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To Humbly Serve: Joseph James Dennis and His Contributions to Clark College

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ABSTRACT

AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDIES, AFRICANA WOMEN’S STUDIES, AND HISTORY

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TO HUMBLY SERVE: JOSEPH JAMES DENNIS AND HIS CONTRIBUTIONS TO CLARK COLLEGE

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The history of historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) has been traditionally discussed using the “top-down” approach, but this oftentimes leads to the omission of the contributions of the many men and women who are essential to the success of these institutions—men like Dr. Joseph James Dennis who served Clark College for forty-seven years. During his tenure, Dennis served as the chairman of the mathematics department, homecoming committee, and institutional representative and President of the Southern Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (SIAC). The purpose of this study is to explore Dennis’ contributions and why Clark College dedicated a building in his honor. This study uses primary and secondary sources to navigate Dennis’ contributions and service. This study suggests that although historical documentation from the administrative lens is vital to posterity, the viewpoints of men and women like Dennis are equally important to the preservation of the HBCU history.

TO HUMBLY SERVE: JOSEPH JAMES DENNIS AND HIS CONTRIBUTIONS
TO CLARK COLLEGE

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF CLARK ATLANTA UNIVERSITY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS

BY

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STUDIES, AND HISTORY

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the contributions of faculty and staff to the history of institutions of higher learning, more specifically, the contributions of Joseph James Dennis to Clark College during his forty-seven year tenure. Despite serving Clark College for over two scores, he is only briefly mentioned in the annals of its history. These mentions relate to the erection of a new academic building, which was to be named McPheeters-Dennis Hall after the late Dean Alphonso A. McPheeters and Dennis. His narrative and the narratives of other notable Clark College faculty members are not presented. Despite being worthy of admission into the Clark College Hall of Fame of Black Teachers, along with individuals like Charles H. Turner (the first African American to earn a doctoral degree in zoology at the University of Chicago in 1907),¹ Stella Brewer Brooks (an English scholar on folklore interpretation and analysis of Joel Chandler Harris and Uncle Remus tales),² and J. deKoven Killingsworth (musician and music professor who was described by Alexander Jefferson in his memoirs *Red Tail Captured, Red Tail Free: Memoirs of a Tuskegee Airman and POW* as “a left-handed,

1. Charles I. Abramson, “Charles Henry Turner,” *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*, accessed April 9, 2016, <http://www.britannica.com/biography/Charles-Henry-Turner>.

2. James P. Brawley, “James P. Brawley Collection,” Archives Research Center, Robert W. Woodruff Library, Atlanta University Center, Atlanta, GA.

cockeyed, strawberry-splotched, red-haired, straight fingered musical genius”),³ Dennis and his contemporaries are rarely mentioned in the institution’s history. While each was an asset to Clark College, he or she was also a trailblazer in his or her respective field. Their accounts and the accounts of their colleagues should be included in the institution’s history. Institutional history⁴ should be inclusive of the narratives of all participants.

Statement of the Problem

Historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) have unique histories and should be documented accordingly. Despite their longevity, many of the remaining institutions have a singular historical account. The restriction of having one account of an institution’s history severely limits the presentation of the history in multiple ways. The first is that many of these accounts are not produced by trained historians. This can be likened to an individual who has earned a doctoral degree in history performing a medical procedure. While the person may have a doctoral degree, he or she does not possess the necessary skills to perform a medical procedure. The same rule applies when recording history. While these men and women were academics who had earned doctorates in a specialized field, if the field of the earned doctorate was not history, then the person was not a historian. Therefore, the information that was presented must be reviewed critically. Recording history is more than compiling a series of dates and events into a comprehensive text. Without proper training or references, these authors created texts

3. Alexander Jefferson and Lewis H. Carlson, *Red Tail Captured, Red Tail Free: Memories of a Tuskegee Airman and POW* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 21.

4. For the purpose of this study, an institutional history is considered a text written solely for the purpose of documenting the history of an institution of higher learning.

which became the antithesis of the field and ended by being the primary source of information for institutions.

The second limitation was the lack of variety in the presentation of the history. The texts reviewed in the upcoming chapters all follow the same formula for the presentation of the history. The formula used a chronological approach to discuss the advancements of the institution through the evolution of the curriculum while discussing student life and a brief chapter mentioning notable alumni. There was limited mention of the faculty and staff throughout any of the texts and this led to the third limitation—the history was presented from an administrative viewpoint. Despite the daily contributions of the faculty and staff, there was no faculty or staff perspective represented in any of these texts. While these men and women were not completely excluded, they were accounted for in a statistical format, their experiences were not represented.

