operated as one of its chief decision-making bodies. In a discussion of Bennett’s statement, it was noted that “[t]he Draft Report places the burden of establishing legitimacy on the disrupters, while the Bennett statement places the burden upon the institution”:⁸² after such an explicit delineation of where the perceived fault might rest, the faculty unsurprisingly voted down Bennett’s motion.

“The question was, as the question is and always shall be, who is going to have control?”: Reclaiming the Occupation of 1969

Following the concessions made by the faculty to members of SASS, professional members of the College community felt it necessary to assert their own power and agency in catalyzing change at the College — and to attest that the change was brought about by reasoned,

⁷⁸ “Draft Report of the Joint Committee on Crisis Principles and Procedures,” Apr. 29 1969. Black Liberation 1969 Database, Swarthmore College Library.

⁷⁹ Greenwald, Michael and Yourgrau, Bertrand, “A Minority Opinion of the Draft Report of the Committee on Crisis Principles and Procedures,” Draft Report of the Joint Committee on Crisis Principles and Procedures, Apr. 29 1969. Black Liberation 1969 Database, Swarthmore College Library.

⁸⁰ Faculty Minutes 5/14/1969.

⁸¹ Faculty Minutes 5/7/1969.

⁸² Faculty Minutes 5/14/1969.

enlightened procedures, and not the “avalanche of paper and ‘parliamentary procedures’ of the first hysterical half of January” that Van de Kamp regarded with “disbelief and horror.”⁸³ This was largely accomplished by denying the role that Black students played in bringing about said change. According to Michael Fields, “the administration looked like it was going to give SASS a lot of what they wanted even before all of these things happened”:

The question was, as the question is and always shall be, who is going to have control? The issue is going to be power. While they were going to do some things, they were going to have control.⁸⁴

While it is true that the Admissions Policy Committee had made recommendations relating to the expanded enrollment of Black students⁸⁵, the faculty’s commitment to addressing SASS demands was not immediate even after the crisis of January 1969 was under way, as demonstrated by the conflict over the agenda in the early days of the crisis. Afterwards, the existence of the APC report was used to deny SASS’s progressive vision of a more inclusive and supportive College environment: in narrating the crisis in a letter to parents and alumni in February, for example, Acting President Edward Cratsley and Chairman of the Board of Managers Robert Browning insisted that the faculty “considered the two documents [SASS’s demands and the APC report] simultaneously [...] both documents [were kept] constantly in front of them.”⁸⁶ Even in this relatively private communication, the men could not admit that Black students had set the agenda for the faculty during the final days of the January crisis.

The repeated refrain that the faculty had been considering and mobilizing change at the College before the sit-in found voice in the narratives of the sit-in produced retrospectively by administrative and professional staff. According to Rogers, these types of narratives were hardly exceptional: the tendency to claim that an institution’s administration had made changes “with more haste for a plan they had already devised” in order “to publicize non-coercion” was a common thread following calls for change by Black student activists.⁸⁷ Hopkins wrote in his open letter from January 1969 that

⁸³ Van de Kamp, Peter. “Statement by Peter Van de Kamp,” Feb. 11 1969. Black Liberation 1969 Database, Swarthmore College Library.

⁸⁴ Fields, Michael. “Transcription Michael Fields Interview.” Black Liberation 1969 Database, Swarthmore College Library.

⁸⁵ Hargadon, Fred. “Admissions Report,” Sept. 1968. Black Liberation 1969 Database, Swarthmore College Library.

⁸⁶ Browning, Richard and Edward Cratsley, “Letter to Alumni, Parents, and Friends from Browning and Cratsley 12 February 1969,” Feb. 12 1969. Black Liberation 1969 Database, Swarthmore College Library.

⁸⁷ Rogers, p.120

[t]he action of SASS has been interpreted by some as a use of direct action which has brought changes which couldn't otherwise have occurred. Except for certain questions of wording and immediate responses to the action of SASS, this is not true [...] The faculty's substantive action to recommend changes at Swarthmore was not based on coercion or threat.⁸⁸

The same need to proclaim that change had not been motivated by the actions of SASS manifested itself in statements passed by the faculty: on January 12th, for example, after Clinton Etheridge announced that SASS “declared the right to engage in direct action in the future” if the Board of Managers failed to support faculty resolutions, the faculty successfully passed a motion stating that “resolutions made [...] have been accepted because faculty believes they are right,”⁸⁹ and not because of the tenacity of the Black students.

As the mainstream media picked up on the events at Swarthmore, faculty members continued to defend their sole role in creating a vision for a more inclusive Swarthmore. Helen North responded to an article published by the *Wall Street Journal* that claimed that the “campus turmoil was worth the trouble”⁹⁰ with a testy assertion of the takeover’s *lack* of influence:

More serious is the equally false impression given by your article that only because of the occupation of the Swarthmore Admissions Office were certain changes made in the policy regarding the admission of black students [...] the Special Admissions Policy Committee submitted its report recommending many of the changes that were later presented as non-negotiable demands by [SASS]. At the same time, another Committee (whose membership included representatives of SASS) presented its report recommending a Black Studies Program. Both reports were scheduled for consideration by the faculty at its meeting in the first week of January.⁹¹

Both North and Joseph Shane also assert in response to the article that its final insinuation that the takeover resulted in greater involvement for students in the decision-making process is faulty, and that students had been involved in policy committees prior to the SASS action.⁹² When considering the forms in which SASS’s story has — and, more significantly, has not — surfaced in years since the crisis, this later drive for narrative control suggests that at a conscious or unconscious level, the institutional memory of Swarthmore has embodied the claims made by

⁸⁸ Hopkins, Raymond. “Open Letter from Raymond Hopkins, Jan. 15 1969,” Jan. 15 1969. Black Liberation 1969 Database, Swarthmore College Library.

⁸⁹ Faculty Minutes 1/12/1969.

⁹⁰ Carlson, Elliot. “Cool Colleges: Two Liberal Schools Decide Campus Turmoil Was Worth the Trouble,” *The Wall Street Journal*, March 1969. Black Liberation 1969 Database, Swarthmore College Library.

⁹¹ North, Helen, “[Letter from Helen North to the WSJ],” March 26 1969. Black Liberation 1969 Database, Swarthmore College Library.

⁹² Ibid. See also Shane, Joseph, “[Letter from Joseph Shane to the Wall Street Journal, 3/24/1969].” Black Liberation 1969 Database, Swarthmore College Library.

North and Shane — and behind them, a faculty that was unwilling to see beyond the doors of their meeting spaces throughout the spring of 1969.

Asmarom Legesse, however, when interviewed over a decade later for an informal history of the College, remembered SASS's action differently. Speaking on the idea that change would have taken place without the occupation of the admissions office, Legesse told author Richard J. Walton: "I don't believe it for a moment; I didn't then. It may have taken us 20 years to do what happened in fifteen to twenty days."⁹³

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⁹³ Legesse, Asmarom, in *Swarthmore College: An Informal History*, Richard J. Walton. Swarthmore, Penn.: Swarthmore College, 1986. Black Liberation 1969 Database, Swarthmore College Library.