




Black at Swarthmore

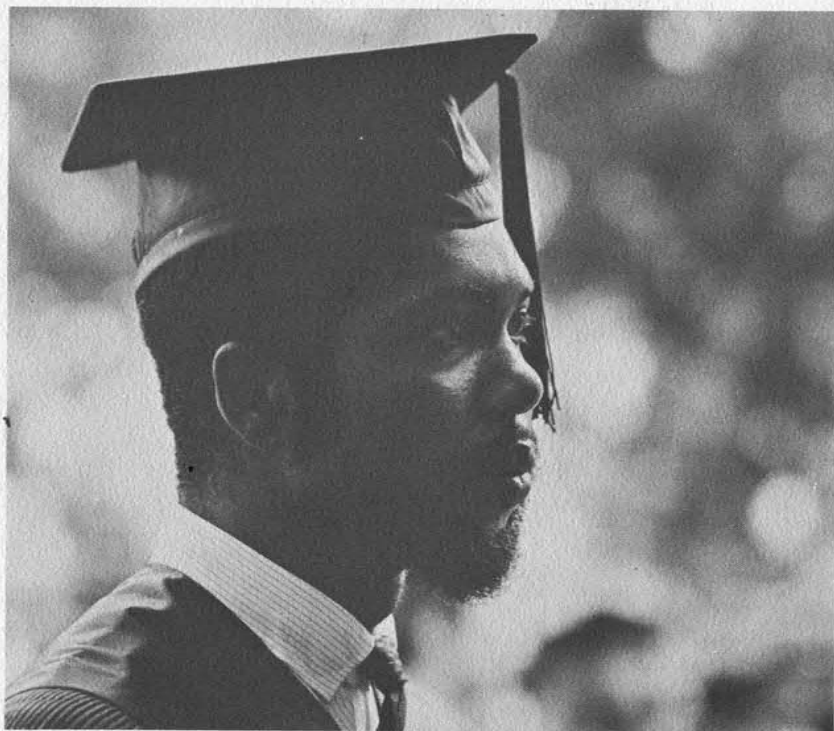


conceived by the swarthmore afro-american students' society
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Broke the chains
Wings spread
Fly Brothers, Sisters
To act,
Unveiling as the night.
As ascension,
As no boundaries
In this sacred moment;
We are Now
We are Here,
Chanting/ And this is the split
This is the holy move
And this is the split
You know,
The Holy Move.



:prelude

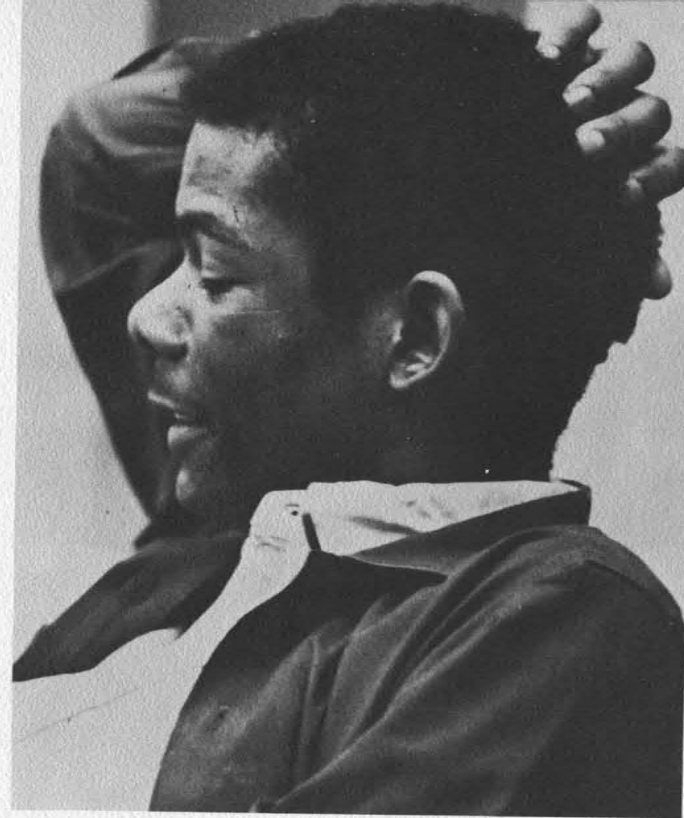
Today, more than ever before, Black students have the opportunity to attend the college of their choice. This booklet attempts to assist you in determining which college might be most appropriate for you, as a Black student: It is an interpretation of what the Black experience often is at a white institution in general, and at Swarthmore College in particular.