Thus, many of the historical accounts of HBCUs were exclusionary. An effort to correct this error should be made. Historians seeking to update the histories of HBCUs must be cognizant of this and actively seek to include these missing accounts, while also acknowledging that these narratives may not follow the same trajectory as the publicly published or accepted narrative. During the retirement celebration for the chair of the Mathematics Department, former Clark College President, Dr. James P. Brawley, made the following statement: “Institutions become best known, renowned, and great, not by the size of the campus, or the number of buildings and elaborate equipment as important as these things are, but because of great personalities that make the institutions great.”⁵ If

5. “James P. Brawley Collection,” Archives Research Center, Robert W. Woodruff Library, Atlanta University Center, Atlanta, GA.

this is true, the personalities that Dr. Brawley references in the aforementioned quote deserve a voice in this branch of history.

The history of Clark Atlanta University is unique; it was created by the consolidation of two historic institutions, Clark College and Atlanta University. However, I might have never known that uniqueness had it not been for my First Year Seminar professor, Dr. Isabella T. Jenkins—affectionately known as Dr. “J”—and her insistence for her students to learn, understand, appreciate, and respect the history of Clark University, Clark College, Atlanta University, and Clark Atlanta University. It was on a Thursday morning during Honors Seminar when she banged her fist against the table and yelled at us, “You gots to know your histry!” We all snickered because of the way she pronounced history. She did not pronounce it phonetically correct as his-story, but his-tree. Understandably, she was frustrated with the class but instead of expressing her frustration, she verbalized her disappointment. She was disappointed that we did not understand the importance of knowing why the buildings were named after certain individuals and the significance of this, the past accolades and achievements of the parent institutions, and the significance of the creation of Clark Atlanta University (CAU). Once we apologized and failed her surprise quiz on the previously assigned reading, she explained the importance of CAU and our parent institutions, Clark College and Atlanta University.

Not to sound clichéish, but Dr. Jenkins took us down memory lane. She told us the story of Clark University and how it evolved into Clark College. She spoke about the value of Atlanta University and the prestige that accompanied anyone who graduated

from the institution. She spoke of the formation of the Black Battalion of Death Football Team at Clark University and how they persevered and became champions without a football field on which to practice. We were told of the “Spirit of Greatness” that Dr. James P. Brawley wrote about in *The Clark College Legacy: An Interpretive History of Relevant Education 1869-1975*, and the penny-pinching president of Atlanta University, Dr. Rufus E. Clement, who would go as far as to verify if an item was really necessary for the success of the institution. The more she spoke the more I began to understand, I was not at Clark Atlanta University just to earn a degree and leave. The moment I was inducted into CAU I became a Panther, a member of a family. It was then that I understood Dr. Jenkins’ frustration and disappointment and recognized that it was no longer Clark Atlanta’s history, but it was our history and it is up to us to continue to tell the story, and to tell the story, “You gots to know your histry.”

Dr. Jenkins was an enigma who had an anecdote about every building on the campus because she knew the majority of the former professors and bishops for whom they were named from her childhood. Her ability to merge her personal experiences with the history of Clark College helped her combat one of the most prominent stigmas surrounding history. Many people assert that history is boring to the average person. It is a necessary field but not interesting enough to engage everyone. Recording history is tedious and requires remarkable attention to detail. It also requires discernment and the ability to identify what is relevant. Dr. Jenkins proved that history is not boring. Unfortunately, Dr. Jenkins’ perspective of the history of Clark College and Clark Atlanta University has not been included in either historical texts, *The Clark College Legacy: An*

Interpretive History of Relevant Education 1869-1975 (1977) or *Clark Atlanta*

University: Charting a Bold New Future (2013), despite serving the institution for fifty years. The accounts of her and other members of the faculty and staff are excluded.

Instead of documenting history using the traditional top-down approach, an approach that begins with collecting evidence from individuals who are the leaders and decision makers, institutional history should be researched from the bottom-up. Historians should begin by using institutional archives to outline the history of the institution while simultaneously compiling a list of potential individuals to interview or from whom to request records. Using these records, the historian can then identify faculty and staff members who served on committees and contributed to the institution. These people may not always fall into the administrative role; they may come with the transparency that is necessary to obtain the information. The history of HBCUs is not documented as thoroughly as it could be.

These institutions of higher learning emerged after the Civil War as the gateway to educating the newly freed slaves. Much of the history surrounding the origins of HBCUs is based on what has been archived and maintained. In rare instances, individuals who were instrumental in the creation or maintenance of these institutions were able to maintain official and unofficial records that detail the institution's history. Without these records, the history would be lost forever and left to the interpretation of those not familiar with the times or institution. Thankfully, this did not happen to the history of Clark College. Former Clark College presidents, Drs. Matthew Simpson Davage, James Phillip Brawley, and Vivian Wilson Henderson, were instrumental in not only physically

expanding the institution but beginning the archives and the maintenance of the history of the institution as well.

