"Quacks, Quirks, Agitators, and Communists": Private Black Colleges and the Limits of Institutional Autonomy

Joy Ann Williamson

Private black colleges and their students played a vital role in the Civil Rights Movement of the middle twentieth century. The colleges' corporate structure shielded the colleges and their students from direct state intervention, and students took advantage of the liberal campus climate. Private philanthropic support and control enabled a more active form of participation in the movement, but insecure economic situations, internal dissention, and other convenient liabilities left the colleges vulnerable. State agencies found creative ways to interfere in campus affairs and capitalize on institutional weaknesses. This piece examines the battle for institutional autonomy as it played out in the state of Mississippi. It offers a picture of the lengths to which racists would go to crush the Civil Rights Movement, an evaluation of the public role of private institutions, and a window into the role of higher educational institutions in society.

The end of the Civil War forced the nation to grapple with integrating freedmen and freedwomen into the social order. Benevolent societies and denominational bodies created what are now labeled private, historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) throughout the South to train African American leaders to uplift the race. These private institutions depended on private donations, tuition, and philanthropic gifts to sustain them and remained outside the state's purview. The campuses were tiny islands that promoted racial equality but rarely challenged the existing Southern social order. Racist state officials paid little attention to the internal affairs of private HBCUs until the middle twentieth century when students joined the campaign for black liberation. Private HBCUs enjoyed political and economic autonomy not shared by their state-supported counterparts, and students took advantage of the liberal campus climate. The corporate structure of private HBCUs buffered them from

the most intense forms of state interference and allowed them and their students to play an active role in the Civil Rights Movement. But, their private status did not shield them completely from state pressures, particularly when college aims collided with state interests. Private HBCUs battled with state legislatures, racist citizen's organizations, and other groups hostile toward the colleges' role in the black freedom struggle. The public role of the private colleges made them enemies of the state.

This piece examines the battle between the state of Mississippi and private HBCUs and its consequences for institutional autonomy during the civil rights era. Mississippi, more than any other state, aggressively attacked all sources of activism. Its agency of choice, the Mississippi Sovereignty Commission, vowed to preserve and defend racial segregation at any cost. It targeted three private HBCUs in particular: Campbell College, Tougaloo College, and Rust College. Other private HBCUs existed in the state, but the Commission considered these three institutions the greatest threat to Mississippi laws and customs. The Commission never succeeded in destabilizing any of the colleges by itself, but it created conditions under which private HBCUs weighed the benefits and costs of remaining involved in civil rights. Its success hinged on its ability to act as a parasite that capitalized on institutional vulnerabilities. The weakest institutions suffered dire consequences, and none of the colleges were immune to the Commission's agenda. The colleges fought back, and in some ways were successful, but the tug-of-war for ultimate control of campus affairs exacted a toll. The experience of the three colleges demonstrates the value of civil society in an oppressive state and the price private HBCUs paid for assuming an active role in the Civil Rights Movement.

The Mississippi Context

Mississippi, like other Southern states, created public HBCUs to insure social stability, to create a separate black professional class, and to keep African Americans from attending historically white institutions. Public college curricula taught respect for the racial order and the proper limits of black aspirations. The all-white Board of Trustees of Institutions of Higher Learning, the state legislature, and campus administrators carefully controlled the institutions to thwart radical notions of black equality. Religious philanthropists created a separate set of private HBCUs. Rather than fit African Americans to the racial status quo, these institutions educated African Americans for full political and civic equality. Religious philanthropists argued that a classical curriculum, paired with religious training, equipped future leaders in the black community with the skills and knowledge necessary for full citizenship. The campuses maintained an uneasy agreement with the surrounding white community: they instilled racial pride, a sense of entitlement, and leadership skills but accepted the segregated Southern reality.

The growth of the Civil Rights Movement dissolved the compromise between the private colleges and hostile whites. The state aggressively attacked individuals and institutions sympathetic to the movement. The high rate of HBCU student participation, particularly by those at private campuses, marked HBCUs as prime targets. The use of campus facilities for integrated events and civil disobedience planning sessions infuriated segregationists. The state completely controlled the public HBCUs and felt confident about its control of some private HBCUs. The state, however, encountered resistance at Campbell College, Tougaloo College, and Rust College. In 1960, the three colleges, combined, educated 1,300 students total. An even smaller number participated in active protest. The number of students meant less than the colleges’ private status, role in the movement, and key geographic locations in the state. Mississippi racists increasingly monitored events at private campuses as civil rights activism escalated.

The state of Mississippi organized its anti-desegregation efforts after the Supreme Court’s 1954 Brown v. Board of Education decision, which declared racial segregation unconstitutional. The state legislature passed a parade of bills that ranged from repealing the state’s compulsory education laws to an interposition resolution. It also created the Mississippi Sovereignty Commission, a tax-supported implementation agency and “a permanent authority for the maintenance of racial segregation.” Incorporated on 29 March 1956, the Commission sought to “do and perform any and all acts and things deemed necessary and proper to protect the sovereignty of the state of Mississippi, and her sister states, from encroachment thereon by the Federal Government or any branch, department, or agency thereof.” The Commission hired informants, conducted investigations on suspected integrationists, and distributed segregationist propaganda to defend Mississippi’s racial hierarchy. It also allocated funds to the White Citizens’ Council, a private citizen’s organization
forced Mississippi activists to regroup. Almost an entire year passed before black Mississippian initiated another direct action attack on Mississippi’s racial caste system.

In 1961, Jackson became the center of increasing civil rights activity after nine Tougaloo College students staged a sit-in at the whites-only public library in March. The sit-in inaugurated a period of sustained and massive civil disobedience across the state and Jackson in particular. Local NAACP branches and other interested individuals organized and executed a variety of attacks on segregation and discrimination in the city in the next few years. Between 1961 and 1964, activists in Jackson launched another longer-lasting and more effective boycott of white stores, conducted sit-ins, pickets, mass marches, and letter writing campaigns, and initiated a school desegregation suit. Police arrested over six hundred people in 1961 and 1962 alone. The assault on Jackson, the urban center and capital of the state, angered white Mississippian. The Citizens’ Council, local police, and the Sovereignty Commission failed, harassed, and killed activists to stem the tide of protest. They also targeted the organizations and institutions in which activists pooled their resources and devised plans of action. Campbell College and Tougaloo College, both of which were located in Jackson, fell under heavy scrutiny.