:introduction

Swarthmore College enrolls slightly over 1100 students, and expects to achieve, over the next few years, a Black student enrollment of about 10%. It is coeducational and is situated in the small Borough of Swarthmore, Pa., just about 11 miles southwest of Philadelphia. Semi-enclosed by a rambling wood known as The Crum (with winding creek, even) and attended by picturesque autumnal and spring seasons, the College's environs are quite different from (perhaps alien to) that which most Black students in America are accustomed to. It is *not* an urban institution, although Philadelphia is a half-hour train ride, New York is two hours north by car, and D.C. less than two hours south by train. It is not within walking distance of any other college, although there are several colleges in the area, among them Haverford, Bryn Mawr, University of Pennsylvania, Franklin and Marshall, Lincoln, Temple and Cheyney State. Now, you've probably never heard of Swarthmore because it has been a small, eastern, intellectual, selective liberal arts college having almost no contact with the Black community. But it has been called the best.



:the facts

Given the tendency to larger and larger universities, and the subsequent depersonalization of undergraduate education, Swarthmore offers the bright, motivated student a stimulating intellectual experience. It is small and undergraduate, which means 1) there is no graduate school to drain resources away from the undergraduate program and 2) the faculty is primarily concerned with teaching, rather than research, during the regular school term. The student/faculty ratio of 9/1 is quite advantageous in the learning situation.

Dedicated to the development of sound intellectual skills, Swarthmore is a conscious move away from super-specialization: The information explosion of our times demands the ability to manage knowledge, not just acquire it. But Swarthmore sends 75% of its graduates to graduate and/or professional schools, where the opportunity and necessity for more specialization exist.

Before we can seriously rap about what it's like to be Black at Swarthmore, a general description of the physical facilities and resources of the College may be helpful:

- 1) the endowment of the College is approximately \$55 million, market value, for 125 faculty members and 1100 students. You figure it out.
- 2) a faculty with $\frac{2}{3}$ Ph.D.'s, commanding among the highest salaries in the country (and paid to teach you).
- 3) 325 acres of rolling green, ivy covered walls, and the rambling Crum—leaving lots of room for movement in your head and body.

- 4) a spanking new library, open stacks shelved with 336,500 books—and immediate physical access to them.
- 5) two brand new dormitories, sound-proof and carpeted.
- 6) a remodeled gymnasium, covered with Tartan, which can be used simultaneously for track, tennis and basketball.

In addition, there are a number of other facilities that are an integral part of College life:

- a) IBM computer center
- b) Sproul Observatory
- c) 5 fraternity houses
- d) a huge, Texas ranch house/Japanese ski lodge-type dining hall (get to *that*).
- e) swimming pool, tennis and squash courts, etc.

Obviously, Swarthmore, as small liberal arts colleges go, is doing all right for itself financially, i.e., it is financially solid. But it costs a lot to run this place, and this is reflected in student costs. Close to \$4,000 per year. That sounds like a lot—that *is* a lot—but don't let that scare you. Financial aid is available for those who need it. If you are admitted you will receive the money you need to attend. Don't let the cost of a prestige college prevent you from applying: All first-rate private colleges cost more, but there is more financial aid available to you. Solid.





