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Black Liberation 19679

Perceptions of Radicalism among SASS Members, Swarthmore Faculty, Alumni, Local and National Media, 1968-1969

Introduction

“Those who profess to favor freedom and yet depreciate agitation, are people who want crops without ploughing the ground; they want rain without thunder and lightning; they want the ocean without the roar of its many waters. The struggle may be a moral one, or it may be a physical one, or it may be both. But it must be a struggle. Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will.”¹

Frederick Douglass

The Black Campus Movement of the 1960s, part of the longer fight for equality in higher education among students of color, gave rise to the creation of Black Studies programs, Black Cultural Centers, Black Student Unions, and greater Black student admission to colleges and universities nationwide. This was possible due to the ceaseless efforts of Black students at various colleges across America. Some of the struggles for equality of representation and greater autonomy on campuses were violent, some of the most infamous of which include student activism at San Francisco and South Carolina State. These acts of defiance against systematic racism within institutions polarized opinions in higher education during the latter part of the 1960s.

The events at Swarthmore College began with the foundation of SASS, the Swarthmore Afro-American Student Society in 1966, progressing into two major takeovers in 1969 and 1970, accompanied with demands calling for Black participation in college matters, the hiring of Black professors and faculty, the creation of a Black Cultural Center, an increased enrollment of Black students, and a Black Studies program. Each time a demand for representation was proposed, a struggle ensued between SASS members and faculty. The inner workings of these struggles are most pertinent to this narrative because they expose subtle and unsubtle racism within an

¹ "A Quote by Frederick Douglass." Goodreads. <http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/85172-those-who-profess-to-favor-freedom-and-yet-depreciate-agitation>.

institution founded on Quaker principles and the mechanisms that were in place to preserve this discrimination.

The particular case of Swarthmore in the context of the larger Black Campus Movement is one that has been seldom written about. It may be that Swarthmore's story is not as wide reaching due to its relatively mild character in the context of actions on other campuses. It is true that there was no brutality, arrest, or violence present in Swarthmore's action. However, in the context of Black student actions as part of the Black Campus Movement, Swarthmore's story needs to be told because of the mechanisms that worked to stagnate and push forward change.

The definition of radical, as informed by readings on the Black Campus Movement, is the challenging of power structures through direct action and swift divergence from norms of complacency. What this meant in the scheme of the Black Campus Movement was that, as a result of the longer Civil Right Movement, Black students began to act in solidarity to create an environment that would not beget "white men with dark skins" in colleges and universities.² Black students' White peers and administrators alike scrutinized these interests and subsequent actions. This scrutiny, along with an education system where learning and power structures were in place to serve Whites further radicalized all people of color who attempted action to change their role in higher education.

There were undoubtedly a large amount of "radical" actions throughout the course of the Black Campus Movement in the 1960's. The events at Swarthmore, in most respects, should not be seen as "radical". By definition, the events were radical. However, there is a difference between the definition of radical and what it meant in the cultural context of the 1960s. The radical itself became radicalized. Additionally, when I refer to radicalization in the narrative, I do not mean that actors were made more radical. I mean specifically that the College imposed the title of radical on certain actors.

For the sake of this historical narrative, it is important to keep in mind that while the events at Swarthmore were seemingly mild, the lead up to these events were carefully scrutinized by those who determined their own definition of radical. Throughout this narrative, I hope to investigate those who perceived certain members of SASS as radical, and SASS member's perceptions of themselves and the events in which they partook. Through this lens, I hope to

² Biondi, Martha. "The Rise of Black Power on Campus." In *The Black Revolution on Campus*, 14. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012.

bring to light new perspective on faculty-student relations, erasure of radical identity, and the media's portrayal of the entire Black Campus Movement in conversation with radicalism and Black student action at Swarthmore.

The main question I pose in relation to this series of historical events is how did peaceful action by students seeking greater representation become construed as violent, radical action? In the case of Black students, it is undoubtedly due to institutional and paternal racism. However, I want to examine this in the specific case of Swarthmore. Additionally, it is important to discern the methods of manipulation used by those in power with certain biases to make it more difficult for SASS demands to be addressed. I will focus particularly on the events before, during, and directly after the 1969 Parrish takeover as a lens to analyze perceptions of radicalism from various perspectives at the time. I will take information from primary sources including the Swarthmore faculty minutes, newspaper articles from the time, correspondence between faculty and SASS members, and interviews from the present day.

SASS and Radical Action: A Look from the Inside

*"One of the more troubling things to emerge from the flexing of student muscle on college campuses is the way Negro dissidents construe limited Negro enrollment as proof of official indifference to Negro aspirations. And nowhere is this mistaken notion more immediately evident than in the takeover of the admissions office at Swarthmore College by members of the Afro-American Students' Society"*³
Philadelphia Bulletin, January 13th, 1969

The events of January 1969 were a culmination of racial tension that had bubbled beneath the surface on Swarthmore's campus, yet until that point, were not openly addressed. The takeover of the admissions office in Parrish Hall on January 9th, 1969 created an atmosphere in which staff, faculty, alumni, and students were polarized even further than they had previously been. This is evident in letters sent from alumni during this period, correspondences within faculty meetings, and SASS reports and correspondence. What led up to this was over a year of demands not being met, well after SASS's initial organization. Many of the inner workings of SASS from the period after its founding are only discernable from commentary after the event, which adds a layer of skepticism to analysis. Though this commentary, rooted in memory, is flawed by its nature, what arises provides a framework to work with notions of radicalism.