President Davage was selected to serve as the second African-American president of Clark College in 1924.⁶ Davage managed to keep the doors of Clark College open during the Great Depression and even succeeded in relocating the campus from its South Atlanta location (current home of George Washington Carver High School) to its current location near the historic West End. This information is known because President Davage provided his official documents, which included correspondences between Florence M. Read, then acting president of Atlanta University and United Methodist representatives among others, to the Clark College libraries. No stranger to historical documentation, Davage understood that these documents would need to be preserved in order to maintain the history of the institution.⁷ As a graduate of an HBCU, New Orleans University (Dillard University), Davage was a stakeholder in this history. He understood the power of perception and the importance and urgency in first documenting and then maintaining the history of this institution. Although his collection was not as vast as Presidents Brawley or Henderson, it provides insight into the workings of Clark University and his fundraising efforts during the mid-thirties that eventually led to the relocation of the campus. Although Davage's presidency ended in 1941, his papers cover the years 1936-1986. This is largely due to his wife's (Alice Davage) contributions as Davage passed in

6. James P. Brawley, *The Clark College Legacy: An Interpretive History of Relevant Education 1869-1975* (Atlanta, GA: Clark College, 1977), 83.

7. Matthew S. Davage, Archives Research Center, Atlanta University Center, Robert W. Woodruff Library, Atlanta, GA.

1976.⁸ The primary focus of the Matthew Simpson Davage Papers is his tenure as President at Clark College and his work with the United Methodist Church.

Where President Davage's collection fell short in details regarding the daily maintenance of the institution, his colleague and successor, James P. Brawley, picked up the mantle and continued to record the history of the institution. Dr. Brawley originally began his career at Clark University as a professor. He was promoted to dean of the College of Arts and Sciences in 1926. He held this position until 1940 when he was promoted to the administrative dean and in 1941; he was selected by the Clark College Board of Trustees to serve as the President of Clark College. He served as president until 1965, the longest-term president in the history of the institution. After stepping down from the presidency, Brawley was given the title of President Emeritus.⁹ In this role he assisted his successor, Vivian Wilson Henderson, with fundraising and institutional planning. From his retirement in 1965 until he passed in 1985, Brawley continued to work at Clark College. Since Brawley, there has not been another president who continued working with the institution after ending his presidency. Brawley was a history practitioner, not a trained historian although he was a man of many degrees, holding a grand total of five, including three doctorates. His first book was a comprehensive history on the United Methodist Church. He then followed this text with the first and only book on the history of Clark College, *The Clark College Legacy: An Interpretative History of Relevant Education 1869-1975*. The James P. Brawley Collection is the most

8. Ibid.

9. "James P. Brawley Collection," Archives Research Center, Robert W. Woodrull Library, Atlanta University Center, Atlanta, GA.

comprehensive and inclusive collection of works related to the history of Clark College, now Clark Atlanta University. Although he was not a trained historian, President Brawley was familiar with the process for recording and writing history. His collection is the largest one discussed in this paper and has the most diverse selection of works in it.

Given his length of time at the institution and the number of positions that he held, Brawley's collection consists of a number of records that at times are hard to decipher. He kept personal and professional correspondences, programs, scripts, speeches, and a myriad of documents. His collection is one of the most diverse in holdings. He does not favor his administrative colleagues over his faculty and staff. One of the most striking differences between this collection and the Davage Papers is the quantity. According to the Archives Research Center, the Davage Papers required 1.5 linear feet in length in storage, whereas the Brawley collection required 75.0 linear feet.¹⁰

Brawley's collection appears to have been amassed with the intent to collect information, while the Davage Papers seem more selective. Davage's tenure as president spanned almost two decades and yet the first decade is not included in his papers. During an interview with Ms. Jacquelynn DeBose, daughter of Joseph J. Dennis, she recalled a discussion with her father regarding the financial difficulties of the institution during the Great Depression. She was lucid and able to recall a discussion she had with her father regarding this topic but the Davage Papers never mention any major financial difficulties during this era. However, there is evidence of Clark University encountering difficulties while attempting to fundraise for new buildings for the new campus and correspondences to support these claims. Though there are no records to corroborate the financial

10. A measure of shelf space necessary to store documents.

difficulties that DeBose recounted, given the historical climate of the late twenties and to mid-thirties it is more than possible that this occurred. Perhaps Davage did not want records from the tumultuous years on record or these records simply could have been lost in the move from the old campus. Because there is no mention of this in his records or those of Dr. Brawley, financial difficulties cannot be validated. Brawley's tenure at the institution began at the institution in 1925 as the department head for Education and Religious Education. A year later he advanced and became the Dean of Arts and Sciences; after earning his doctorate degree in 1941, he became the President of Clark College. He was employed at the college during the depression and could have left information regarding these times in his collection. This is why archives are important to the historian.