:a more relevant dimension in admissions

Because most of the Brothers and Sisters born in America are faced with almost insurmountable obstacles in every sphere of life, and because many of the institutions functioning in this society are actually crippling bright and creative young Black minds, Swarthmore has come to recognize that it has an educational and social

responsibility to seek out and encourage unconventionally qualified students, those whose qualifications may be different from the kind of student who generally applies, but who nevertheless display potential to cope with the rigorous academics if given the opportunity to attend and adjust to a qualitatively different demanding situation. In an effort to ensure that those students who need a period of adjustment and assistance to adapt to this situation are given a chance, the College provides a counselor of Black students, charged with administering support programs for the duration of the student's initial difficulty. Some students get uptight about the 'stigma' of needing initial help, and some are actually ashamed. Fortunately, they soon realize that *they* have nothing to be ashamed of; indeed, it is *America's* shame that their *schools* failed *them*. The fact of the matter is, they can and *do* do the work.





:swarthmore afro-american students' society

The very presence of Black students is transforming America's leading colleges, and Swarthmore is certainly no exception. Many Black students have come to the conclusion that their efforts in College ought to reflect a consciousness beyond campus boundaries. At Swarthmore, this realization has manifested itself into SASS—the Swarthmore Afro-American Students' Society. The aim is very simple and powerful: to foment and extend an exchange of ideas among Black students, in order to gain a deeper understanding of ourselves and the society in which we exist.

Many of us came to Swarthmore resolved (consciously or unconsciously) to be assimilated into this white culture, ready to relinquish the 'stigma' of being Black, i.e., 'acting like a nigger.' Ironically, we found that it was our intimate exposure to, and understanding of, this culture and society that made us appreciate our own. Many acknowledge now that, whereas an education was once seen as a means of escape from the community, it is now seen as a means of liberating it. There are, however, varying degrees of commitment to this principle, and the Black community at Swarthmore respects them. But coming to Swarthmore will not allow you to ignore the fact that you are Black; nor will coming here (as some argue) automatically make you 'white.' Many of us place our Blackness above our individuality, while many of us do not consider race or culture overly significant. But no matter where we are situated on the continuum of racial

consciousness, communication is our constant watchword because through this medium we are better able to confront most of the issues of life we will face continuously through interaction with white students and faculty.

Many find SASS a source of strength and inspiration, a home away from home, where Brothers and Sisters attempt to relate and interpret their experience in a white milieu (i.e., America). Some find activity in SASS a lower priority in their life-style. Still, the reality of cultural differences does not disappear in college, although how you regard them often does. The white campus is no haven from racial misunderstanding and no one should expect it to be so. While Swarthmore is no complete refuge, it is oftentimes a cozy secure environment compared to the world beyond its narrow borders. But many of us realize more and more that our dreams, our goals and even our presence are especially important for dealing with the realities just outside Swarthmore.

:black studies

The appearance of numbers (relatively speaking) of Black students on Swarthmore's campus has caused the College to reassess its position with respect to several Black-oriented areas of concern, that is to say, that the Brothers and Sisters have taken this school through some *changes*. The experiences of Black people are now the focus for academic inquiry in the Black Studies program; it is an attempt to correct the curricular deficiencies and conventional value-bias long present in all white institutions of higher learning when considering the experiences of Black people. The program is characterized by its interdisciplinary nature, flexibility, and rigorous approach to the subject matter. The objective is to deal with the information in as relevant a manner as possible by emphasizing a problem-solving orientation through field work. Additional emphasis is placed on combining intellectual expertise with creativity: exciting.



:black cultural center

The Black cultural center provides the Black community here with opportunities different from, but in addition to, the more general social and cultural life of the College. It is a means of enriching the campus' cultural/social experience. It is not a move to separate Black students or their interests entirely from the life of the College. Rather, it is a base for definition and reinforcement of Black identity, an anchor in a white sea, a psychological and geographical point of reference. Moreover, because it is utilized periodically as a center for programs geared to the entire College community—art exhibits, performances, etc.—the center provides a situation conducive to meaningful cultural interaction. But obviously its main function is a place where you can go and jam and rap and feel mellow. Right on.





:rhythms & blues

Swarthmore, tho', is not all buildings and books and classes and financial aid. It is far more than that. It is a time in your life. You live and you learn and you wonder and it is exciting and depressing and it is college.