³ "Swarthmore College Sit-In." *The Philadelphia Bulletin*, January 13, 1969.

Before the '69 Parrish takeover, SASS put forth demands that challenged the College to move at a pace that they found to be unjustifiable and at odds with its mission and spirit. To begin the discussion on perceptions of radicalism from the perspective of Black students, the first thing to look at is how the members of SASS perceived their experience before the takeover. The majority of SASS members who were integral in the planning of the '69 takeover were seniors at the time. The fact that they had experienced three and a half years of Swarthmore's treatment of Black students, which in their eyes was wrought with irreconcilable sleights, within the larger climate of the Black Campus Movement and the Civil Rights Movement was undoubtedly a primary motivating factor behind the "radical" idea of direct action as a the best tool to create immediate change.

On October 1st, 1968, Don Mizell and Clinton Etheridge penned a letter addressing Black admission that was published in The Phoenix. The report used statistics comparing Swarthmore's use of Rockefeller Funds⁴ with other comparable liberal arts colleges as well as the number of Black students admitted at comparable institutions. Mizell and Etheridge's letter to the editor ends, "Let's get this thing together."⁵ It shows that, at this point, there was strong hope of collaboration between SASS and the College.

In part in response to the aforementioned letter, on October 7th, 1968, Dean of Admissions, Fred Hargadon released the report, produced by the admissions office, on Black student enrollment since 1964 to Black students and made publically available in the library. The report publicized, without specifically naming students, current Black students' family structures, family income, parents' level of education, grades in secondary school and at Swarthmore, and SAT scores. This all came along with commentary on each section in light of Black enrollment. Some choice quotes from the report are as follows:

*"Needless to say, the integrationist ethic itself has come under considerable fire from many quarters, not the least of which is a group of our own Swarthmore Negro Students. (This has created no little consternation and complication in our admissions efforts.)"*⁶

⁴ Rockefeller Funds references money dedicated to the college from the Rockefeller Foundation, a philanthropic group founded by the Rockefeller Family, to increase Black admissions in the early 1960's.

⁵ Mizell, Don, and Clinton Etheridge. "Letters to the Editor." *Swarthmore Phoenix*, October 15, 1968.

⁶ Admissions Report, Frederick Hargadon, September, 1968, Black Liberation 1969 Database, Swarthmore College Library.

“Our relationships with these schools (and their relationships with the students and parents) are understandable strained when it appears that we have gone out of our way to recruit and enroll a less able student simply because he or she is Negro.”^{7,8}

“In high schools which are both integrated and of limited resources, the fact that we as a college are singling out from among all students whose educational aspirations and chances have been stunted because they are poor and culturally deprived, only Negro students, rankles them, and in my opinion rightly so.”⁹

Hargadon and the Admissions Committee had completely misguided the audience. In terms of who this report was speaking to, which was the Black student body, it appears that there was a complete lack of communication and understanding as to what the majority of Black students would find acceptable. A devastating effect of the admissions report was an increase in tension in the Black community on campus based on the personal nature of information released.

SASS members were justifiably angry in the face of the publication of the admissions report. Dean Hargadon’s apologist rhetoric and insensitivity to the concerns of Black students was egregious. Students felt as if they were being treated as mere statistics under the hand of a paternalistic white organization that did not represent Black interests and intrinsically had problems with them being at Swarthmore College. This action undoubtedly split relations between SASS and representatives of the College further than it had been before. The College failed to understand the shock and hurt of Black students at the publicizing of this information. The polarization and lack of understanding of the Black student response made it increasingly likely that any action taken by Black students to assert themselves and challenge their standing at Swarthmore would be viewed as “radical” in nature.

Marilyn Allman Maye identified the “microaggression” of the admissions report’s placement in the library as what “really triggered everyone” to mobilize.¹⁰ Both parties continued to discuss the worsening dynamic between the College and SASS members. By December of 1968, it became apparent that SASS and the College were operating on different levels. The

⁷ These schools references the caliber of school which Swarthmore students come from.

⁸ Hargadon, “Admissions Report.”

⁹ Hargadon, “Admissions Report.”

¹⁰ Marilyn Allman Maye ‘69 Interview, October 31, 2014, Black Liberation 1969 Database, Swarthmore College Library.

debate over admissions had been stuck on the increased admission of “risk” students, the notion of an integrationist ethic, and the hiring of Black admissions staff.¹¹

As the tension escalated, SASS made demands that put more pressure on the College. A set of initial SASS demands was published one week after the admissions report was put out. In this, SASS demanded the admissions report be taken off general reserve, a Black admissions committee be formed, the hiring of a “high-level Black administrator”, and active work with Dean Hargadon on the recruitment of Black students.¹² This set of demands was virtually ignored by the faculty, namely Dean Hargadon, which prompted the production of a second set of more forward demands by SASS before the College’s Christmas vacation.