As historians progress with recording institutional history, documenting the accounts of the marginalized community of faculty and staff is important. While there is no collective history regarding the creation and classification of HBCUs, there are even fewer texts that document the histories of these institutions of higher learning. Most historical accounts of these institutions are written by individuals who served the institution or are alumni. Noted historian Clarence A. Bacote authored *The Story of Atlanta University: A Century of Service, 1865-1965*, a book which chronicles the rise and evolution of Atlanta University, but nothing post-1965 exists in the realm of Atlanta University. Former president of Clark College, James P. Brawley, authored *The Clark College Legacy: An Interpretative History of Relevant Education 1869-1975*. Like Bacote, Brawley's intent was to document the origins of Clark College and show its

evolution. Neither of these works would have been possible without the proper sources, many of which are now conserved and preserved in the Atlanta University Center Robert Woodruff Library Center for Archive Research. Without the collections and papers of the former leaders of these institutions, the history would have been lost and left to the interpretation of non-shareholders in this legacy. The history of brother and sister Atlanta University Center institutions—Morris Brown College, Morehouse College, and Spelman College—was documented under the same purpose and will be discussed in the upcoming chapter.

The Brawley Collection allows the researcher the opportunity to examine Clark University and Clark College in a broad scope. The entire collection consists of 179 boxes that are organized into nine categories: Clark College, Correspondence, Family and Personal Records, Memorabilia, Methodist Church Records, News Clippings, Rust College, Writings, and Audio/Visual Materials. The Clark College category includes copies of minutes from the Clark College Board of Trustees meetings, registrar records, and information related to the organization and structuring of various offices and programs at the institution.¹¹ The uniqueness of Brawley's record keeping is in the details. Although he spent the majority of his service with the institution as an administrator, he hand wrote letters of congratulations and condolences to all members of the Clark College community. Finding letters and cards of condolences and congratulations to the Clark College community written to and from the President and former Dean provides insight into Brawley and his level of commitment to the faculty

11. "James P. Brawley Collection," Archives Research Center, Robert W. Woodruff Library, Atlanta University Center, Atlanta, GA.

and staff of Clark College and the institution. However, this claim could not be made if these primary documents were not available to the general public.

Vivian Wilson Henderson succeeded Brawley as president of Clark College in 1965. Unlike his successors, President Henderson was not able to retire and pass the torch to his successor as he died while in office. The Henderson Papers consists of 129.0 linear feet, and is comprised of personal and family files, correspondences, awards and honors, memorial tributes, and audio/visual records. During Henderson's presidency, he worked to establish a rapport with the federal government and used his position on the Board of Trustees for the Ford Foundation to help advance the institution.¹² Under his leadership, the institution obtained a record number of grants and access to federal funds to create new programs and offices.¹³ Because of his background as an economist, the collection highlights his work in that arena prior to coming to Clark College and his work during his tenure. The Henderson Papers also include a plethora of manuscripts of speeches and articles written by Henderson. Through this particular collection of papers, one is able to ascertain the development of the institution after Brawley's term. There was growth, both financial and academic. Henderson's presidency was also aided by Brawley's status as President Emeritus. Brawley continued to assist the administration with growing and advancing the College. It was because of the collaborative efforts of these two men and

12. Vivian Wilson Henderson, "The Vivian Wilson Henderson Papers," Archives Research Center, Robert W. Woodruff Library, Atlanta University Center, Atlanta, GA.

13. Ibid.

the dedicated faculty and staff that the curriculum was expanded to include Mass Media Arts, Medical Illustration, and Allied Health Programs.¹⁴

These men are written about in or have written the history of Clark College. They were forward thinkers and understood the value in documenting the history. What they did not recognize was the danger of not including every stakeholder or reflecting the contributions in recording that history. African Americans and their contributions have continuously been marginalized in relationship to American history; the exclusion of any stakeholder when documenting the history of HBCUs is an error that cannot be afforded. Because each of these men had the foresight to keep records pertaining to the history of Clark College, there is a history to build upon. But their work alone will not sustain the history of the institution. There must be a consistent process developed to maintain the history of Clark College and Clark Atlanta University. Simply providing the Archives Research Center with records is not enough. The Center must be provided with the necessary historical information for each item. When providing items such as personal correspondence, speeches, programs, videos, and recordings, it is important to be detailed in the description. A folder of personal correspondence between administrative personnel and faculty and staff can often be categorized into subfields. An example of this can be found in the both the Davage and Brawley Collections. Davage's collection features multiple types of correspondence between the United Method Church and correspondence sent to potential donors to the school. Brawley's collection categorizes the majority of his correspondence by the recipient.