It is people, it is Brothers and Sisters jiving, booking and/or styling. It is rapping till sun-up about just anything and maybe getting your game blown away like it never was back at home, where you were the main man or the bossest sister.



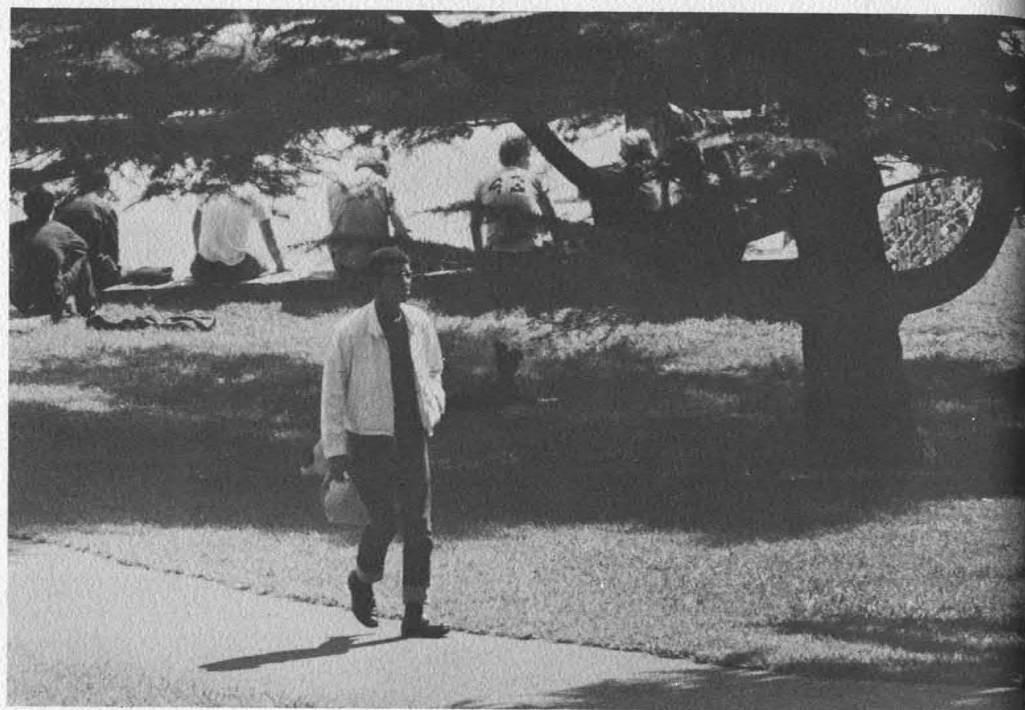


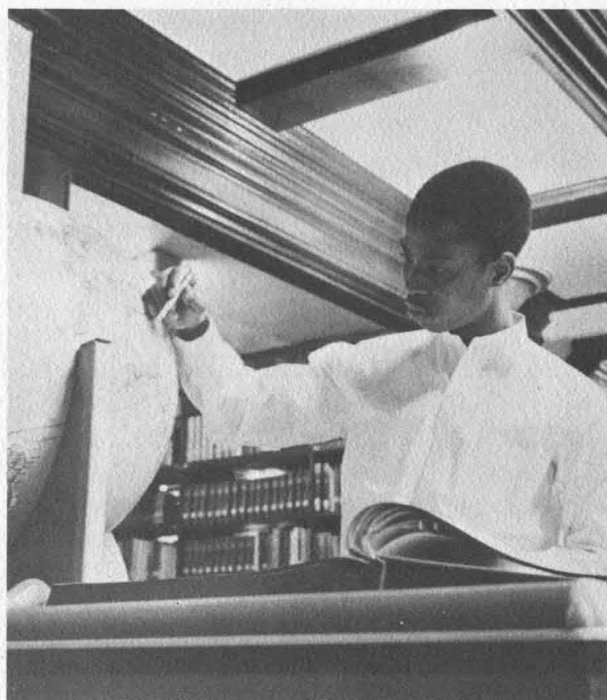




Swarthmore is fronting and trying to run down your program to somebody, synthesizing your rap ability and your intellectual qualities—and getting ranked all over the place. It is hoopin in the afternoon in the gym. Or playing cards. Or digging 'Trane on a Saturday afternoon between sporadic and loose-ended dialogue about the value-bias in the social sciences, with your tight man. It is checking out Philly and finding that it is not all that hip for a city of its size—but nothing a little creativity can't deal with. It is getting a C— or D+ on that very first paper and undergoing Instant Trauma (whatever happened to those A's and B's I was getting in high school?) but coming back strong next time around.

