

Swarthmore College
Swarthmore, Pennsylvania

Office of the President

31 December 1968

To Members of the Faculty:

I feel that I should let you know about the enclosed communication that came to me on December 23rd from Clinton A. Etheridge, Jr., Chairman of the Swarthmore Afro-American Students' Society.

As you will remember, several new problems in recruiting and enrolling able Negro students, after several years of considerable success in comparison with other selective colleges and universities, were identified by Dean Hargadon last spring. He spoke to the Faculty about the matter on April 19th, and again on June 6th. On May 9th, in a conversation with Sam Shepherd, then chairman of SASS, and Don Mizell I proposed that the Admissions Policy Committee and students to be designated jointly by the chairman of SASS and the president of Student Council begin early this fall to study the matter in depth and make recommendations to the Faculty and the Board of Managers. In preparation for this joint activity Dean Hargadon worked during the summer on a factual report of our experience and problems and prospects in regard to Negro recruitment and enrollment, in order to give us a solid basis for our policy discussions. What followed has been a frustrating sequence of events that delayed us in getting to the important policy questions that face us. It is instructive to compare these delays with the quickness with which we were permitted to move forward in a constructive way on substantive proposals made last April 26th for increasing black studies.

It is quite inaccurate and unjust to say that SASS's four earlier "demands," sent in mid October to members of the Admissions Policy Committee, "have lain on the table for two months." The two of those "demands" that bore on admissions have had the constant attention of the Admissions Policy Committee all fall. For the other two (the creation of a Black Interest Committee and the recruitment, subject to SASS's review, of a high-level Black administrator) the chairman of SASS was told by the Dean of Admissions in October that they were not the province of the Admissions Policy Committee and should be re-directed. They never were, except to Student Council for endorsement. Indeed through one student who had written an open letter about the administration's apparent failure to respond, and through the president of Student Council, I have been undertaking to find out exactly what members of SASS had in mind in their "demands." The first sentence in Clinton Etheridge's covering letter reveals an awareness of this fact.

On December 26th I telephoned Clinton Etheridge in New York, told him that I had received his letter and wished to talk to him about it. I asked him to come to my office on December 27th or, if that were not possible, December 28th. He was unwilling to come without knowing what I was going to say to him, and reluctant to come without other members of SASS for whom he was as chairman the signer of the letter. I said that he could bring any number of others with him. He asked if I was seeking amplification of some of the demands or wanted to discuss the whole concept of the letter; I said the latter. I said that I wanted us as two human beings to discuss a human problem in the search for a human solution to it. He said that he would call me back on December 27th. On December 27th he phoned to say that he would discuss the content of the letter, toward its implementation, but only with other members of SASS present, who would not be available until after vacation. He asked, therefore, for an appointment for SASS members to meet with me on Monday, January 6th, at 11:00 A.M. I said that this was too late in relation to the January 7th deadline and implied threat made during the vacation period by SASS, but he would not agree to an earlier meeting and I said I would in any case be glad to meet with the SASS members at the time he asked. I then told Clinton that I had wanted to explain that while I was sympathetic with many of their underlying concerns and was open minded on proposals for implementation, I simply could not act alone upon their demands since these involve basic policy matters for the Faculty and the Board of Managers, with, hopefully, student expression as well. The College, I said, never accedes to anyone's demands, but I said that in the early meeting I sought with him I was going to request him to recast the SASS letter and accompanying document in the form of proposals which would then go to the Faculty and the Board of Managers for full and unprejudiced consideration, along with the recommendations of the Admissions Policy Committee which I understand are to be released in a few days. I said that in view of his unwillingness to meet with me until January 6th, the day before the deadline and threat set by SASS in connection with a "public" acceptance, I wanted him to know that I might have no choice but to write, before then, the public response called for in his letter, making public at the same time his letter to which I was replying.

I want the Faculty to know, therefore, that I shall meet with members of SASS on Monday, January 6th, at 11:00 A.M., meet with them as an educator, and President of a college concerned for their welfare, not as a combatant anticipating siege. I expect to limit myself to making the following points:

1. I have great sympathy for the underlying concerns of SASS in seeking an increase in the number of Negro students, in seeking to create a viable healthy black student population, and in recognizing the importance of self definition. I want our entire College community to consider conscien-

tiously and imaginatively the best way to achieve these goals. In making non-negotiable demands SASS members are separating themselves from all who share so many of their concerns and wish to work toward them. They are saying in effect that other students and the Faculty and the Board of Managers have nothing to say about these goals and the ways and means to achieve them.

2. This College has never and must never be governed by demands or moved by threats. I cannot believe it is the best in individual SASS members that speaks of non-negotiable demands and threatens force, and I know that the best for the College has never been achieved in this way. As I said in my first Collection talk this fall, referring then to quite a different problem,

"It has never been Swarthmore's way to be shaped by demands -- whether demands of trustees, faculty, administration, students, alumni, or the public. Nor will it be shaped by anyone who thinks only as a trustee, a faculty member, an administrator, or a student. It will be shaped by what its faculty, administration, trustees, and students choose that it will be, and we, like Professor Finley, are thinking of choice as a rational and considerate process, not a cold process but a very warm and human process that realizes and responds to the felt needs of individuals."

3. In the case of the present demands the President does not have the authority to act alone on basic policy matters on which student views are welcomed and on which an eventual judgment must be made by the Faculty and then the Board of Managers. SASS predicates a power in the presidency -- a power to circumvent the role of the Faculty and the Board of Managers in the formulation of major policy -- which the President does not have and would not seek, a power it would in fact ill-serve the community for him to have.

4. I shall ask SASS members to recast their letter and accompanying document in the form of proposals which can be discussed by all students and go to the Faculty and Board of Managers for full and unprejudiced consideration, along with the report of the Admissions Policy Committee which, on the request of the Student Council, is to be sent as soon as possible to all students as well as to the Faculty and the Board.

The notice of the Faculty meeting for Tuesday, January 7th, at 4:15 P.M. said that we will continue our discussion of the reports of the Student Life Committee and the Expanded Student Affairs Committee. Subsequent to that notice, Professor Frank Pierson has asked, as chairman of the Black Studies Curriculum Committee, that we have a preliminary discussion of that committee's report at the meeting. Subsequent to that request, the president of Student Council has asked that we give the highest priority at that meeting to the proposal for "Student Week." Subsequent to that request, the SASS communication of which I have written was presented and should, it now appears, be our first order of business on the 7th.

Courtney Smith