14. James P. Brawley, *The Clark College Legacy: An Interpretive History of Relevant Education 1869-1975* (Atlanta, GA: Clark College, 1977), 277-279.

Archival research is vital to the development of a comprehensive institutional history. Without archives there is little that can be consistently proven. One can state that enrollment at Clark College increased in 1931, but without enrollment records to verify this information, it is a general statement. The curriculum can be described as being vast and comprehensive but without the ability to review a course catalog and compare it to the courses offered at similar institutions, this claim cannot be verified. Institutional archives have an abundance of these documents (registrar records, applications, course catalogs, and yearbooks) that must be critically analyzed. However, these documents allow the historian to develop a comprehensive institutional history, one that is inclusive of faculty, staff, administration, and students. In some cases, archives hold the documents of people who are not included in the history books but were instrumental in the institution. The papers of Annie L. McPheeters, the first African-American librarian in Atlanta, Georgia and wife of Alphonso A. McPheeters, are held in the Auburn Avenue Research Library.¹⁵ The works of jazz flutist Waymon Carver can be found in the Atlanta University Center Robert Woodruff Library Archives Research Center. Each of their collections contains personal and professional content about these individuals. While their work may not always be directly related to the institution, these records provide the necessary evidence to verify their contributions not only to the institution but to their respective disciplines.

Since the consolidation of Atlanta University and Clark College, there has been a steady decrease in the archiving of documents related to CAU. Although many might

15. Alphonso A. McPheeters Papers, Archives Research Center, Robert W. Woodruff Library, Atlanta University Center, Atlanta, GA.

consider items like commencement and convocation programs to be inconsequential, these very programs might aid future researchers, Clark Atlanta University employees, and alumni with answering the most basic questions about the history of the institution. Each year a new program emerges or a new initiative is developed and there is no trace of this information in the institution's records. The ideas and meticulously laid plans of the predecessors of various members of the administration are laid to the side and new initiatives and policies emerge in an effort to create a more efficient university. The foundation for many of these programs and policies is lost because there is no reference for the current administration to use in their plans to make changes. The importance of including all stakeholders when recording history creates an opportunity to increase the validity of the research and the credibility of the researcher. When a voice is omitted, it becomes invalid to the public simply because it does not exist in the dominant narrative. If there is an opportunity to present an account from all stakeholders, the historian should take advantage of it and present a comprehensive view of the history.

CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

From the Desk of the President—Or Some Other Administrator

Recording the history of HBCUs has traditionally been approached using the “top-down” methodology.¹ This requires the historian, or author in some cases, to examine the key contributors to the institution. These stakeholders are typically those individuals who are former presidents, deans, and other top-level administrators. These are the individuals who can be considered to be the face of the institutions. These men and women are the faces of their respective institutions and thus, the failures and successes are, historically, publicly associated with these individuals. Given the level of public scrutiny that these individuals face in regards to their decisions and their management of the institution’s day-to-day operations, the accounting of these events must be handled with the utmost discretion and care. When relating this to HBCUs, it becomes important to understand the dynamics of organizational structure. The

1. Scholarship that emphasizes elites and leaders, as opposed to average people. Think, for instance, of a book of World War II that focused on Franklin Roosevelt rather than on the lives of ordinary Americans.

organizational structure is ultimately used to determine accountability.² The public blame will almost always follow the person at the top of the chart and this person is typically the president of the institution. Regardless of the person at fault, most published accounts of events will reference or frame the story around the president. It is with this understanding that the histories of HBCUs are typically documented from the administrative view. This is beneficial because most of the mentioned texts are organized chronologically. It becomes easier to delineate a particular time period or era without the overuse of terms and phrases like “The Great Depression” or “The Civil Rights Era.” Instead, one will find chapters and books named after former presidents in *The Clark College Legacy: An Interpretive History of Relevant Education 1869-1975* (1977) by James P. Brawley, *The Story of Atlanta University: A Century of Service, 1865-1965* (Clarence A. Bacote), *The History of Morehouse College* (Benjamin G. Brawley), *A Candle in the Dark: The Complete History of Morehouse College* (Edward A. Jones), *Morris Brown College: From Its Beginnings in 1885 Until the Time of Its Removal* (Annie B. Thomas) *The Story of Spelman College* (Florence M. Read), and *A Legacy Continues: The Manley Years at Spelman College 1953-1976* (Albert M. Manley). However, *Morris Brown College: The First Hundred Years* (George A. Sewell and Cornelius V. Troup) names each chapter after a stanza taken from the Morris Brown alma mater. While the majority of these texts was authored by individuals who served as the president of their respective institutions, *The Story of Atlanta University*, *Morris Brown College: From Its Beginnings in 1885 Until the Time of Its Removal*, *Morris Brown: The*

2. An organizational structure is a system used to define a hierarchy within an organization. This structure is developed to establish how an organization operates and assists an organization in obtaining its goals to allow for future growth. The structure is illustrated using an organizational chart.