Swarthmore is getting turned on to a new dimension of experience—and maybe turning it off. It is an attempt to forget. Or re-think. It is an all-Black thing. Or a cross-cultural thing. Or a just do what you want to when you want to and forget about people thing. Swarthmore is getting tired and depressed and questioning the meaning of it all, and wanting to hang it up but knowing all the while how un-hip that would be. It is bursting into class, ready to relate some freaked out idea you just had in the bathroom. It is community organizing in the nearby Black communities.





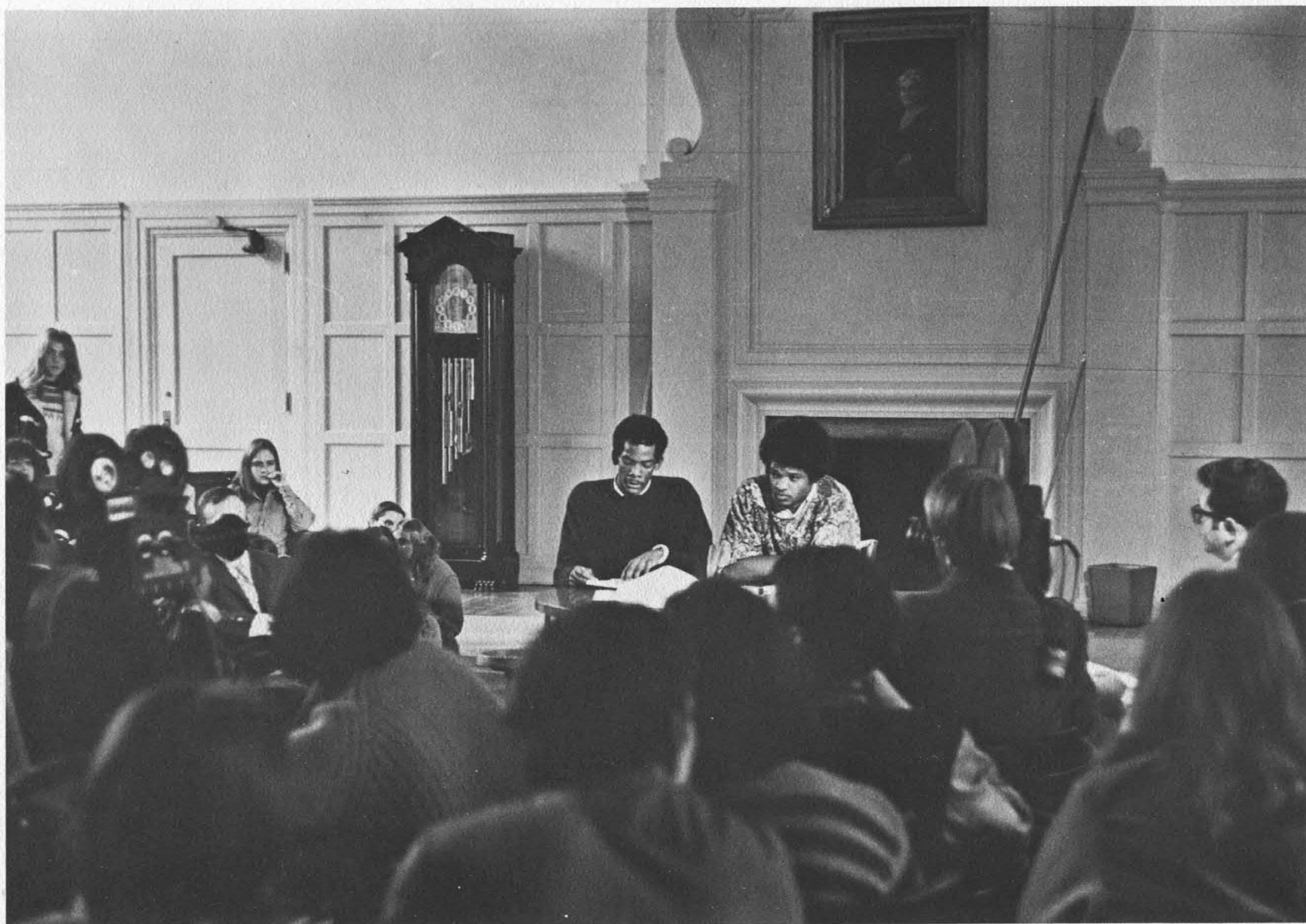


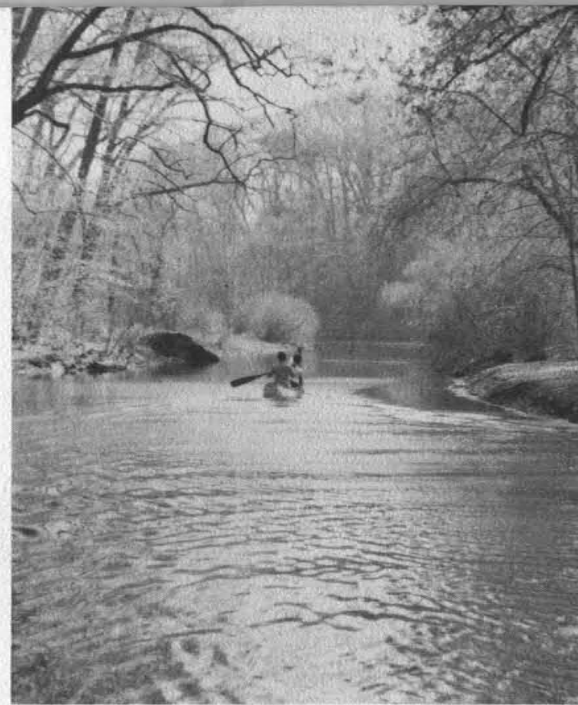
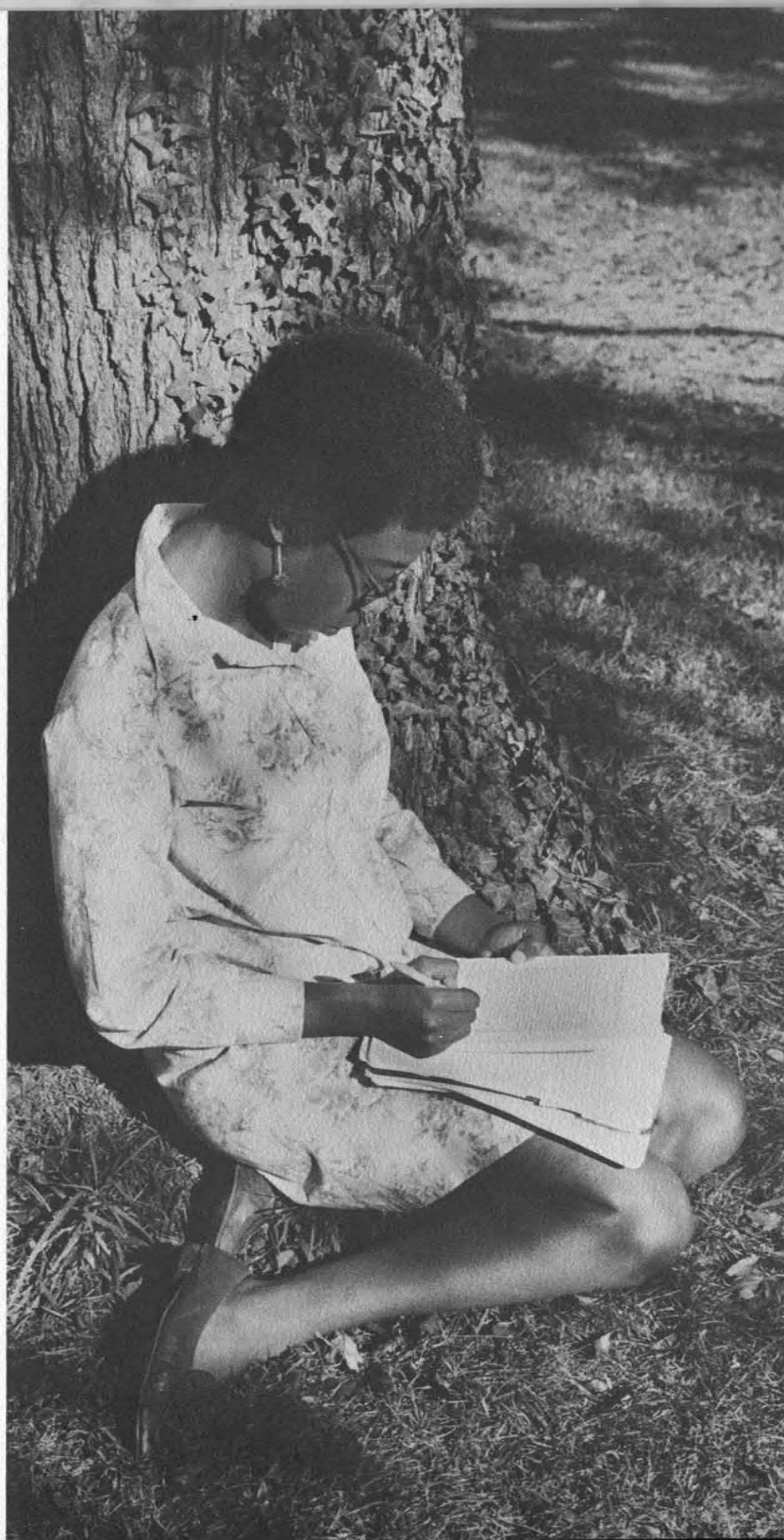
Swarthmore is being confronted with new information, with new kinds of people whose convictions and life-style may be radically different from yours, and reacting. And being confused. And finally pulling yourself together. Then feeling mellow as a cello.