Mississippi’s dismal record on civil rights brought increasing media attention and more civil rights workers in 1964. During the summer months, SNCC spearheaded the Mississippi Summer Project. SNCC hoped to force the state to change its racist policies or coerce federal intervention, highlight the rabid resistance to racial equality, and develop local leadership to sustain the movement. The Project brought hundreds of mostly white volunteers to Mississippi to teach in Freedom Schools and to work in voter registration alongside local activists. After completing a week of training in Oxford, Ohio, in classroom pedagogy, Mississippi history, and nonviolent self-defense, volunteers made the long drive to Mississippi. Their journey often took them through Holly Springs. Some workers remained in Holly Springs and joined other SNCC workers and local activists in a major campaign against segregated facilities and voting rights violations. As one of the only sizable towns in northern Mississippi, Holly Springs and its independent institutions, including Rust College, became invaluable for movement purposes. They also became targets for state intervention.
The Institutional Consequences of Involvement in the Civil Rights Movement

The Sovereignty Commission and the Board of Trustees of Institutions of Higher Learning policed public HBCU campuses and expected full compliance from their presidents. As an arm of the legislature, on which public HBCUs were economically dependent, college presidents followed the Commission’s advice and fired any faculty labeled as an agitator. Tenure did not exist at state-supported HBCUs, nor did the state pretend to value institutional integrity. The Commission also forced the presidents to be agents in its fight against student participation in the movement. Students at Mississippi Vocational College staged a thirty-six-hour walk-out to demand a student government in 1957, the first boycott in an HBCU in Mississippi. The president stalled the issue for four years before allowing the students to form an association. He guaranteed the student government’s compliance with college regulations against activism by requiring the presence of two faculty members and the Dean of Students at all meetings. Also in 1957, the Board of Trustees fired the president of Alcorn A&M College after he sided with students boycotting classes to protest pro-segregation editorials written by an Alcorn professor. The Board demanded his immediate resignation, expelled the entire student body, and appointed a new president more amenable to its attitudes on proper student behavior. In 1961, Jackson State College’s president dissolved its Student Government Association after accusing it of instigating civil rights activities and “embarrassing” the school when Jackson State students rallied in support of the Tougaloo students arrested at the whites-only library. He also provided the Sovereignty Commission with the names and home address of activist students. Students at public institutions were not dormant, but the nature of state control and the severe consequences leveled by the administration negatively influenced participation in the movement.

Conditions at Mississippi’s private HBCUs were different. The high rate of private HBCU student participation in the movement, paired with the fact that college presidents refused to expel or punish activist students for their involvement, infuriated Mississippi racists. Segregationists and their allies rallied against what Lieutenant Governor Carroll Gartin called havens for “quacks, quirks, political agitators and possibly some communists.” The Sovereignty Commission enlisted the assistance of campus informants and sponsored court injunctions to prevent campus constituents from participating in direct action. The Citizens’ Council initiated its own investigations and accused various campus officials of conspiring with communists to overthrow the United States government. Local police regularly visited the campuses and recorded license plate numbers in an effort to gather information and to harass campus constituents and off-campus activists. In extreme cases the legislature itself entertained creative sanctions against the colleges. The state’s organized and interconnected network marshaled its forces to intimidate the colleges into compliance with state laws and social codes.

Private status buffered the institutions from direct state intervention since the legislature did not finance the colleges or appoint their boards of trustees. But, institutional vulnerabilities provided the entrance through which the state forced the private colleges to reevaluate their role in the Civil Rights Movement. Campbell, Tougaloo, and Rust were not wealthy institutions. Defending the campuses and their constituents from constant state harassment diverted funds away from college development projects. The state also exploited dissention on each campus. Individual campus constituents maintained different ideas on the path and pace of social reform. Conservatives accused activists of hijacking education for civil rights aims and transforming the colleges into centers for political activity. As white Tougaloo professor John Held stated, “I am in favor of the Negro having every right that he can obtain—but I do not believe it to be the purpose of Tougaloo College to sponsor agitation.” Campbell, Tougaloo, and Rust fought back, and private status prevented unilateral Commission success. But, the colleges differed in their ability to negotiate the internal and external pressures threatening to undermine their autonomy.

Of the three institutions, Campbell College was the most vulnerable to state intervention and suffered the most dire consequences. A variety of factors set Campbell College apart. First, it was supported by black religious philanthropy, namely the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) church. It was one of only two black-controlled higher educational institutions in the entire state of Mississippi. The entire Campbell College constituency, from its Board of Trustees, faculty, administrators, staff, and students, was African American. Racial separation was not an anomaly in Mississippi, but black control of a higher educational institution was. Second, AME doc-
trine supported full racial equality and likened forced segregation with second-class citizenship. White religious philanthropists, including those who created Tougaloo College and Rust College, did not share the same overtly political theological principles though campus constituents often professed radical interpretations of Christian theology. Not all AME members translated church doctrine into direct confrontation with the Southern racial hierarchy, but some did, particularly when the Civil Rights Movement gained momentum.

Beyond its black philanthropic roots, the particular nature of funding also set Campbell apart and made it more vulnerable to Commission aims. The college was uniquely quite poor. The Eighth Episcopal District of the AME church, consisting of Louisiana and Mississippi, supported the institution. The AME church had a nationwide network, but different districts took on the financial responsibilities of particular schools. Campbell, a combined high school and junior college, received little national AME attention as the denomination concentrated its funds and energies on its four-year institutions. Campbell had only a small pool of money on which to rely for support. Lastly, the level of internal dissent on campus regarding the role of Campbell College in the Civil Rights Movement was extreme. Each campus had its own conservatives calling for a return to pure academic education, but disagreements within the Campbell Board of Trustees and between the trustees and the campus administration threatened to disintegrate the institution. The Sovereignty Commission exacerbated the college’s problems and pushed Campbell toward ruin.

Tougaloo, on the other hand, was in stronger position to resist Sovereignty Commission efforts. The nature of philanthropic support buffered it. The American Missionary Association (AMA), a group of white religious philanthropists, supported Tougaloo. More importantly, AMA colleges received funding from a nationwide network, not individual districts. AMA headquarters were located in New York, another factor that marked them as different from Campbell and provided an important sense of autonomy since philanthropic agencies with headquarters and donors outside the South were more immune to state pressure. Tougaloo’s financial scaffold provided it with more security, but it was far from wealthy. Tougaloo received less money from the AMA than some of the association’s other colleges, but it still received more financial assistance than other private colleges in Mississippi. The AMA cared enough about Tougaloo to work toward costly accreditation requirements before any other philanthropic group did the same for its colleges. In 1948, Tougaloo became the only accredited HBCU in Mississippi, a distinction it kept until the 1960s.19

Tougaloo and Campbell were located a mere six miles from each other near the seat of government in Jackson, and students often coordinated civil rights activities and visited each other’s campus. What marked Tougaloo as different was the level of campus participation in the Civil Rights Movement. Tougaloo students, faculty, and staff spearheaded some of the most public and most disruptive assaults on Mississippi’s racial hierarchy. Tougaloo also had more extensive campus facilities than Campbell College, which made Tougaloo more attractive for off-campus activists seeking a meeting place in Jackson. On-campus events and off-campus demonstrations garnered the college and the movement increasing publicity in national and local media outlets. These factors combined made Tougaloo the Sovereignty Commission’s biggest college target. Commission director Erle Johnston Jr., associated his own career advancement with his ability to quash the activism emanating from Tougaloo.20 Tougaloo was stronger than Campbell, but it was also a bigger threat to Mississippi laws and customs—a fact illustrated by the common racist nickname for the institution, Cancer College. Accordingly, the Sovereignty Commission more aggressively harassed the institution and focused its energies on finding an entrée to exploit. A fortuitous fundraising campaign and a unique charter controversy provided the Commission with the fodder it needed to undermine Tougaloo’s role in the movement and make civil rights activism a campus liability.