First Hundred Years, and *The History of Morehouse College* are the only two texts not written by a former president of Atlanta University or Morehouse College.³

This suggests that the majority of the literature about the Atlanta University Center will present a narrative that positively reflects the various administrations. James P. Brawley, Read, and Manley all wrote and published their respective manuscripts after their presidential terms had ended. While both Brawley and Read were awarded the status of president emeritus and emerita, respectively, only Brawley was an active former president on the campus of Clark College. He continued to work with the institution, mainly in the Office of Institutional Advancement, assisting with fundraising campaigns aimed at financially sustaining the institution. He also worked with his successor, Vivian Henderson, to develop and establish an Honors Program at Clark College.⁴ This information was verified through Brawley's numerous correspondences that were written on letterhead created exclusively for the Office of the President Emeritus.⁵ Thus, control of the narrative was in the hands of the people who were the figureheads of the largest consortium of HBCUs in the country.

3. It should be noted that while this study primarily focuses on Atlanta University Center institutions, similar patterns and themes were found in the presentation of institutional histories of Florida Agricultural and Mechanical Institution, Fort Valley State University, and Tennessee State University. The initial list of reviewed institutional histories included more than forty HBCUs.

4. "James P. Brawley Collection," Archives Research Center, Robert W. Woodruff Library at Atlanta University Center, Atlanta, GA.

5. Ibid.

Interestingly, Clarence A. Bacote was the only trained historian in this bunch.⁶ He also holds the distinction of being the first graduate professor at Atlanta University and served the institution for a total of forty-seven years (fourteen years as chair of the History Department). Despite his training in the field, Bacote's text is the most tedious to read. He, like the aforementioned authors, chronicles the evolution of Atlanta University from a normal school into the premiere graduate school in the South. Bacote clearly takes advantage of his historical training in requiring the reader to fully engage the text. The downfall to this technique is that it becomes stale and the reader can lose interest in the text with little effort. Bacote is detailed in his quest to cover a century of historical events. Like his counterparts, Bacote relied heavily on primary sources which included, official reports and University documents, the personal papers of former presidents and other administrators, as well as university publications.

Bacote's attempt to cover a hundred years is an indicator that only major trends and shifts will be covered in his text. The limitations to this include the exclusion of the smaller stakeholders. Individuals like Dennis who served the institution in multiple positions were excluded. In 1928, the Department of Interior Bureau of Education reported its findings at various HBCU institutions. This report analyzed HBCU's across the country and provided information about each institution's shortfalls and advancement. While the findings recognized growth at various stages, it did not hesitate to identify the weakness of these historical colleges and universities. The faculty was profiled in this text similarly to the statistical analysis provided by Bacote and his

6. Clarence A. Bacote, "Clarence A. Bacote Papers," Archives Research Center, Robert W. Woodruff Library, Atlanta University Center, Atlanta, GA.

contemporaries, predecessors, and successors; however, it went a step further in some cases. The Clark University faculty profile discussed the advancements made in the student accountability division through the development of the Registrar's Office but was swift to acknowledge that "... much of the advantage of the improved student accounting system is being nullified by the fact that the registrar is being overburdened with work. In addition to his duties as a registrar, he is in charge of the department of mathematics in the college and teaches 17 hours a week."⁷ The inclusion of the dual roles that many individuals hold at colleges and institutions provides an accurate description of the institution.

The faculty was profiled in a statistical format. Details regarding the pedigree of the professor's education and the institutions that these individuals earned their respective degrees were noted. This information was vital to the accreditation and validation of the institution. An institution is only as credible as the credentials of its faculty. This was important to the acceptance of degrees earned at HBCUs. During the early twentieth century, it was not uncommon to find alumni of these institutions employed at their alma maters. Bacote, however, could not place emphasis on the contributions of the faculty and staff given the span of years that he attempted to cover. One of the limitations to the discussion of the history is periodization and knowing when the timeline is too expansive to be thorough. It is possible to cover a century in a text but it is not the most effective when the editing process begins.

7. Arthur J. Klein, *Survey of Negro Colleges and Universities, Bulletin No. 7* (Washington, DC: Bureau of Education, Department of the Interior, 1928), 228.