In a set of demands addressed to President Smith dated December 23rd, 1968, SASS stated that, “If you fail to issue a clear, unequivocal public acceptance of these non-negotiable demands by noon, Tuesday, January 7, 1969, the Black students and SASS will be forced to do whatever is necessary to obtain acceptance of same.”¹³ This set of demands further denounced the producers of the admissions report for their non-communication with Black students about something that so blatantly concerned their own lives. It also said that the outing of information that was private for all other students always was an affront and an embarrassment to Black students.

The main point of contention, and the catalyst for heightened perception of radicalism in Black students is described in the report as follows, “[Dean Hargadon’s] 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 and the viewpoints of the few negroes who agree with it.” Dean of Admissions Fred Hargadon was undoubtedly the main source of worsening relations between SASS and the College as exemplified by the statements above.

January 7th passed without resolution of the demands, and SASS made good on their promises of action in the face of inaction two days later. What the administration did not know was that this action had been orchestrated over winter break at the Harlem home of Marilyn

¹¹ “SASS Makes Recommendations; Admissions Dispute Continues.” *Swarthmore Phoenix*, November 5, 1968.

¹² SASS Statement, 10/18/1969, Swarthmore Afro-American Students’ Society, Black Liberation 1969 Database, Swarthmore College Library.

¹³ “SASS Makes Recommendations; Admissions Dispute Continues.”

Allman Maye '69. During the occupation of the admissions office, every member of SASS and Black student at Swarthmore behaved in what could only be labeled as a peaceful manner. By the second day of the occupation, a coalition of two hundred students of wide political and social background had penned a letter urging the administration to act in favor of the SASS demands. This petition was undoubtedly informed by the perceived radicalness of this action. The reasoning for solidarity within the wider student population was more based in fear of schism as opposed to legitimate support. However, each ally SASS had was a valuable one.

The SASS occupation of the Admission's office came to an end January 16, 1969 in the wake of President Smith's death. Many emotions were unleashed on the campus. There was immediate vitriol from reactionary students who believed that the SASS members had killed the president. Black students were confused and angry. During this period, however, rather than becoming polarized, for the most part the students, Black and White, remained stable in their mourning.

Despite the wider campus' melancholy environment, the SASS students' feared for themselves as a result of taking action perceived as radical. Jannette Domingo observed, "...after President Smith died, there the rumors were swirling that some of the athletes were, particularly, were going to come with baseball bats to physically remove us from the office, that they were so angry that they thought that we were responsible for the President's death, that they were going to remove us and, you know, punish us. And remember now, this is the '60s so the scenes of dogs and fire hoses and all that were not far from our minds that people could in fact, even at Swarthmore, that people could resort to violence."¹⁴ Her quote best sums up what SASS members felt at Swarthmore in the specific context of the takeover. Their peaceful action had provoked misunderstanding from their White peers, which translated to threats in the case of the students and condescension and slow action or inaction in the case of the faculty.

The Faculty and Staff Perspective

"Why do we want more Negro students enrolled here? Is it simply because we want to be able to say that we have x-number in the student body? Is it because they represent the kind (or a kind) of well-qualified student whom we seek anyway? Or, is it because we feel a social obligation to

¹⁴ Jannette Domingo '69 Interview, October 31, 2014, Black Liberation 1969 Database, Swarthmore College Library.

*meet a particularly pressing need of contemporary society? Is it because we believe that we have something special in the way of an educational program to offer them?"*¹⁵

- Dean of Admissions Fred Hargadon, September, 1968

The faculty and staff of Swarthmore were of mixed opinion about the events surrounding the 1969 SASS takeover. However, certain actors within this group allowed for, if not controlled, the narrative of SASS members as radicals. The main focuses of dialogue between SASS and the faculty were President Courtney Smith and Dean of Admissions Fred Hargadon. Professor Asmarom Legesse of the Sociology and Anthropology department was the sole Black faculty member present during the 1968-69 academic year. He served as the faculty liaison to SASS during the takeover. The dean of admissions acted as a catalyst for SASS action, and the burden of salvation lie with the president when the direct action occurred. Both the dean and the president acted in a way that served to exacerbate tensions between Black students, faculty, and staff. The deliberations around the SASS demands controlled the dialogue between faculty members and between students and faculty up until the takeover in January, 1969. The admissions report was neither the first nor the last cause of debate and action involving SASS.

The Black Studies Committee met in May 1968 to create a Black Studies program at Swarthmore. The committee minutes detail arguments that undoubtedly had bearing, at least in terms of racial dynamics, on the events later that year and in January 1969. The dialogue happening around the creation of a Black Studies program was not completely isolated from that surrounding Black admissions at Swarthmore. However, the same dynamic of misunderstanding of Black interests versus the interests of the College and White administrators and faculty, was at play, thus contributing to perceptions of radicalization.¹⁶

The majority of the faculty recognized a need to respond to SASS demands during the occupation of the admissions office. Beforehand, faculty responses to SASS demands had been postponed, which catalyzed the takeover. This represented a fundamental gap in logic. Why are the student's actions viewed as radical by some faculty and staff when they had previously made it seem like nothing was ever going to happen and that they did not care about Black admissions? The disagreement between both parties hinged on perceptions of paternalistic racism on one side and radical action on the other. Additionally, each party was conscious of their perception by the

¹⁵ Hargadon, "Admissions Report."