Rust College was the least influenced by external pressure and was able to protect itself from punitive measures for a variety of reasons. Like Tougaloo, it was funded by white religious philanthropy (Methodist Episcopal Church), maintained a Board of Trustees headquarters outside Mississippi, and was supported by a nationwide financial network. The fact that Rust did not have any peculiar vulnerabilities, like Tougaloo, or extreme financial trouble, like Campbell, frustrated the Sovereignty Commission’s agenda. Also, the Commission reserved much of its energy for events in Jackson and at Tougaloo in particular. Sit-ins, demonstrations, and boycotts in the capital embarrassed the state and drew much of the Commission’s attention. The Commission monitored the Rust cam-
pus, particularly when activist students became more aggressive, but Rust's isolated geographic location made it a secondary target. Even the Mississippi media ignored much of the movement in northern Mississippi as Rust students and their civil rights projects received little noteworthy press. Lastly, the Sovereignty Commission learned from its mistakes in Jackson. Local and national newspapers repeatedly carried pictures of Jackson activists (including some from Tougaloo and Campbell) being attacked by hostile whites and chased by police dogs. The Commission resented the bad publicity, particularly since one of its missions was to soften Mississippi's image and convince the American populace that Mississippi blacks were content with the existing social structure. Commission representatives put their hard lessons to use in Holly Springs and at Rust, but the campus withstood the pressure.

**Campbell College**

We think it wise to keep this record of [Negro AME ministers] in case they crop up in future meetings or incidents.

AME ideology on racial equality influenced the campus ethos, but Campbell College and its constituents did not directly confront the existing racial order until the growth of the Civil Rights Movement in the mid-twentieth century. The Sovereignty Commission matched Campbell's increasingly public role in social reform with increasing scrutiny. Investigators monitored church events and, in December 1957, reported that a Bishop admonished members attending a regional conference: "I warn you here and now, in the presence of God and this audience, that if any one of you permit any person, white or black, to advocate segregation in any form, your appointment will be immediately revoked. Further, you will be brought to trial for violation of the honor and traditions of this great denomination." AME publications in the early 1960s articulated an overtly political agenda for AME schools: "The basic concern of the A.M.E. Church in education is training Christian leaders for the struggle of the Negro to secure by his own efforts full rights, privileges and benefits of citizenship and respect for the worth and dignity of human personality without regard to race, creed or nationality—for realization of Christian and democratic ideals of liberty and justice." This aggressive stance put the AME church and its schools in direct conflict with Mississippi's racial hierarchy.

Campbell College, with an enrollment of three hundred in the early 1960s, hosted a few of the civil rights events centered on the economic boycott of white Jackson stores. Chaplain and Dean of Religion, Charles Jones, became heavily involved and invited the NAACP to use the campus for organizing sessions and press conferences by Medgar Evers. The enrollment of almost one hundred black high school students expelled from Burgland High School in McComb, Mississippi, in October 1961, drew the campus deeper into the movement and, in turn, increased Campbell College's visibility in the state. The previous summer, several Burgland students participated in a voter registration drive and sit-ins, and some had been arrested. Fifteen year-old Brenda Travis was sentenced to one year at the Oakley Training School, a school for juvenile delinquents. At a Burgland assembly the following fall, students quizzed the principal about Travis's return. He hedged his answer, and the students initiated an impromptu march through downtown McComb. Police arrested them as they prayed on the steps of City Hall. The principal refused to allow the one hundred sixteen arrested students to re-enroll unless they signed a pledge promising to refrain from participating in any further demonstrations. Many students refused, and Campbell College president Robert Stevens extended offers of enrollment.

The Sovereignty Commission watched in horror as Campbell College constituents joined demonstrations against the state and used the college facilities to plan direct action tactics. President Stevens did not join any demonstrations or participate in the planning of civil disobedience, but he allowed these activities to occur on campus and refused to curtail the involvement of both students and staff. The state of Mississippi considered his offer to enroll expelled Burgland High School students a slap in the face. The Commission, however, reserved some of its harshest criticism for Charles Jones and treated him as a primary cause for concern. Jones made headlines with an attempt (by himself) to integrate the Jackson Trailways Bus Terminal the same day the Interstate Commerce Commission ordered segregated signage to be removed and with his participation in an interracial pray-in at the Jackson Federal Post Office to protest police brutality. Jackson police arrested him and a court convicted him of breach of the peace after both demonstrations. His active involvement in the movement and the support of President Stevens earned both men the dubious distinction of being added to
the Sovereignty Commission's "trouble-makers list." As Campbell's role in the movement increased so, too, did Commission efforts to destabilize the institution. In 1960, the Commission sent a list of Campbell's Board of Trustees to local Jackson police to solicit ideas for how to deal with them, and at least one Trustee joined the Commission payroll. But, Campbell's private status insulated it from direct state intervention.

Campbell College officials gave the Commission the opening it could exploit. Conservative AME Board of Trustees members held gradualist attitudes toward the pace of societal reform and admonished students and staff that a college should focus on academics and not political education. Fearing the campus had spun out of control, four members of the Board of Trustees requested an injunction preventing President Robert Stevens, Dean Charles Jones, and other Campbell College administrators from performing their campus duties in February 1962. The state did not act as a plaintiff, but the ends sought by the plaintiffs certainly buoyed the Commission's cause. The plaintiffs linked their disgust for campus-based civil rights agitation with accusations that Campbell College officials abused its charter, the laws of the state of Mississippi, and financial donations. The Sovereignty Commission kept a record of the court proceedings and watched the situation carefully.

The plaintiffs in the injunction focused part of their argument on Charles Jones. They charged that Jones's election as Dean of Religion was "for the express purpose of preaching to, and disseminating among the students of the college, the radical and unorthodox views held by him, and in order to create dissent among students of the college and to agitate and incite them into a violation of the laws of the State of Mississippi." Jones's aggressive attacks on white supremacy colored the campus atmosphere. He and other activists transformed Campbell from a respected private institution into a hotbed for political activism. The plaintiffs argued: "he invited and encouraged the so-called 'freedom riders' to congregate on the campus of the College, and he undertook to persuade the students of the college to join in the movement, and to violate the laws of the State of Mississippi; and he himself did, in fact, join in said movement and for his willful violation of the laws of the State of Mississippi, he was arrested by the Police of the City of Jackson, and was tried and convicted, and is now out on bond." His actions, according to the plaintiffs, jeopardized the institution.

Campbell's admission of the ousted Burgland High School students aggravated the situation. Plaintiffs complained that the enrollment of the students flouted the laws of Mississippi and unnecessarily politicized the campus. Campbell had been involved in the movement prior to their arrival, but few people outside of Jackson had paid any attention to the college. Their enrollment brought the campus unwanted and negative attention in the white press, a fact that made the plaintiffs very wary. Plaintiffs also attacked the students' right to attend. Their suit argued that the students took the spots of deserving and qualified children of AME church members. President Stevens admitted the high school students "without any regard whatsoever to their educational and scholastic qualifications or good character, and without requiring them to pay the usual enrollment and tuition fees." Complaintants considered these actions a violation of the charter agreement and evidence of bad judgment.

