



CONSTRUCTING



BLACK



EDUCATION

at OBERLIN



COLLEGE

A Documentary History



ROLAND M. BAUMANN

Ohio University Press, Athens, Ohio 45701

www.ohioswallow.com

© 2010 by Ohio University Press

All rights reserved

49a4763083cd5dca501a5e733a08d76b
ebrary

To obtain permission to quote, reprint, or otherwise reproduce or distribute material from Ohio University Press publications, please contact our rights and permissions department at (740) 593-1154 or (740) 593-4536 (fax).

Printed in the United States of America

Ohio University Press books are printed on acid-free paper © ™

16 15 14 13 12 11 10 5 4 3 2 1

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Baumann, Roland M.

49a4763083cd5dca501a5e733a08d76b
ebrary Constructing Black education at Oberlin College : a documentary history / Roland M. Baumann.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-8214-1887-1 (hc : alk. paper)

1. Oberlin College—History. 2. African Americans—Education—Ohio—Oberlin—History—19th century. 3. African Americans—Education—Ohio—Oberlin—History—20th century. 4. College integration—Ohio—Oberlin. I. Title.

LD4168.3.B38 2009

378.771'23—dc22

2009028715

49a4763083cd5dca501a5e733a08d76b
ebrary

Oberlin College also participated in a multicollge program. In 1964, a coalition of liberal arts colleges—Antioch, Carleton, Grinnell, Occidental, Reed, and Swarthmore—submitted to the Rockefeller Foundation a “proposal for an inter-college effort to achieve improvements in education and educational opportunity for American Negro students.”¹¹³ The foundation responded with authorized grants totaling, over several years, about \$1,950,000. (Of this total figure, Oberlin received two grant awards of \$275,000 each, the first in 1964 and the second in 1967.)¹¹⁴ The foundation did not fund the six-college group proposal as written, drawing instead on the model of grants to individual institutions established by four southern universities in an earlier round of funding.¹¹⁵ Oberlin’s comments and position on group funding may have figured in the foundation’s decision to approve parts of the group proposal but to fund each of the colleges individually rather than collectively.¹¹⁶

On the basis of the April 1, 1964, resolutions, the foundation expected the colleges to give special emphasis to increasing the “discovery of talented Negro and other minority group students,” to address the issue of gender, and to further focus on the education of black males “to help overcome the comparatively low proportion of Negro boys who seek college education.”¹¹⁷ Because the grants allowed some flexibility in how the money was to be spent, the elite colleges developed programs that varied in emphasis.¹¹⁸ Carleton College focused its attention on providing sixty minority scholarships.¹¹⁹ At Reed College—where changing the existing “assumptions as to what an ideal education should be like” proved difficult—the enrollment of fewer than forty black students created a “black studies crisis.”¹²⁰ Occidental College, for its part, planned to give “some attention to . . . Mexican American students” as well.¹²¹

It is striking that Oberlin College had declined to participate in the collective proposal. Its leaders did not think that a “group effort on this problem” would lead to greater success.¹²² Of course, Oberlin’s status as a pioneer in black education led the college sometimes to separate itself from this group. For example, the SEOP was unique in its focus on middle school students (ages thirteen and fourteen)—a college-bound program faculty called “Middle Start.”¹²³ Oberlin College also stood out in the college program funded by Rockefeller Foundation in its willingness to take risks when admitting African American students.¹²⁴

Like the other six participating schools, however, Oberlin College expended most of its Rockefeller Foundation funding on scholarships. Of the \$275,000 grant received in 1964, the college directed \$240,000 to financial aid. In the first year of the grant period, the college awarded Rockefeller scholarships to fifty-eight students, more than at any other participating college.¹²⁵ By 1967, there were eighty-seven black students on campus, including thirty-three students from the Rockefeller-funded program, whereas in 1963, Oberlin had had only nineteen minority students enrolled in both divisions of the college.¹²⁶

Many selective colleges spent large amounts on financial aid for black students, but there was always an “intense competition for the really good Negro high school graduates and each of the more prestigious colleges finally [got] fewer than it would [have been] glad to take and assist financially.”¹²⁷ In many cases, promising black students who were admitted to small liberal arts colleges attended Ivy League universities instead.¹²⁸ Nevertheless, the Rockefeller grants helped increase the numbers of African Americans applying to participating schools and ultimately contributed to rewriting the missions of some of these institutions.¹²⁹ Some colleges, like Carleton and Reed, recruited minority students because of their scholarly abilities; their faculties were not prepared to explore new possibilities or to embrace students representative of the counterculture.