¹⁶ See *Minutes of the Black Studies Curriculum Committee 05/08/1968* for dialogue between Professors Legesse, Van Til, Pierson and Wright and SASS Members.

other. This becomes evident within the faculty in the debate over whether to admit “risk” Black students. Eventually, the word risk is nixed from official documents that go out because the faculty believed it would be misconstrued.¹⁷

The SASS members were less worried about looking like radicals and more worried about getting their goals accomplished. In response to faculty concerns regarding group consciousness controlling the Black narrative, or the Black narrative the faculty would have preferred to hear (that of Dianne Batts, Karen Simmons)¹⁸, Clinton Etheridge said, “Black people are seeking a group consciousness so as better to cope with a racist society; achievement can be group achievement rather than individual achievement.”¹⁹ This statement, rather than conforming to faculty interest, pushed back at them and attempts to help them understand where SASS members were coming from.

Throughout their meetings in January 1969, the faculty deplored the use of force and said that the admissions issue would have been taken care of in the same manner with or without the takeover. Helen North, speaking January 15th, 1969 said, “The faculty reaffirms its statement of 9 January 1969 that it deplores the use of force. Direct action, which has not forced the faculty’s hand in this situation, will not force it in the future.”²⁰ The faculty could never appear to condone actions that they considered “forceful” or in some cases “radical”. However, because of this the faculty could not or would not recognize the takeover’s legitimacy as a change-producing action. This denial undoubtedly blocked a potentially productive dialogue between the faculty, staff, and SASS about the College’s mission and non-violent action.

With the fire underneath them, the faculty acted quickly, passing both sets of SASS demands. This is to say that they acted because they perceived immediate threat, but they said that they acted out of the good of their own hearts and from the basis of their own rhetoric. The radicalization of SASS’s non-violent action by the faculty and their hypocritical public response to it is a clear indicator of the denial of agency to Black students, further connecting those in power to the idea of paternalistic racism.

¹⁷ Swarthmore College Faculty Meeting Minutes, Friends Historical Library, January, 1969, 181, 186.

¹⁸ Dianne Batts said to the faculty in January, 1969, ““To take Black risk students would be paternalistic.” - Swarthmore College Faculty Meeting Minutes, Friends Historical Library, January, 1969, 184.

¹⁹ Swarthmore College Faculty Meeting Minutes, Friends Historical Library, January, 1969, 171.

²⁰ Swarthmore College Faculty Meeting Minutes, Friends Historical Library, January, 1969, 190.

Furthermore, in the aftermath of the 1970 takeover, a different struggle between SASS members, faculty, and administrators that focused on demands for a Black Cultural Center, the staff's voice was even more pronounced. For example, custodial staff, the majority of whom were Black, sent a letter of support for SASS members showing outward support which had been shown quietly for years.²¹ However, there were members of the administrative staff such as Mary Gatens, a secretary in the music department who had a different response. Gatens wrote to then President Cross to insist that her son, a student at the time, not have any of his tuition go towards the funding of SASS. The rationalization behind her logic was that classes and a music concert that her son was to participate in were cancelled during the takeover. She goes on to say that she had spoken with other faculty members who agreed that "adolescent temper-tantrums" effects on employees are not being considered.²² The letter to President Cross, dated March 15th, 1970, ends with the phrase, "each concession is a stepping-stone to further irrationality and ultimate academic suicide." Without naming people, Ms. Gatens implicates other staff that clearly views the members of SASS as irrational and radical "adolescent" actors. It is clear through this that concessions made to SASS through belabored faculty and staff action were accommodations made for convenience, and did not represent any change in ideology.

Local and National Media's Role in Radicalization of the 1969 Takeover: The Phoenix and The Press

*"The Swarthmore College campus has passed through a melancholy season, a long winter of discontent. But now spring is come to the elm-lined walks. The trees – fleshed with green – and Swarthmore perennials – girls like buds, boys like saplings – assert their preeminence over the wintry seasons of Man and Nature. The view from the window of the president's office in Parrish Hall is one that delighted Dr. Courtney C. Smith for the 15 years he was president of Swarthmore, and it is one that he will not see again."*²³

Requiem for Courtney Smith, Written by Paul Good, Life Magazine, May 1969

Media coverage of the 1969 takeover and its aftermath varied from objective reportage, to racist editorial coverage, to subtly biased writing. The most widely read of the coverage of the SASS

²¹ Open Letter to the Parents of Black Students of Swarthmore College from William and Eileen Kline et al, March 14, 1970, Black Liberation 1969 Database, Swarthmore College Library.

²² Letter from Mary Gatens to President Robert Cross, March 15, 1970, Black Liberation 1969 Database, Swarthmore College Library.