The injunction also illuminated a split in the Board of Trustees. The plaintiffs accused Chairman Frederick Jordan and Dean Jones of mismanaging large sums of money. They complained that the men diverted donations, church assessments, and rent from College-owned property in Mound Bayou for personal gain. Jordan, the suit declared, practiced duplicitous behavior on a regular basis. The plaintiffs offered the example of the purchase and sale of property located near the campus. According to the suit, R. A. Scott, one of the plaintiffs and former president of the College, owned land adjoining the campus. Jordan persuaded individual AME church members that Campbell College should purchase the land for educational purposes and raised the necessary funds. The College bought the land, but Jordan immediately sold it to the state for $2,500. The plaintiffs accused Jordan of keeping the funds for himself rather than depositing the money in the College's accounts. Their final insult came when Jordan, Jones, and President Stevens conspired to solicit funds under the guise of the McComb high school student episode. The accused not only wrongly enrolled the students, they did so "as a publicity 'gimmick' to raise money for their personal gain." 36

Three weeks after the plaintiffs filed their plea the Chancery Court ordered that the Board of Trustees be reconstituted and demanded that the Council of Bishops remove Jordan as presiding Bishop of the Eighth Episcopal District. But, the Court allowed Charles Jones to continue as Chaplain and Dean of Religion until the trustees election, and it did not object to President Stevens's reinstatement by the
new Board if it so desired. 37 Four months later, AME members re-elected fifty percent of the former Board of Trustees and reinstated President Stevens and Dean Jones. 38 The AME effectively reasserted its authority over Campbell and demonstrated the broader AME church's support for the administration. It is unknown if the Court or the Sovereignty Commission expected the trustees to reinstate President Stevens and Dean Jones. It is possible that Commission officials miscalculated the broad base of support for the administrators, and by extension, the Civil Rights Movement. Campbell College regained an important sense of autonomy in its tug-o-war with the Sovereignty Commission.

Campbell College looked very much the same before and after the litigation. The staff remained largely intact, and the Burgland high school students left the college at the end of the academic year. The Campbell College student body remained active in the movement after 1962, and the campus continued to host civil rights events. The difference was that the Eighth Episcopal District of the AME church and Campbell College grew poorer in the process. The court injunction cost the church money, particularly since it pitted campus officials against each other. Campbell College never maintained a large endowment and had been under-funded for years. Neither the Court nor the plaintiffs offered incontrovertible evidence that Trustee Jordan, President Stevens, or Dean Jones mismanaged money, but the validity of the claim was irrelevant as far as the Court was concerned. The financial claims provided a perfect opportunity to exploit institutional weakness. The state stepped in, and this time it sealed the college's fate.

In 1964, the state of Mississippi seized the Campbell College property by right of eminent domain. The campus had deteriorated and gone into debt, and the legislature wrested control from the Board of Trustees. Legislators never called it an act of retribution, but Campbell's place in the Jackson movement clearly influenced the decision. Campbell College administrators planned to move the campus to Mound Bayou, 174 miles northwest of Jackson, but needed time to do so. They applied to the Board of Trustees of Institutions of Higher Learning, which charted the creation of any new private or public college, for two separate extensions before vacating the premises. The new presiding Bishop even used the removal of President Stevens as a bargaining chip: more time to build a college in Mound Bayou for Stevens's forced retirement. The Board refused to be swayed, particularly since "the take-over of the property automatically will remove Dr. Stevens." 39 The state clearly never supported a rebuilding campaign and did all in its power to prevent it from succeeding. The state purchased the Campbell College property and deeded it to Jackson State College for its expansion program under the leadership of Jacob Reddix, Jackson State president and friend of the Sovereignty Commission. 40 A new campus was never constructed due to lack of funds.

The demise of Campbell College provides an extreme example of private HBCU vulnerability to state attempts to quash the Civil Rights Movement. Campbell's role in the movement made it a target for the state, and its financial situation provided an opportunity the state refused to ignore. The nature of its philanthropic support made the campus susceptible to external pressure. Colleges supported by black philanthropy were notoriously under-funded. Tuition, church assessments, and donations rarely yielded enough for basic operating costs. Their racial make-up made funding agencies wary, and Northern foundations preferred institutions with, if not a white president, a predominantly white board of trustees. 41 The intense internal dissention also facilitated the Commission's efforts. Campbell trustees unwittingly primed the institution for the state's successful intervention. Mississippi racists not only halting the college's role in the movement, they killed Campbell College.

Tougaloo College

Tougaloo College is finally surrendering to intimidation. 42

Though enrollment was only five hundred in 1960, Tougaloo College had a national reputation and attracted students from across the country. It maintained high academic standards, had a well-respected faculty, and was headed by a strong and independent Board of Trustees located in New York. The state paid little attention to the campus until the 1940s and 1950s when a few campus constituents initiated individual attacks against the racial hierarchy. In 1946, William Albert Bender, Tougaloo's African American chaplain, attempted to vote in the Democratic primary but was denied. He later filed a complaint with the state attorney general. Hostile whites burned a cross on the Tougaloo campus in retaliation. 43 In 1958, Tougaloo professor Ernst Borinski, a German Jew, invited Tougaloo students to join his German classes at Millsaps College, a private white insti-
tution in Jackson. Borinski taught courses at Millsaps during the summer months, and a Tougaloo student enrolled in his class two weeks after it began. The White Citizens' Council blasted Millsaps in the press, and campus officials moved the class to Tougaloo since Millsaps maintained strict policies on racial segregation. The state monitored these men and other campus constituents who actively challenged the social order but did not consider them much of a threat until the Civil Rights Movement gained momentum and transformed isolated acts of resistance into full-blown civil disobedience. The state and its allies easily contained individual activism but worried about an organized assault on Mississippi laws and customs.

By the early 1960s, the Sovereignty Commission identified Tougaloo as one of its primary targets. The degree of activism on campus was unmatched at colleges across the state. Tougaloo students in the campus NAACP chapter inaugurated the sustained Civil Rights Movement in Mississippi with the sit-in at the Jackson Municipal Library in March 1961, and continued to play a vital role in a variety of other very public attacks on Mississippi's racial hierarchy. Off-campus activists from across the nation identified Tougaloo as a hospitable environment and frequently used campus facilities to plan direct action activities. Key Tougaloo faculty and administrators joined with students to support the Civil Rights Movement in Jackson. Chaplain Ed King and Professor John Salter, two of the most active white staff members on campus, received national media attention for their involvement in certain civil rights projects. President Adam D. Beittel, a white man, supported civil rights efforts, defended the students' right to protest, and was photographed with students, Ed King, and John Salter at a sit-in at the local Woolworth's. By 1964, four white students enrolled at Tougaloo making it the only voluntarily desegregated institution in the entire state. It seemed, at least to the State of Mississippi, the entire Tougaloo campus was involved in the Civil Rights Movement.