Benjamin Brawley, no relation to James P. Brawley, Edward A. Jones, George A. Sewell and Cornelius V. Troup hold the distinction in this group of being the only alumni to record the history of their respective alma maters. Brawley served as the first Dean of Morehouse College. Because this text was written by a man who was not only an alumnus of the institution but also served as the first Dean of the college, its objectivity can and should be questioned at times. Although Brawley wrote the history of Morehouse, he was not a trained historian. Often cited as an educator and author, Brawley is mostly credited for telling stories and writing poetry. This makes one skeptical regarding his treatment of Morehouse College. With little impartiality and objectivity, he could be considered one of the originators of the administrative approach to documenting the history of HBCUs. Published in 1917, it is the oldest of the selected texts. Brawley only provides one page of sources, a list of six sources in total, with a special note of indebtedness which reads:

For information or other assistance on special points indebtedness is gratefully acknowledged to Rev. H.L. Morehouse, of New York; President John Hope, of Morehouse College; President W. E. Holmes, of Central City College, Macon, Ga; Mrs. Clara Goble Sale, of Boston, Mass; Mr. Ephraim Sale, of Toronto, Canada; Dr. S. C. Graves, of Detroit, Mich.; Mr. William C. Graves, of Chicago, Il; Rev. E R. Carter, of Atlanta, Ga; Rev. D. D. Crawford, of Atlanta, Ga; Rev. D. W. Cannon, of Atlanta, Ga; and Rev. J. M. Nabrit of Augusta, Ga.⁸

He does not indicate whether or not he interviewed these individuals or if they provided vital primary and secondary sources for the completion of this text. Brawley recorded the first fifty years of the institution's history but with his limited bibliography, there is little to no way to corroborate his findings. This could be intentional given that the account

8. Benjamin Griffith Brawley, *The Story of Morehouse College* (Atlanta, GA: Morehouse College, 1917), 160.

was commissioned by the governing body of the institution. There may have been a desire to maintain a level of discretion when developing and maintaining the public image of an institution that had been presented as the premiere institution for African-American males.⁹ Despite these limitations, Brawley's text provides the reader with a picture, albeit prescribed picture, of the origins and makings of Morehouse College. Brawley does recognize some faculty members who left indelible marks on their students. "It is not too much to say that the real permanence of the school was guaranteed by the hard work from day to day of these two loyal teachers."¹⁰ To Mr. Holmes the students constantly turned for advice about their papers, speeches, and numerous personal problems; and he soon had a very warm place in their hearts."

Despite having two authors, *Morris Brown College: The First Hundred Years* was not initially planned as a joint venture. Troup, an alumnus and former president of Fort Valley State University, began compiling the data for the text and took ill. He requested the assistance of Sewell, another alum, before his passing. Troup and Sewell's work has, however, proven that it is possible to cover a century of history and capture a holistic view of the institution. Although the text is not written jointly and there are a plethora of moments throughout the text in which Sewell indirectly references' Troup's plans or methodology by referring to him as the "co-author," it is fluid. It includes much of the same type of information that is present in Brawley, Read, Manley, and Bacote's texts, including the establishment of the institution, curriculum advancement, faculty educational background, student and extracurricular activities, and alumni profiles and

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid., 37.

accomplishments. However, Troup's uniqueness is that he sought to include the voices of the alumni within his findings.

In the chapter titled *Alumni*, Sewell stated that, "The late co-author devised a questionnaire whereby he hoped to attain some consensus from the alumni as to 'best teachers,' 'most outstanding alumni,' etc. Though the responses were numerically inadequate, repeatedly among those most named were graduates of the college."¹¹ Although a sample of this questionnaire was not available, Troup's development and Sewell's implementation and analysis represent an attempt to include all stakeholders within the institution. In retrospect, Troup and Sewell recognized the power of agency and creating it within the alumni population. While some historians speak of the legacies of publicly popular professors, those they taught should determine the actual merit of these individuals and not by the public personas that are disseminated.

Troup and Sewell also provided detailed information on the organizational structure of the institution's Board of Trustees. They provided a list of all members from the year of establishment, 1881, until 1975. Additionally, they provided the reader with information regarding the functions and responsibilities of the Board of Trustees, the methods of selection, and procedures for the removal of a trustee from office. None of this information has been found in any of the texts for other Atlanta University Center institutions discussed in this section. The information concerning the policies of the governing board of Morris Brown shows the transparency of both the authors and the administration. Like, Brawley's *A History of Morehouse* and Edward A. Jones' *A Candle*

11. Cornelius V. Troup and George A. Sewell, *Morris Brown: The First Hundred Years* (Atlanta, GA: Morris Brown College, 1981), 225.

in the Dark: The Complete History of Morehouse College, the latter Morris Brown history was commissioned by its Board of Trustees. This very likely added an additional step to both the editing and publication process. The board would also have to approve the book in order for it to become an official historical text of the University and fund its publication.