²³ Good, Paul. "Requiem for Courtney Smith." *Life Magazine*, May 1, 1969, 76B-89.

takeover was undoubtedly the Life Magazine profile of the deceased Swarthmore President, entitled *“Requiem for Courtney Smith”*. This piece provided a generally balanced perspective on the death of President Smith, if overly diplomatic towards the administration and preservation of the status quo.²⁴ The Phoenix, Swarthmore’s student newspaper, published a supplement to its normal coverage every day of the takeover. In terms of determining the narrative of SASS members as radicals or militants, The Phoenix comes off much more neutrally than publications outside of the school.

The Phoenix supplement was a generally straight, balanced series of reports. A basic report of events was produced detailing each interaction between the faculty and SASS and notable occurrences. It republished speeches made by the President, correspondences between faculty and SASS, and commentary by various members of the Swarthmore community. It also published editorials, which provide some of the most interesting commentary there is on how White students felt about the SASS action at the time.

The strongest and undoubtedly loudest opinions articulated in newspapers across the country about the 1969 takeover were in the editorial sections. The editorial section of The Phoenix was not immune to people’s opinions of SASS as militant actors, fundamentally and irrevocably changing the fabric of the College. Two examples are as follows:

*“However old and conservative it may be, the argument, “if you don’t like it here, you can go somewhere else” still carries some weight. I did, and it worked. And I get understandably disturbed by people who think they have an inherent right to change the very aspects of Swarthmore that made me come here.”*²⁵

*“If anyone knows the meaning of the word violence it is surely Quakers, and yet occupying a building and preventing its normal use, and, worse, occupying the entire faculty, staff, student body, and campus is crisis negotiation, is euphemistically termed peace in the same paper which uses “Crisis” in three of its front page headlines.”*²⁶

These two quotes come from letters from a student and an outsider, both published after the takeover. These are not representative of the entire spectrum of editorials that were published in the wake of the SASS action. However, they represent a critical mass of thought that was

²⁴ “[President Smith] was confronted with non-negotiable demands and rhetoric that did great offense to him....This hurt him bitterly. But he never let himself be moved to anger.” – J. Roland Pennock describing Courtney Smith’s reaction to the December 23rd set of SASS demands.

²⁵ Wolfson, Richard, “Letters to the Editor: Pluralism.” *Swarthmore Phoenix*, January 9, 1969.

²⁶ Shelby, Marian, “Letters to the Editor: Crisis Issue; Alumni Speakers.” *Swarthmore Phoenix*, March 18, 1969.

present in the student body, in the faculty, and in the country at the time. There were also a significant number of letters of support that were published in *The Phoenix*. Excerpts from two examples of support are as follows:

*"In [SASS's] recent encounter with the Admissions department, they have again shown their determination to represent effectively the Black students at Swarthmore. The whole student body is benefitting from SASS's actions, and they deserve support from the white students in this confrontation with an administration traditionally unresponsive to Black interests."*²⁷

*"Now, as we read of Swarthmore's black students recognizing and expressing their own educational needs and concerns, we are proud and gratified; something we helped get started has 'come of age'. In truth, as reported in the papers, the Afro-American Students' 'demands' are modest, reasonable, constructive, and obviously will benefit the whole college community."*²⁸

These two quotes come from a student and a pair of alumnae. The amount of support in *The Phoenix* was relatively equal to the amount of critical editorials received. This equality was definitely unique to *The Phoenix*, as both the majority of local and national publications that were not affiliated with Swarthmore appeared to publish antagonistic and critical editorial responses to the SASS takeover. Below is an example of this:

*"The fault lies with the following: disregard for the enforcement of law and order, lack of discipline and deportment, lack of student loyalty and dedication, rule by the minority....Swarthmore College does not have to answer to anyone but God and their alumni."*²⁹
- W. Sproul Lewis '22, *The Delaware County Daily Times*, February 14th, 1969

The fact that, during and after the takeover of Parrish, local newspapers chose to cover Black student action at Swarthmore, while virtually ignoring what was going on beforehand is reprehensible and, along with the style of coverage, reveals an agenda.

In one non-editorial entry from *The Delaware County Daily Times*, an article begins, "...the seizure of the admissions office by black militant students at Swarthmore...."³⁰ The heightening of rhetoric ("black militant students") in local news undoubtedly created the potential for a more hostile environment for Black Swarthmore students in the aftermath of the takeover.

²⁷ Bardwell, Steve, "Letters to the Editor: SASS Support." *Swarthmore Phoenix*, November 15, 1968.

²⁸ Eliot, Johan and Frances Sears Eliot, "Letters to the Editor: Mourning." *Swarthmore Phoenix*, January 29, 1969.

²⁹ Lewis, W. Sproul, "Swarthmore Can Do As They Please." *The Delaware Country Daily Times*, February 14, 1969.

³⁰ "Uprisings Criticized." *The Delaware Country Daily Times*, January 17, 1969.