The Rockefeller Foundation decided not to renew Oberlin’s grant in 1969. The foundation staff wrote that it was “compelled to hope that the many institutions that have now become interested in diversifying their student bodies will be prepared to commit more of their own resources and of their fund raising from their own constituencies to the necessary support of disadvantaged students, and also that they will put increased pressure on the Congress to appropriate more adequately for this purpose.”¹³⁰ Congress did authorize funding for the Department of Education’s Upward Bound program, in which Oberlin College was a participant from 1977 through 2003.¹³¹

Oberlin’s Rockefeller funds began to run out in 1972, but the college allocated some of its own operational funds to sustain more limited programs, including summer remedial education for admitted African American students.¹³² Oberlin also took part in a 1989 minority scholar-in-residence program in coordination with nineteen participating schools, including five of the original Rockefeller grant institutions.¹³³

The SEOP was an embryonic project, providing program experience in minority recruitment, development services, and cross-cultural programs. At its core, however, the program was not Afrocentric, for it also opened the door to disadvantaged white students and Puerto Ricans who did not look like or think like the college’s more privileged majority. Although the SEOP embraced an integrationist model in which assimilation was a dominant value, many students chose to stick with members of their own race and sidestepped the difficult issues of intercultural contact. Document 20 sets forth the course of action taken by Oberlin College to make education more accessible to economically disadvantaged students, to assist them toward success, and to reallocate portions of the financial aid budget toward black and Latino students.



116. Sullivan to Carr, March 2, 1964. See also as referenced in note 114 above, Resolutions, April 1, 1964.

117. Leland DeVinney to Courtney C. Smith, March 2, 1964 (copy), Swarthmore College Student Assistance file, SEOP Files, Rockefeller Archive Center. The receiving date is April 13, 1964. Quoted words on page 2.

118. Ibid. See also Resolutions, April 1, 1964.

119. Merrill E. Jarchow, *Carleton Moves Confidently into Its Second Century, 1966–1992* (Northfield, Minn.: Carleton College, 1992), 16.

120. Emily E. Rena-Dozier and Ryan E. Schram, eds., *LET'S LEARN! A Reed College Student Handbook*, 10th ed. (Portland, Ore.: Reed College, 1998), 9, 14. I am indebted to Mark Kuestner for this bibliographical lead.

121. See Resolutions, April 1, 1964, plus Swarthmore College Student Assistance File, #64201 (copy), Rockefeller Archive Center.

122. T[hurston] E. M[anning] to R[obert] K. C[arr], note written on the back of a memorandum from Carr to Manning and W[illiam] F. H[ellmuth Jr], Reed College documents, Administrative Files, Carr Records, OCA.

123. Swarthmore College Student Assistant Files, #64198 (copy), Rockefeller Archive Center. Yinger, Ikeda, Laycock, and Cutler called this experiment in educational enrichment for these young adolescents Middle Start. This program influenced the way in which the college would write Upward Bound grants to the U.S. Office of Education.

124. Antioch College placed ahead of Oberlin in taking risks when admitting African American students. In contrast, "Swarthmore and Reed have made the least concessions in their admission policy, while probably Carleton has made the least concessions in its academic handling of its Rockefeller students once they arrived," [Carleton] President [John W.] Nason, "Report on Seven College Conference Relating to Rockefeller Scholarship Program held in Chicago, Illinois, May 3 and 4, 1967," 1, 3, Project Files, Baumann Papers, OCA; see also memo from "PWB," April 26, 1965, Swarthmore College Assistance file, SEOP Files, Rockefeller Archive Center.

125. Nason, "Report on Seven College Conference," 1.

126. Resolutions, April 1, 1964. See also McQueen, "Black Students at Oberlin," 5–11.

127. "Interviews: L[eland] G. D[eVinney]: Visit to Swarthmore College," July 11, 1966, 1, Swarthmore College Student Assistance file (copy), Rockefeller Archive Center.