Swarthmore is papers, seminars, and essay exams. It is field work. It is reading one helluva lot, synthesizing and criticizing the information. The competition is tough. Really tough. The student body comes from among the top 2% of the nation's high schoolers. You may stumble a little at first, not knowing what's expected of you—but 3 years later when you are ripping off A and B papers in no time flat, you are hip that it was just a matter of time. Just a matter of time.

Swarthmore is 9 o'clock at night and 300 pages to go and the Brothers and Sisters are down at the House partying back and you want to get into that, but you know why you are here so you stay right there, steady bookin'. It is dealing with some white liberal who wants you to solve 'the problem' for him or apologize for his existence. Or coping with somebody trying to run a Blacker-than-thou thing on you and forcing you to get your program together, whatever it is.







Swarthmore is spring or autumn (maybe even winter). It is a feeling inside. It is the fall rolling in and the greens, reds, oranges, browns, and yellows sprinkling the sky, sometimes dancing. It is strolling across the sloping front lawns barefoot, deep in thought about the dynamics of Black Aesthetics. Or just knocking out under a big oak. Swarthmore is spring, a stroll through the woods, perhaps with a loved one, closer to nature, to our roots and innermost thoughts: seeing beauty in the world and maybe moved by that beauty to a greater conviction that things have to change; that our people are suffering and things have to change.

