

SWARTHMORE COLLEGE  
Swarthmore, Pennsylvania

March 17, 1970

To members of the Swarthmore College Community:

After some discussion of the principles and procedures outlined in the attached memorandum, SASS's vigil in my office was concluded late Saturday evening. I intend to move immediately to implement the provisions of the memorandum for creating and maintaining a Black Cultural Center.

Robert D. Cross  
President

14 March 1970

MEMORANDUM

Previous correspondence and SASS's determination to conduct a vigil suggest that either there is an unbridgeable difference in the notion of what a Black Cultural Center should consist of or there is a real problem of communication, the resolution of which might lay the basis for an effective Center. This memorandum is meant as a framework for the exploration of these points.

SASS and I started last summer with the common assumption that a Black Cultural Center was desirable for the College as a whole and for black students at the College--and, perhaps, for other institutions trying to find a just and equitable way to productive forms of multi-racialism.

It has been difficult to find an appropriate site for a Center during 1969-70, and this has been aggravating to everyone. There has not been evident disagreement about the character and function of this Center. Everyone seemed to believe that such a Center, while providing appropriate privacies and areas for independent action by black students, ought also to contribute to the cultural life of the entire College. Since there had been no precise analogues to a Black Cultural Center at Swarthmore before, we assumed that some special arrangements and definitions would be necessary for a BCC.

When, during this past week, it became apparent that black students believed a clear commitment to a particular facility for a satisfactory BCC for next fall was needed soon, a group of members of SASS and of the College administration visited possible sites. Questions of the precise character of a BCC were not then explored; instead, discussion was focused primarily on essentially physical items, such as location, the size of meeting rooms, the cost of adaptation and operation. We also discussed provision of a program budget.

SASS's memorandum of 11 March, and my response the following day, suggest that at least as important as such details as those mentioned is the question of the degree to which Swarthmore can make special facilities available to particular groups, and under what circumstances. (The analogy to fraternities is imperfect: for one thing, fraternities at Swarthmore may not determine their membership on the basis of race, creed, or color; furthermore, they support themselves primarily from the contributions of their members and alumni, and they constructed their own buildings.)

There are three general considerations governing the College's response to this question. 1) The College, while expecting individual and group differences among its students, must not by any administrative arrangements tend to coerce its students into social or political attitudes or affiliations. It must reserve the right to determine the character of the education that is offered and the qualifications for a degree that it confers. It may facilitate - it must not coerce - students or faculty to adopt (or refuse to adopt) - a special style of life. It cannot transfer to a self-defined section of the College an unqualified right to determine, independently of the College, how it should comport itself in relation to the rest of the College.



2) The College must be concerned with its integrity in both its community and institutional aspects. It should provide the conditions of a community, - e.g., it should not promote unreasonable discriminations or exclusions. As an institution, it is not at liberty in policy or law to delegate finally to groups within it or sections of it decisions affecting the relations of groups to one another or to the institution. Therefore we are creating a steering committee for the Cultural Center which, operating within the framework of the law in setting policy and regulations, will be responsible for developing, coordinating, and implementing matters of program and of access to the center, and will be responsible for developing a capital and operating budget. This committee shall consist of a joint group of students, faculty, and officers of the College: five black administrators, including the counselor for black students, the admissions officer for black admissions, the Director of Black Studies, and two other members of the black college community mutually acceptable to SASS and to the College; and the five-person steering committee of SASS. The general arrangements discussed here are compatible with the arrangements worked out last year for the appointment of black officers of the College to work with black students.

3) The College must be governed by the law and, specifically, by Federal Civil Rights legislation and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania's Fair Educational Opportunities and Human Relations Acts. Use of institutional funds or facilities in a way that is prejudicial to others on the basis of race is illegal. Opinions of counsel sought during the winter and spring months of last year make this absolutely clear.

Robert D. Cross  
President