In terms of national media, coverage was limited. There was the aforementioned piece in Life Magazine and the editorial piece in The Washington Post which both appeared in the direct aftermath of the takeover. The lack of national news coverage of the takeover was undoubtedly due to the size of Swarthmore and the other actions happening on other campuses around the same time. The overall effect of both negative and positive media coverage is determined by who produced said media. In terms of the radicalization of SASS members, the editorials from people associated with the College (i.e. alumni), gave more legitimacy to that portrayal.

The Alumni Perspective

“So the militants have lynched a good and valuable man who was only 52 and had years ahead in which to continue to make valuable contributions to education and to racial equality. Yes, let us say “lynched” loudly and clearly: it means the arbitrary administration of drumhead punishment to an innocent person.”

- Janet Vaughn Koch '38, Washington Post, January 23rd, 1969³¹

As a group, the alumni were absolutely the most outspoken purveyors of blatant racism, classism, and anger subjected at the college for tolerating the takeover. The majority of alumni, with few exceptions, were fervent in their portrayal of the SASS members as militants, radicals, and intrinsically against what Swarthmore represented. This undoubtedly had an effect on the College's actions during the event, and the speed at which they acted in their demands. Many of the letters sent by alumni were directed to Dean Hargadon or President Smith. The unpublicized nature of these letters undoubtedly created an underlying pressure for administrators already looking for ways to fund new programs and under fire from students, media, and faculty.

Nearly all the letters mentioned some kind of absolute shock at the events that transpired at Swarthmore during the takeover and after the death of President Smith. Multiple alumni blamed SASS members and the takeover for the death of the president and refused to contribute funding to the College as long as the SASS members who perpetrated these events were still students at Swarthmore. One of the more offensive examples is below:

“[President Smith's] heart attack was undoubtedly brought about by the militant negro disturbances we have been reading about and has strengthened a growing feeling in this: As long as SASS (sassy black militants) are allowed to remain on campus and make such outrageous demands, we will no longer contribute as much as one penny to what was once our beloved Alma Mater.”³²

³¹ Koch, Janet, “Tragedy at Swarthmore.” *The Washington Post*, January 23, 1969.

³² Letter from Davis Marion '23 to Alumni Annual Giving Fund, January 16, 1969, Black Liberation 1969 Database, Swarthmore College Library.

Davis Marion '23, Addressed to Alumni Annual Giving Fund

From graduates of an institution such as Swarthmore, which prided itself on its Quaker history, inclusion, and liberal mindedness, the letters sent in have to represent either a broad misunderstanding of the motives of SASS members or very thinly veiled racism. The majority of alumnae also believed that SASS's demands to increase Black admission were plainly wrong. Jane S. Coburn '39 expresses a popular sentiment when she says, "I feel that if the students are going to run the College, they should finance it."³³

In a letter to Vice President Joseph B. Shane, Harvey T. Satterthwaite '07 expressed his opinions on the takeover and its aftermath in some of the most overtly and confusingly racist terms of any letter. Not only is what is said relatively incoherent, it also brings up the issue of interracial dating.

*"Unless great care is exercised to promptly straighten matters out the college can be ruined and it will be difficult to get either faculty or President of the standards of today and the already delicate matter of the colored boys and the white girls can get beyond the explosive point and some of this could probably be due to girls who think it smart to have colored boyfriends."*³⁴

As has already been said, many alumni in the face of the 1969 takeover wrote letters to various newspapers to express their disgust. It is uncertain what made certain alumni go to college, local, or national news as opposed to writing a letter to the college. However, the alumnae who decided to publish their opinions on the takeover did something important in publicizing sentiments that had been confined to private correspondence. It is uncertain if the alumnae were in contact with each other. The most likely conclusion for the standard nature of response is miscommunication and misunderstanding between the College and its alumni network regarding the takeover. The majority of letters sent referenced hearing about the events on the radio or in the newspaper.

It is almost difficult to write in any constructive manner about the alumni because, as a group, they were so monolithically conservative. It has been difficult to find any letters from alumni which express a modicum of support for SASS. There is a noticeable lack of Black

Note: The author of this piece is from West Chester, Pennsylvania and it would not be unlikely that he was reading local news reports in The Delaware County Daily Times about the takeover.

³³Letter from Jane Coburn '39, January 14, 1969, Black Liberation 1969 Database, Swarthmore College Library.

³⁴ Letter from Harry Satterthwaite to Joseph Shane, January 17, 1969, Black Liberation 1969 Database, Swarthmore College Library.

alumni input into the debate over SASS, which allows whites to control the narrative. However, this was most likely due to the small number of Black alumni and a lack of a formal Black alumni network or organization. It is also notable that graduation year had no bearing on perceptions of radicalism among alumni. Among series of letters, there appeared to only be one of support penned by two alumnae who began the campaign to bring the first Black student to Swarthmore in the 1940's. This letter appears in the previous section of this narrative, and was originally published in *The Phoenix*.

It is important to remember that the alumni had some stake in controlling the narrative because they gave a large portion of funding to the school and were privileged with confidentiality in their letters to the College. They were not being held accountable for their views, yet were still influential in their perception of SASS members as radicals. This undoubtedly led to unrest among College administrators in higher positions such as the president, vice president, and dean of admissions of the college. From this point of view, it appears that the alumni held a disproportionate amount of influence in the crafting of the narrative of SASS as radical. However, it is uncertain how much their correspondences really mattered in the passing through of SASS demands. There may have been a slowing down of passage based in a strong consideration of alumni concerns. However, overall the College's responses were more calming than conciliatory towards the alumnae.