The Sovereignty Commission escalated its attacks on the campus as years passed and employed some of the same tactics it used to destabilize Campbell College. In June 1963, the Sovereignty Commission sponsored a court order naming President Beittel, Chaplain King, Professor Salter, student Bette Anne Poole (an African American) along with other individuals, the NAACP, Congress of Racial Equality, Tougaloo trustees, and "their agents, members, employees, attorneys, successors, and all other persons in active concert with them" in a writ of temporary injunction preventing them from demonstrating in any way, shape, or form. The point of the injunction, ending civil rights activism, paralleled the mission of the injunction at Campbell, but it was different in important respects. First, the impetus for the Tougaloo injunction came from an external source, not campus officials. The Campbell injunction revealed a serious ideological split and created an opportunity the Sovereignty Commission happily manipulated. The Commission attempted to create a similar exploitative situation at Tougaloo but failed. Second, the injunction against Tougaloo requested a halt to demonstrations not the termination of employment for individual staff members. The Campbell injunction pitted campus officials against each other and split the campus while the Tougaloo injunction, by the sheer number and variety of campus constituents named in the court order, unified the campus by pitting it against the state. The plaintiffs in neither injunction succeeded in ending campus activism, but they did weaken the institutions by draining scant resources away from other campus projects. At Campbell, the plaintiffs unintentionally weakened the institution beyond financial recovery. The Commission attempted to create dire financial consequences at Tougaloo, but Tougaloo's national financial network was less rocked by the immediate fiscal requirements of defending itself against a court injunction.

Tougaloo withstood the first phase of the tug-o-war, but the state was not easily dissuaded from its task. The Sovereignty Commission tried another tactic and attempted to capitalize on the fact that some Tougaloo constituents resented the college's involvement in the Civil Rights Movement. Dr. John Held, chairman of Tougaloo's Department of Philosophy and Religion, volunteered to become an informant in early April 1964. Held accused Beittel and others of appropriating the college for civil rights aims and transforming Tougaloo into a center for political activity. He also had designs on the presidency. While on an invited visit to the Commission's office, Held informed Director Johnston about "the dissent among faculty and students" regarding the policies of President Beittel and Chaplain King, threatened to resign if Beittel was not removed, and offered to identify documents linking Beittel to a communist organization. Johnston, grateful for the assistance, requested a list of students and faculty opposed to and in support of Beittel and King as well as the names of trustees who might be open to Commission
concerns. Held and Johnston "worked out a code system for communication and relaying information which would not involve Dr. Held with those at Tougaloo who would be opposed to his contact with the Sovereignty Commission." Days later, "Mr. Zero" submitted a list of trustees considered "most vital and influential" (all of whom were white) and those "probably more easily influenced by pressure" (all of whom were African American). The communication also included a list of notable students and a Tougaloo College catalog in which Mr. Zero categorized the faculty.

Meanwhile, Tougaloo's Board of Trustees attempted to broaden the campus financial base. The campus's annual expenses jumped when Tougaloo experienced a rapid increase in student attendance that forced the college to institute a major new facilities campaign in the late 1950s. President Beittel worked hard to solicit funds from individual donors and philanthropic agencies and was in large part successful, but increasing college costs made the task a daunting one. Also, certain financial sources turned away from Tougaloo. The Mississippi branch of the Christian Churches (Disciples of Christ) withdrew its financial support after Tougaloo activists targeted its segregated churches for prayer-ins in 1963. Trustees looked to the Ford Foundation's Fund for the Advancement of Education for financial assistance. The Fund supported partnerships between HBCUs and predominantly white northern colleges. Tougaloo and Brown University already shared a friendly relationship, and both institutions entertained a more formal association. In fall 1963, Tougaloo and Brown began the application process for Ford funds.

Tougaloo trustees hinged their financial hopes on the Ford grant and attempted to clear a path for a speedy decision. Tougaloo's public role in the movement became a point of concern. Brown University President Barby Keeney warned the Tougaloo trustees that the Ford Foundation was wary of donating the money for the partnership because of the siege situation created by constant harassment. Brown University shared the same set of concerns. Keeney then targeted Tougaloo's President Beittel, a vocal supporter of the Civil Rights Movement, and urged that the Tougaloo trustees fire him. Keeney believed that Beittel's refusal to curb campus activism was irresponsible and that Beittel's actions unnecessarily politicized the campus and brought it unwanted scrutiny. He warned the trustees that Beittel's firing was imperative to secure Ford funding: "They will not do much, if anything, until they have this assurance." Certain Tougaloo trustees agreed with Keeney's assessment and set about undermining Beittel's presidency. A self-selected group of trustees, the same trustees Mr. Zero identified as most vital and influential, arranged a special meeting with Beittel at Board headquarters in New York in January 1964. They explained to Beittel that the partnership program funded by the Ford Foundation needed consistent leadership for at least ten years, an impossibility for him because he was sixty-five. They then requested his resignation. Their next task was to convince the other trustees, a racially mixed group, that their actions were appropriate and necessary. A few of the trustees expressed anger at the sub-committees' unilateral decision, but they presented a united front in public. Rather than announce the decision immediately, the trustees decided to wait for the official Board meeting in April.

Beittel fought the decision. The Board hired him in 1960, and was fully aware of his liberal leanings since Beittel had been equally involved in civil rights issues while president at Talladega College, a private HBCU in Alabama and Tougaloo's sister-institution under the American Missionary Association. One of his conditions for employment at Tougaloo had been that the Board assure him of job security until age seventy, provided he remained healthy, with the option to continue on a yearly basis after age sixty-five. Beittel found the Board's violation of his contract highly suspicious and accused the trustees of using him as a bargaining tool: "It was indicated that Brown University would not continue our promising cooperative relationship unless I am replaced, and that without Brown University the Ford Foundation will provide no support, and without Ford support other Foundations will not respond, and without foundation support the future of Tougaloo College is very uncertain." The Board rejected the implication that an external source prompted their actions, discounted Beittel's claims in a variety of forums, and refused to alter their decision to fire President Beittel.

Meanwhile, the legislature itself employed measures to punish Tougaloo for its role in the Civil Rights Movement. Legislators used materials gathered by the Sovereignty Commission to devise two bills meant to cripple the institution and never pretended otherwise. On 17 February 1964, Lieutenant Governor Carroll Gartin called for an investigation of the College's role in demonstrations and civil rights activities. Other state leaders joined his cause, and three days later, three senators introduced a bill to revoke Tougaloo's ninety-
four-year-old charter in the name of "public interest." The argument was twofold. First, Tougaloo's original charter restricted the campus to five hundred thousand dollars worth of assets, a figure Tougaloo passed years earlier with no repercussions. Second, and more to the heart of the matter, Gartin and others accused the College of neglecting its charter all together: "The big question to be decided is whether the school has substituted civil disobedience instruction for the curriculum it was authorized to have under its charter." The legislature also contemplated a bill that allowed discretionary powers to the Commission on College Accreditation. Passage of the bill revoked Tougaloo's reciprocal accreditation from the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, and the state. The loss of state accreditation prevented education students from receiving state teacher's licenses. The state hoped the loss of accreditation would tarnish Tougaloo's reputation, limit attendance, and force those teachers who received their degrees from Cancer College to leave Mississippi.