128. Ibid., page 2 of the interview.

129. Carleton College, for instance, "had one Negro applicant" in 1961, none in 1962, 5 in 1963, 15 in 1964 (following the announcement of the Rockefeller grant), and 120 in 1965. Of the 120 applicants in that year, 27 were admitted, and 12 matriculated. See Richard C. Gilman to Leland DeVinney, June 30, 1965 (copy), Rockefeller Archive Center. On Oberlin's commitment to improving diversity and inclusiveness, see Reich, "Educational Opportunity," 9–13.

130. Leland DeVinney to Frederick A. Hargadon, November 21, 1968, Swarthmore College Student Assistance file, SEOP Files, Rockefeller Archive Center.

131. Oberlin's Upward Bound program remained active through 2003, serving Lorain County's "large population of low-income and first-generation students." See

Roderick R. Paige to [Oberlin College], November 18, 2003, Upward Bound file, Records of the Dean of Student Support Services, OCA. See also Larry Oxendine to Nancy Dye, August 28, 2003, Presidential Records of Nancy S. Dye, OCA.

132. Warren F. Walker Jr. to [Ellsworth Clayton] Carlson, March 27, 1974, Developmental Services—SEOP, 1969–75, Other Administrative Units, Files of Administrative Offices/Departmental Units, Office of the Provost, OCA.

133. Grinnell, Oberlin, Occidental, Reed, and Swarthmore. The other institutions were Bates, Bowdoin, Bryn Mawr, Colby, Colorado, Davidson, Franklin and Marshall, Lafayette, Macalester, Pomona, Rhodes, Trinity, Wellesley, and the University of the South. *Observer*, February 16, 1989, 1, 6.

134. See the special report on the Rockefeller Foundation's program "Equal Opportunities for All," text by Richard Schickel, appearing under the title *The Long Road to College: A Summer of Opportunity* (New York: Rockefeller Foundation, 1965).

135. One phase of Oberlin's work among disadvantaged adolescents in the SEOP is reported in Yinger, Ikeda, Laycock, and Cutler, *Middle Start*. The Rockefeller Foundation made two awards, one of \$275,000 and the other of \$150,000, in support of the college's SEOP.

136. Simpson, who feared separatism and wanted integration, opposed creating a separate department for the purpose of advancing course offerings in black history and culture. See George E. Simpson to Donald Reich, May 5, 1971, OC African American Studies, 1968–69, 1971, Simpson Papers, OCA.

137. See file titled "Upward Bound, 1969–70," Campus Programs, Academic Departments and Programs, College of Arts and Sciences, OCA. See also related files of Upward Bound program (under Grants, 1977–87), Dean of Student Support Services, OCA.

138. Oberlin College received a number of challenge grants from the Ford Foundation in the early 1960s and from the Rockefeller Foundation in the mid-1960s.

139. This academic break between semesters is now called "Winter Term."

140. James Bagby is known today as Ihsan Abdul-Wajid Bagby.

141. Quotation from mailing of the OCABC Executive Committee, May 10, 1968, in Ad hoc Committee on Afro-American Life and Culture, 1968–69, McQueen Papers, OCA.

142. On the demands of black students at Antioch College, see Dixon, *Antioch*, esp. chap. 20; and Offie Cherry Wortham, "A Project Demonstrating Excellence on Interracial Education at Antioch College: An Analysis of the Efforts of Antioch College to Increase Cultural Pluralism, 1964–1973" (Ph.D. diss., Union for Experimenting Colleges and Universities, 1974). On events at Reed College, I have relied on a series of articles appearing in *Sallyport* (October 1965, July 1969, and October 1969). "Sallyport" is the name the Reed College alumni magazine used until 1971. See also "Black Studies Accord Ends Reed Takeover," *Oregonian*, December 20, 1968, 42. I am indebted to Mark Kuestner, Reed College Archives, for making available these printed pieces.

143. The news article "Black Students Will Organize," by Richard C. Vidman, in the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* on January 4, 1968, 17, is attached to George L[angelier] to Bill [Hellmuth], n.d. (typescript note), William Hellmuth folder, SEOP, 1967–68, Papers of Ira S. Steinberg, OCA.