SASS Members' Modern Perceptions of Radicalism

"...Our memory has no guarantees at all, and yet we bow more often than is objectively justified to the compulsion to believe what it says." Sigmund Freud, The Interpretation of Dreams

One of the most interesting parts of the crafting of this narrative has been seeing how perspective changes over time based on lived experience. This section of this narrative is different from others because it is a meta-examination of sorts. SASS members' actions at the time of the takeover will be compared to how they view these actions now in light of the aftermath of the takeover and who they are now. This is important to examine because it exposes a facet of this narrative that was previously impossible to uncover.

The two SASS actors I will focus on are Clinton Etheridge '69 and Marilyn Allman Maye '69. Both of these people had an important role in the development of the narrative of SASS as a radical organization and the takeover as a radical action. However, some of these actors self-

identified as radical in a stronger sense than others. The public face of SASS was an admittedly moderate rhetorical force with the centrist faces of Sam Shepard '68 and Clinton Etheridge '69 occupying the the most visible positions. Through these actors' contemporary testimonies, the information that was available during the period of the 1969 takeover is put into a more individualized perspective.

Clinton Etheridge was chairman of SASS during the 1968-1969 school year. He was the face of the organization throughout the takeover, and was present at faculty meetings and media events. Through personal testimony from Clinton Etheridge and his peers, we see that he was a "shy, reluctant, unlikely leader" who did not imagine himself as the face of SASS until he was elected to the position.³⁵ Prior to the writing of these narratives, Mr. Etheridge was and remains the only SASS member present at the takeover to have published anything on the event.

In *The Crucible of Character*, published in the March 2005 magazine *The Swarthmore College Bulletin*, Mr. Etheridge details the events of the takeover.³⁶ Mr. Etheridge references this article several times in the September 27, 2014 individual interview with him as well as the group interview with the men of SASS.³⁷ He performs an invaluable service by detailing Black admissions history at Swarthmore in the essay for an assumedly unknowledgeable audience.

In writing the piece, Mr. Etheridge attempts to subvert the militant or radical narrative perpetrated at the time by legitimizing SASS members' lives after Swarthmore as successful and mainstream.³⁸ This is an interesting way to go about telling the narrative to the mostly white alumni, especially because Clinton Etheridge rejected the integrationist ethic pushed forth by Dean Hargadon and advocated for Black self-determinism during his leadership of SASS. Rather than affirm the merits of SASS's actions in the beginning of the essay, he undercuts them.

Additionally, Mr. Etheridge pulls back away from the "strong language" he used to communicate with President Smith in the set of SASS demands dated December 23rd, 1968.

³⁵ Clinton Etheridge '69 Interview, September 27, 2014, Black Liberation 1969 Database, Swarthmore College Library.

³⁶ Etheridge, Clinton. "The Crucible of Character." *Swarthmore College Bulletin*, March 1, 2005, 22-24, 84-87.

³⁷ The group interview, conducted on September 27th, 2014, included Clinton Etheridge '69, Harold Buchanan '69, Michael Fields '69, and James White '73.

³⁸ "Little did that newspaper know that one of those "militants" would become chairman of the Maryland Public Utilities Commission (Russell Frisby '72, who attended Yale Law School). Or that another "militant" would become one of the nation's top black lawyers (according to Black Enterprise) and a senior partner with the multinational law firm of Holland & Knight (Marilyn Holifield '69, who attended Harvard Law School and also served on the College's Board of Managers)."

However, immediately after this he says that he expected the College to ignore the demands that SASS presented. Mr. Etheridge attempts to create a narrative that weaves through the best of both worlds. He is apologetic in terms of the means of action, at the time construed as radical, but does not change what actually happened in telling the history. Mr. Etheridge likely understands this subtle reworking of the narrative will place SASS members involved in the takeover in a better light. However, what it does in truth is give more legitimacy to the perception of the radicalization of SASS members by administration, staff, alumni, and fellow students at the time.

Marilyn Allman Maye '69 was a member of the group of women in SASS called the Seven Sisters. She was integral in the foundation of SASS, and was part of a body of women who were the behind the scenes leaders of the organization. As opposed to the more conservative stance of Clinton Etheridge today, Dr. Allman Maye has remained relatively consistent in her convictions in the modern telling of the narrative of the 1969 takeover. In her October 31, 2014 interview, Allman Maye said: *"I have always been the person that said, 'I don't have time to fight White people.' I know that's probably not politically correct, but what I mean by 'White people' is opposition people."*³⁹ This quote defines her convictions then and her unwillingness to back down from them now. Now, Dr. Allman Maye goes to the length of saying that her statement may not be politically correct. However, at the time of the takeover, this rhetoric certainly would have been seen as radical and incendiary.