Tougaloo mounted an aggressive publicity campaign to call attention to the situation and embarrass Governor Paul Johnson into either vetoing or limiting the influence of each legislative bill. President Beittel, at the same time he was fighting for his own job, aggressively protected Tougaloo from the state's onslaught. He enlisted the assistance of the American Association of University Professors, the United Church of Christ, Tougaloo's sister institutions, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, and other institutions and organizations with a vested interest in protecting higher educational autonomy. Tougaloo's allies wrote the legislature and the governor expressing their horror at such a public and offensive disrespect for institutional integrity. Tougaloo's efforts were successful. The bill to revoke Tougaloo's charter died in the Judiciary Committee. The bill separating accreditation passed but held no teeth. The legislature was increasingly disturbed by the bad press created by the situation and did not use the Act against Tougaloo.

The Sovereignty Commission took matters into its own hands in April 1964, months prior to the resolution of the legislative bills. Harassing Tougaloo became a top priority for Director Erle Johnston Jr. With the list of powerful and influential trustees provided by Mr. Zero, Johnston requested a private meeting with a group of Tougaloo trustees to plead his case:

At the meeting it was our purpose to show that the image of Tougaloo as represented by the President, Dr. A. D. Beittel and [Reverend Ed King], had inspired such resentment on the part of state officials and legislators that a show-down clash appeared imminent. We suggested that if Tougaloo had a good man as president and a good man as [chaplain], the institution could be restored to its former status as a respected private college. We also suggested that if such a move could be made by the trustees, the college would have ample time to prove good faith and a change of attitude and possibly avoid punitive action from the Legislature.  

Johnston and Shelby Rogers, a Jackson attorney and Commission confidant, flew to the Board of Trustees headquarters in New York. They met with a subcommittee of trustees— the same trustees who, unbeknown to the Commission, had already requested and spearheaded Beittel's forced resignation in January.

The Board of Trustees announced Beittel's retirement at their annual meeting only days after the subcommittee's appointment with the Sovereignty Commission. The timing could not have been worse. The subgroup of powerful trustees delayed the announcement of Beittel's resignation until the April Board meeting to avoid having his resignation associated with Brown University or the Ford Foundation. Meanwhile, the Sovereignty Commission visit became public knowledge and turned into a public relations fiasco. Trustees adamantly denied that Beittel's active support for civil rights contributed to the decision to request his resignation, but the local press and angry campus constituents coupled Beittel's termination with Sovereignty Commission aims. The Commission itself promoted this interpretation: "Our pipeline of information from Tougaloo says the trustees gave as their reason for dismissal of Dr. Beittel that he was 'inefficient.' This will certainly work to our advantage. Had Dr. Beittel been asked to resign because of racial agitation or collaboration with communist front organizations, he could have made a martyr out of himself." The self-congratulation was misplaced. The Commission's visit with the Tougaloo trustees did not prompt the Board's decision, which had been made months earlier, but Tougaloo's involvement in the Civil Rights Movement did. The legislative bills, court injunctions, and constant harassment became costly. The trustees spent time and money needed to improve the college on defending it instead. Tougaloo's role in the Civil Rights Movement became a liability. Trustees made a decision they believed would protect the college and insure its financial future.

The Campbell College situation looked like a cakewalk compared to the battle between the state and Tougaloo. Many of the factors
that saved Tougaloo from Campbell’s fate became like a double-edged sword. Tougaloo’s prestige and private status made it the most important black college in the entire state but also made it the Commission’s number one target. Tougaloo’s ability to garner national support and media attention prevented the legislature from closing the campus, but the state merely turned to other tactics to rein in the campus. Internal dissention did not reach a level in which the campus disintegrated from the inside out, but it did provide fodder for Commission aims in the guise of informants and conservative trustees. Tougaloo’s relative financial security, made possible by a national network and a unique funding opportunity, prevented an immediate fiscal catastrophe. At the same time, the funding opportunity and desire for increased donations made Tougaloo vulnerable and the college’s role in the movement a liability. The Commission did not precipitate Beittel’s retirement or have an immediate effect on daily campus life and activism, but the immense amount of energy, time, and money spent on destabilizing Tougaloo was not in vain. The Commission and its allies made it costly for Tougaloo to remain in the movement and forced the trustees to take a particular course of action, one they may not have considered without constant harassment by the state of Mississippi.

*Rust College*

Holly Springs, in my thinking, is one of the most explosive spots in Mississippi for racial trouble due to the fact that Rust College is located there. Rust College’s geographical location in northern Mississippi made campus facilities particularly important for the movement in that part of the state. In 1962, the campus played a tangential role in James Meredith’s enrollment at the University of Mississippi, marking the end of legal segregation in higher education institutions in the state. The Mississippi press reported that Meredith and his legal team drove from Oxford, Mississippi, to Memphis, Tennessee, during his repeated attempts to enroll at the University of Mississippi, but Meredith sometimes spent the night at Rust College instead. Holly Springs was closer to Oxford, and the Rust College campus offered a friendly and secret space to recuperate from the white racist reaction to his enrollment. Two years later, SNCC’s Summer Project made the campus invaluable. Student volunteers often traveled through Holly Springs and spent time at Rust before heading to their respective assignments throughout the state. The campus also became a clearinghouse for Freedom School materials. Books poured in from Northern states and found their way to Rust where students and staff sorted them for distribution.

Rust students also used the campus to launch their own attack on Mississippi’s racial caste system. Leslie Burl McLemore, a student at Rust from 1960 to 1964, chose the institution because of its private status, “I wanted to go to a place where I knew I wouldn’t have any difficulty with my political activity.” He used the shield of the campus to help organize and become the first president of the campus chapter of the NAACP in 1962. He and other students participated in SNCC, the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, and various direct action initiatives in Marshall County and other surrounding counties. The Student Government Association, of which McLemore became president, fed the civil rights cause. Students also created a Speaker’s Bureau that dispatched its members to local black churches to discuss voting rights issues. Frank Smith, a SNCC organizer sent to Holly Springs to help with voter registration, joined their effort and was impressed by what students had accomplished. According to Smith: “the image of students knocking on doors, the fact of their speaking at churches on Sundays, and the threat of demonstration have served to build respect for them and has challenged the local ministers to no end. They see this and are beginning to work to try to build their images and redeem themselves.”