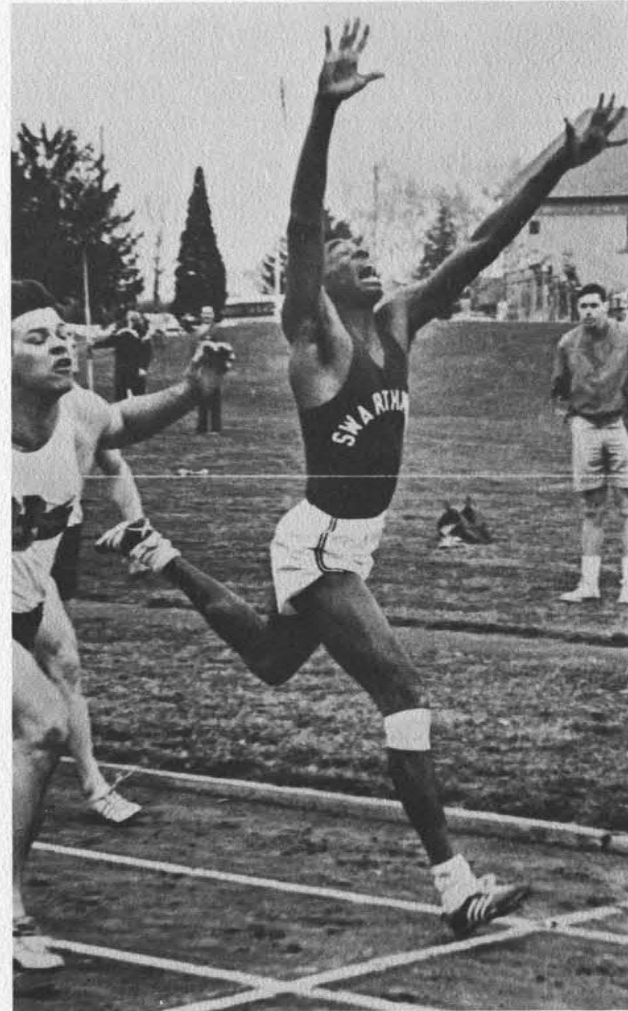
Swarthmore is hard work and lots of it. It is 30-35 hrs. a week studying outside of class. Managing knowledge, juggling it and arriving at conclusions. No textbooks—they make it easy for you. It is getting diverse materials and working with them. And this is hip, this is definitely hip.



Swarthmore is getting hung up on not being right in an urban situation, but digging that the rural-type setting has its advantages. It is getting tired of the low-key mood and the scenic atmosphere round about vacation time, time to go home. (There are, however, 3 good-sized Black communities within 4 miles of the College—in the city of Chester, and the towns of Media and Morton). Make no mistake about it, tho', Swarthmore is not home—it is different, and some people dig it from that angle alone. But there is a Black cultural center and it is the place where the Brothers and Sisters hang so you know it's cool.

Swarthmore is weird weekends. It is being short on coin and trying to figure out what to get into: check out a flick, get mellow, throw a set, dig the 76'ers, Phillies, Eagles or Flyers, catch Pharaoh Saunders, go bowling, play cards, camp out, make a rock concert, go over to Bryn Mawr or Haverford, read, or finish that paper, make it on up to The City, cop a play, or just git with some Black folks. If you get bored, you are probably lame anyway.






:epilogue

This exposition has not attempted to be objective or complete; you can obtain more concrete details by reading the regular College Bulletin. No, it is simply an effort to convey a few impressions of what Swarthmore is and perhaps can be, to you. It is not a big university swarming with people, it does not house famous public figures to attract publicity (although an astronomer here recently discovered a new planet), it is rarely in the national sports news, and it is not a familiar household word in all parts of the country. Aside from that, however, it is a college esteemed to be of the very highest quality and intent on remaining so. If you think Swarthmore offers something in some way that you could *really* get into, we urge you to seriously explore that possibility.

You ought to know there's a Brother here who is interested in you. He is William Cline, Assistant Dean of Admissions. So if you have questions about admissions, or want application forms, write to him at the Office of Admissions, Swarthmore College, Swarthmore, Pa. 19081.

And keep on pushin'.



A black and white photograph of a winter forest scene. The ground is covered in snow, with several large, fallen tree trunks and branches scattered across it. In the background, many thin, bare trees stand upright, their branches reaching towards the sky. The lighting is soft, creating a serene and somewhat somber atmosphere.

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Wings spread
Fly Brothers, Sisters.
To act,
Unveiling as the night.
As ascension,
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