Dr. Allman Maye also describes the Black Studies course she designed and took while she was a student at Swarthmore called *Black Philosophies of Liberation*. She says of the courses foundation: *"What's the sense in going to college and calling yourself well-educated and you don't know basic history about yourself and your people, right?"*⁴⁰

These quotes from the interview serve to illustrate Allman Maye's relatively unfettered convictions and her view of herself then compared with her now. She does not try to rework the narrative. She talks about what happened and does not necessarily care about making herself look any less "radical" than she appeared to faculty, staff, alumni, and fellow students in 1969.

Dr. Allman Maye also details how the women of SASS were the ones who were willing to take action over the men. This was something that many of the men, including chairman Clinton

³⁹ "Marilyn Allman Maye '69 Interview."

⁴⁰ "Marilyn Allman Maye '69 Interview."

Etheridge, skirted around in contemporary interviews.⁴¹ She details how she held the meeting to plan the takeover in her home in Harlem, and how they identified with an African Socialist mentality where, as women, they would control things from behind the scenes and place the men upfront as the faces of SASS. It is easy to see how this rhetoric could be inflammatory to the men of SASS, prompting backlash.

Nonviolence's Radicalization: Conclusions on SASS's Action and Swarthmore's Response

*"So, a lot of us left --- I don't want to say a lot --- I left Swarthmore not knowing if I really wanted to return. It wasn't just about the school, it was about my total experience here. Even though I am very, very, thankful for that experience, but it was kind of painful to come back to Swarthmore."*⁴²
- James White '73

In Martha Biondi's book on the Black Campus Movement, she concludes that, "[Black student activists and their allies] rejected the market-driven approach that dominates the contemporary landscape of higher education, and viewed the discourse of merit as laden with disguised class and race privilege...."⁴³ Certainly, many of the ideas present during the Black Campus Movement, such as Black self-determinism, increased enrollment of students of color, and greater minority representation in faculties and administrations of campuses across the country fell victim to that "market-driven approach". Additionally, the discourse of merit, one that continues to have bearing, was key in the decision making process of Black students and White faculty members at Swarthmore. Arguably, in the form of discussion of risk student admission, it was the largest structural obstacle that served to prevent change from being enacted more quickly.

The role of radicalism in the crafting of the narrative surrounding the 1969 Parrish takeover cannot be understated. Members of the Swarthmore community including all members of SASS, Dean of Admissions Fred Hargadon, and President Courtney Smith, as well as national, local, and college media, and alumnae played a part in determining the perception of SASS actors before, during, and after the 1969 takeover of Parrish Hall. As has been laid out in this narrative, each of the aforementioned parties directly influenced the direction of actions in a variety ways.

⁴¹ See Group Interview Transcription: "I think there was commitment to the overall goals and vision of SASS of both the men and the women, the founding fathers and the founding mothers."

⁴² James White '73 Interview, September 27, 2014, Black Liberation 1969 Database, Swarthmore College Library.

⁴³ Biondi, *The Black Revolution on Campus*, 278.

SASS members went through with a non-violent action spurred on by the College's inaction, and were perceived by the dean of admissions as irrational actors, deeply saddened the president with their words, piqued the deep anger of a large portion of the alumni, and provoked editorials in major national publications. It would not be an understatement to say that the majority of feedback that SASS members received during and after the takeover was negative. This was punctuated by the death of President Courtney Smith on January 16th, which ended the takeover, but was not surprisingly unduly blamed on SASS.

Many of the members of SASS who graduated in 1969 did not return for long periods of time. In some cases, this was merely because they were preoccupied with their own lives. But in a number of the cases, it was because they felt that Swarthmore had hurt them, as evidenced in the quote that starts this section. The painful nature of the experiences with the College is not unique to Black students, but the specific pain may be. The status of Black students as an extreme minority in a sea of White faces who are accepted as inherently normal, coupled with a lack of enfranchisement within the College created an unwelcoming environment.

At San Francisco State, Northwestern University, the University of Michigan, Wesleyan University, Lincoln University, and South Carolina State among many others, the fight for the extension of the Civil Rights Movement to campus was waged. Ibram X. Kendi says, "The new ideals, the new racial constitution gave higher education the tools to fully extract the knife and heal the wounds inflicted by one hundred years of the moralized contraption, standardization of exclusion, normalized mask of whiteness, and ladder altruism."^{44,45} The tools were used to change the makeup of Swarthmore College in particular. However, the lack of discussion of the fight for these tools negates much of the change.

Swarthmore College prides itself in its Quaker roots, its liberal tradition, and its tolerance. This overarching narrative is why this story needs to be told so badly. The clean, unfettered image of Swarthmore is one that negates the struggles of groups within it. Swarthmore was built to serve wealthier, white students over others despite its perennial portrayal as progressive and inclusive. With all of the perspectives taken into account, especially those of SASS members who, for the most part, have not yet gotten a chance to speak about their experiences, hopefully a more full picture of Swarthmore College will emerge.

⁴⁴ The knife is a reference to the Malcolm X quote, "You don't stick a knife in a man's back nine inches and then pull it out six inches and say you're making progress."

⁴⁵ Kendi, Ibram X. "Epilogue." In *The Black Campus*, 161. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

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