Activist students also spearheaded boycotts against local merchants. In May 1961, Leon Roundtree, a theater owner, received a letter signed by the Rust College student body declaring their intent to boycott the theater if he continued to practice segregation and discrimination against black patrons. Worried about the loss of revenue and the possibility that the boycott would spread to students at Mississippi Industrial College, a private HBCU located across the street from Rust and run by the Colored Methodist Church, Roundtree arranged a meeting with the Student Government Association. He offered to build a colored theater of equal quality, but students rejected his compromise. They demanded, “Permit us to sit where we please, by whom we please, and use the same facilities that everyone else uses.” Roundtree refused, and Rust students inaugurated the boycott. The theater keenly felt the economic ramifications, and the boycott spread to other white merchants. In December 1962,
Rust College students boycotted local drugstores. Rather than encouraging patrons to avoid the stores, the boycott called for sit-ins. Students visited each drugstore and made polite inquiries about the possibility of desegregating lunch counters. None of the druggists agreed to desegregate, and one threatened to remove tables and chairs if students attempted to use them. The students held meetings on Rust's campus to discuss the issue and invited each druggist to attend. None accepted the invitation.74

As students devised a plan of action so, too, did the Sovereignty Commission. Informed of the events by the druggists, the Commission swung into action. The Commission counseled the Holly Springs police to return the students to campus rather than transport them to jail. The Commission learned valuable lessons from the Jackson police who found pictures of themselves in local and national media brutalizing students with billy clubs and attack dogs. Television cameras hoping to catch Holly Springs police officers abusing students and carrying them to jail would instead find little newsworthy behavior. The Commission advised the police to warn Rust College President Earnest Smith about continued activism and remind him “that good relationships between Holly Springs and the negro colleges had always been maintained in the past.”75 This type of reaction, the Commission believed, would be a “tremendous set-back” and “psychological defeat for Rust College as well as Rust College students.”76 The students, however, were not deterred.

Several Rust College faculty and staff supported the activist students. Most faculty refused to use grades and attendance as a way to deter activism. Leslie Burl McLemore remembered, “No one penalized me because I was not in class, but they made it very clear that they expected me to do my work.”77 Some key faculty members actively supported the movement by loaning vehicles to activist students transporting registrants to the County Courthouse and joining the Regional Council of Negro Leadership, a Mississippi organization that sponsored voter registration drives and economic boycotts and was considered radical by the white establishment.78 President Smith never participated in any civil rights demonstrations, but he refused to punish campus constituents for their involvement in the movement. When students treated the National Guard convoy escorting James Meredith from Memphis to the University of Mississippi like a celebratory parade, Smith was pressured to rein in the students, particularly after such a public display of disrespect for

Mississippi laws and customs. He refused. He also assisted activist students by calling special faculty meetings to solicit money for bail and demonstrated by example through his membership in the NAACP.79 Smith's actions angered racist whites, including the mayor of Holly Springs, who asked why President Smith refused to punish activist students the way that President Ed Rankin of Mississippi Industrial College did: “President Rankin made it crystal clear to all students attending M.I. that the institution was a place of learning in which those who would take advantage of it could better qualify themselves for any vocation in life; whereas, Rust College appears to defend those who violated the law.”80 Presidential and faculty support for the movement and student participation in it marked the college as a threat to the state.

Rust College and Holly Springs received less attention than institutions and events in Jackson, but the Sovereignty Commission kept close watch on campus affairs, particularly since “It was the general consensus of everyone that evidently not just one racial agitator was busy agitating out at Rust College, but there were quite a few agitators out there.”81 The Commission began identifying allies as early as the late 1950s, and considered two African American Board of Trustees members potential informants since both publicly opposed the NAACP.82 Rust's Board of Trustees also included a white Holly Springs bank president, Glen Fant, who maintained close contact with the Commission. In 1961, Fant offered information to the Commission, persuaded fellow trustees to take particular actions, and promised his resignation before he would become a party to “spawning an integration crew at Rust College.”83 Rust students continued to agitate, and Fant resigned his trusteeship when his term expired in 1963.84 The Commission made little headway in destabilizing the college in part because it focused most of its time and energy on events in Jackson. But, SNCC's 1964 Freedom Summer Project and Rust's geographic importance to it brought the campus under increasing scrutiny.

The Sovereignty Commission, buoyed by its “success” at ousting the leadership at Tougaloo College, set its sites on Rust College and President Earnest Smith in the summer of 1964: “We have put into action a plan for Rust College similar to the plan we used at Tougaloo College.... It is hoped that the case against President Smith will be ready to present to trustees at Rust College within a short time with the recommendation that the president be removed and a new ad-
ministration return the college to the educational purposes for which it was established.”85 A Commission employee and a member of the Board of Trustees traveled to Holly Springs to reason with Smith and discern what was happening on the campus, but Smith refused to meet with them and ordered them off the campus.86 Undeterred, the Commission interviewed campus informants who accused Smith of employing a large number of “suspected homosexuals” as faculty, impregnating a young girl, refusing to discipline a white male and black female “caught in the act,” and employing a “bunch of white beatniks” to teach summer courses.87 The Commission gathered the evidence and returned to the Board of Trustees hoping to get Smith fired. Other public officials joined the cause and attempted to undermine Smith’s authority. Mayor Sam Coopwood wrote to the Mississippi branch of the Methodist Church and encouraged it to investigate the college and President Smith.88 Senator George Yarbrough, from Marshall County, pressured the Board of Trustees in New York to take action against Smith.89 The Commission and its allies attempted to marshal their forces to compel the trustees to take action.

The attempts to oust President Smith failed. He remained president until 1966 when he retired of his own volition. A series of miscalculations frustrated the Commission’s efforts. The Commission’s assessment of the Board of Trustees was somewhat accurate. Several trustees wanted to insulate Rust from the Civil Rights Movement, and the Board’s lukewarm support of civil rights activism frustrated President Smith and contributed to his voluntary departure.90 But, the Commission miscalculated the level of the Board’s antipathy toward the movement. Many of the white Board members from the Mississippi branch of the church were angry about the campus’s place in the movement, but the Mississippi Methodist Church donated only a small amount of funds to the college. Rust received most of its financial sustenance from the national church so financial threats from the Mississippi branch carried little weight. The Commission also overestimated the level of dissent between the Board and President Smith. Board members may have tempered their support for the campus-based movement, but they found the Commission’s morals charges against Smith distasteful and obvious. The Commission’s harassment offended the Board, which refused to take any action.

The Commission also misjudged its power over private HBCUs. It did not, by itself, precipitate the president’s firing at Tougaloo College or the demise of Campbell College. Tougaloo’s charter and fund-raising crisis and Campbell College’s financial situation provided the Commission with a rare opportunity. Rust College’s financial situation was not as dire as that at Campbell College, though it was far from healthy. Nor was Rust in the middle of a charter crisis or a funding campaign like that at Tougaloo College. The Commission considered Rust a threat to the state, but it could not capitalize on fortuitous vulnerabilities. Rust was able to withstand state pressure in part because it received less concerted attention from the Commission, but also because it did not provide the Commission with an entree to exploit.

Implications

The examination of Campbell College, Tougaloo College, and Rust College during the civil rights era offers implications beyond discrete battles with the Sovereignty Commission. Their experiences offer civil rights scholars evidence of the importance of independent, self-sustaining institutions and the depths of Southern racism. The advent of the Civil Rights Movement severed the uneasy compromise between private HBCUs and the Southern power structure. The state easily dealt with individual campus constituents who confronted the Southern system. Quelling group dissent proved another matter. Government agencies aggressively attacked the institutions and their constituents, an attack made easier by the insecure economic situation of the colleges, internal dissent, and other convenient vulnerabilities. Their private status forced segregationists to invent creative strategies to curtail activism. The state was not the only destabilizing force, but it created conditions under which the colleges struggled to function and were forced to take drastic and costly measures to protect themselves if possible. The experiences of Campbell, Tougaloo, and Rust demonstrate the volatile nature of the era and the lengths to which racists would go to crush the Civil Rights Movement.

Also, the experiences of these three small and isolated institutions illuminate broader themes in the history of higher education. First, the battle between the colleges and the state contributes to the debate over the role of a college in society: should it remain aloof and practice neutrality or should it be pressed into service toward specific social and ideological goals.91 The state of Mississippi admonished private HBCUs to stay out of the Civil Rights Movement. Ac-
tivists drafted Campbell College, Tougaloo College, and Rust College to play a role in societal reform despite the state's threats. The institutions became what Aldon Morris describes as movement centers: organizations or institutions that enable a subjugated group to engage in sustained protest by providing communication networks, organized groups, experienced leaders, and an opportunity to pool social capital. Activists used their respective campuses as a protective shield to coordinate an attack on racial domination and eschewed the notion that participation in social reform should wait until after graduation. Student-status protected activists, but the HBCUs themselves became targets. The Sovereignty Commission, legislature, government officials, Board of Trustees of Institutions of Higher Learning, local police, the state legal system, and Citizens' Council marshaled their forces to punish the private colleges and force them to take a more conservative position on the role of a college in society. Private status prevented direct intervention, but the state and its allies were able to make the public role of private colleges a liability.

Second, the experiences of these private HBCUs force a reevaluation of the dichotomy drawn between public and private institutions. The category has proven useful in examinations of higher education, but the experiences of these institutions put a different spin on the question: What is (should be) the relationship between the state and higher education institutions? The Supreme Court addressed the potential danger of the situation in its 1819 Dartmouth College decision. The Court found that a privately funded college should not be subjected to legislative whims, public opinion, or the rise and fall of political parties. Education was a public matter, but the faculty and philanthropic interests had the right to act as a private entity. The decision had nothing to do with private black colleges; none existed at the time. But, missionary philanthropists set up private HBCUs with the same assumption: financial and political autonomy from the state and the right to develop curricula, campus policies, and other matters without the fear of state intervention in college affairs. The state violated the autonomy of private colleges after they became involved in the Civil Rights Movement. The campuses were free to encourage group esteem and practice desegregation as long as their campus reality did not directly confront the Southern racial order itself. Private institutions, as Rust's President Smith put it, "were not as free as everyone thought we were." Third, an examination of private HBCUs in the Civil Rights Movement offers an alternative interpretation of the role of private and public institutions in a democracy. The history of higher education tells us that public institutions democratized higher education. State-supported institutions expanded the educational opportunities for youth previously excluded in a system of private colleges. Under certain conditions, however, private institutions became vital to democratic aims while public institutions could not perform the same role. In the 1960s, when Southern state interests collided with constitutionally protected freedoms, private institutions provided a forum for dissent. Private HBCUs—because they were private—were invaluable. Their freedom from state control allowed the colleges latitude not available to public institutions. They paid heavily for their choice and intense external pressures left its mark, but private HBCUs played a pivotal role in the protection of egalitarian aims.

Notes
5. "Citizen Council Grant" [1964], Sovereignty Commission Record (hereafter cited as SCR) 99-30-046-1-1 to 2-1-1, Mississippi Department of Archives and History (hereafter cited MDAH; all Sovereignty Commission Files are located at the MDAH).
8. Ibid., 86–87.
J. Pendleton was a black school principal, minister, and Campbell College Board of Trustees member.


33. A. L. Hopkins to Members of the Sovereignty Commission, 1 May 1962, SCR 7-4-0-77-1-1-1.

34. Scott v. Campbell College, 3 (both quotes).

35. Ibid., 3-4.

36. Ibid., 4.


39. Erle Johnston to File, 13 July 1964, 1, SCR 3-78-0-4-1-1-1.

40. Ibid.


45. Ed King joined the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, an alternative to the state’s Democratic Party that barred black participation, and ran as its vice presidential candidate in a mock election in 1963. John Salter became the North Jackson NAACP Youth Council’s adviser and gained national media attention after his picture at the Woolworth’s sit-in appeared in the national media in 1963.

46. See Salter, Jackson, Mississippi, and Ed King, interview by Joy Ann Williamson, 28 August 2003, Jackson, Mississippi.

47. Writ of Temporary Injunction, Chancery Court of the First Judicial District of Hinds County, Mississippi, 6 June 1963, Ed King Papers, Box 8, folder 374, Tougaloo College Archives, Tougaloo, Mississippi (hereafter cited TCA).

48. Erle Johnston to File, 13 April 1964, 1, SCR 3-74-2-17-1-1-1 through 2-1-1.

49. Mr. Zero to Sovereignty Commission, 5 May 1964, 1, SCR 3-74-2-19-1-1-1 through 2-1-1.

50. In 1954, Tougaloo merged with Southern Christian Institute, and the Tougaloo campus absorbed the Institute’s student body.

51. “Church Group Cancels Support of Tougaloo,” Jackson Daily News, 20 September 1963, Box A.D. Brittel Unprocessed, Folder Board of Trustees, Fall 1963, TCA.

52. Barnaby Keeney to Lawrence Durbin, 9 March 1964, 1, Barnaby Keeney Office File Register, Tougaloo College, 1964–65, Miscellaneous Correspondence, BUA.

53. Wesley Hotchkiss to Robert Wilder, 10 April 1964, Barnaby Keeney Office File Register, Tougaloo College, 1964–65, Miscellaneous Correspondence, BUA.
80. Tom Scarbrough, "Marshall County (Rust College)," 30 June 1964, 5, SCR 2-20-1-78-1-1-1 through 5-1-1.


82. M. L. Malone to Zack Van Landingham, 9 February 1959, SCR 2-94-0-2-1-1-1; Zack Van Landingham to Director of the State Sovereignty Commission, 6 March 1959, SCR 2-4-10-6-1-1-1; Tom Scarbrough, "Lowndes County," 1 September 1961, SCR 2-94-0-56-1-1-1 through 2-1-1.

83. Tom Scarbrough, "Marshall County-Mrs. Clarice Campbell, white female teacher at Rust College-also Rust College-all Negro School," 29 May 1961, 4, SCR 2-20-1-50-1-1-1 through 7-1-1.


85. Erle Johnston, Jr., to Herman Glazier, 9 June 1964, SCR 2-20-1-77-1-1-1.

86. Smith, interview.

87. Tom Scarbrough, "Marshall County (Rust College)," 30 June 1964, 2 (first quote), 3 (second and third quotes), SCR 2-20-1-78-1-1-1 through 5-1-1.

88. Sam Coopwood to Bishop Marvin Franklin, 29 June 1964, SCR 2-20-1-80-1-1-1.

89. Tom Scarbrough, "Marshall County-Mrs. Clarice Campbell, white female teacher at Rust College-also Rust College-all Negro School," 29 May 1961, SCR 2-20-1-50-1-1-1 through 7-1-1.

90. Smith, interview.

91. Derek Bok discusses this debate in Beyond the Ivory Tower: Social Responsibilities of the Modern University (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982), though he does not address the dilemma faced by black colleges in the Civil Rights Movement.


94. Smith, interview.