Former Clark College President, Dr. James P. Brawley, had a unique career path. He first entered Clark University as the head of the Education and Religion Department in 1925 and advanced to Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences in 1926. He continued to move up the organizational chart of Clark College and became the Administrative Dean in 1940. After earning his doctorate in education, he succeeded Dr. Matthew Simpson Davage as Clark College's seventeenth president. Brawley's manuscript grew out of his dedication to both Clark College and the United Methodist Church. Another untrained historian, Brawley's major fault lies in his treatment of his tenure at the institution. He followed the same formula as the others for the first third of the manuscript. He outlined the origins of the institution, identified the individuals who were instrumental in organizing and establishing the schools, and discussed the evolution of the curriculum. The narrative was vague at times but filled with the one element that *The History of Morehouse College* lacked: verifiable sources.

Because of Brawley's decades of service at Clark College and his administrative role, he was privy to a wealth of information and important decisions. He was a key player and decision maker at the institution before and after his appointment to the presidency. It was because of this that he was able to provide insight and details into the

day to day operations of the institution. This also enabled him access to materials that might otherwise be considered confidential, including minutes from Board of Trustees meetings and other official university documents. Brawley also had strong ties to the United Methodist church and had access to documents from their offices. Prior to the 1977 release of *The Clark College Legacy*, Brawley authored *Two Centuries of Methodist Concern: Bondage, Freedom and Education of Black People* (1974), a history of the United Methodist Church and its role in the establishment of institutions of higher learning for black people. This text, while comprehensive in some areas, is vague in others. Brawley was also able to lean on the work of his colleague and friend Dr. Alphonso A. McPheeters, whose dissertation, *The Origin and Development of Clark University and Gammon Theological Seminary*, focused primarily on the institution. Brawley had a multitude of primary sources to depend on and yet he still made a classic mistake, by not maintaining his objectivity throughout the manuscript.

Despite beginning with a chronological organization, Brawley shifted to a topical approach towards the end of the text. While this is beneficial to the reader, it is slightly problematic for the researcher. The ability to place the shifts in academic programs and student life into the appropriate historical context becomes difficult when one must jump from the back of the book to the front for confirmation. To describe the changes in curriculum and student life within the appropriate timeline along with the changes to the administration and in the case of Clark College, the various relocations of institution is important. It would have been beneficial to discuss the shift in course offerings and majors in the same chapters as the discussions about the early administration and the

economic shifts over time. The creation of new programs of study was born out of need and to not highlight these in the appropriate historical context does not show the full evolution of the institution. Brawley did not provide basic statistical data and this prevents the reader from determining the average class sizes or enrollment during this time. Despite his rapport with the faculty and staff, Brawley did not focus on them in any fashion. He recognized the individuals who were historically relevant to the narrative. How he determined their relevance is unknown, especially when the *James P. Brawley Collection* housed in the Robert W. Woodruff Library Archives Research Center includes hundreds of folders and many of those contain correspondences and documents related to a number of former Clark University and Clark College employees.

Dr. Albert Manley was the first African American and the first male president of Spelman College. He began his term in 1953 and served in this position for twenty-three years. Throughout his tenure, Manley was able to make remarkable gains for the institution. In 1958, the College was fully accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools.¹² He also established a system of rank, tenure and promotion for the faculty; and reorganized the divisional structure of the College.¹³ Manley's text, however, was more of a biography of his time at the institution and not necessarily a narrative that was objectively focused on the institution and its historical gains. *A Legacy Continues: The Manley Years at Spelman College 1953-1976* continued where Florence M. Read's manuscript ended. Manley chronicled his presidential term

12. Albert E. Manley, *A Legacy Continues: The Manley Years at Spelman College, 1953-1976* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1995), 192.

13. Ibid.

through various topics. Each topic was explored chronologically and each chapter was devoted to providing further insight into Spelman College.

Manley used statistical data to provide empirical documentation to support his claims of advancement. He was cited for increasing enrollment at the institution during his twenty-three year tenure, establishing the Study Abroad Program, and developing the Black Studies and the Health Careers Programs. He did an excellent job of placing the major shifts in the institution within a historical context. Although it may be disputed by some, Manley referenced the effect of the Civil Rights Movement during his term and how the administration worked with the students. He also discussed the changing environment and the effect that it had on the curriculum as well as student life. The Civil Rights Movement brought the Black Studies Department to the institution in 1969. Despite all of these great things, his work, like Brawley's (*The Story of Morehouse College*) lacked a substantial amount of sources. Because his text focused solely on his tenure as president of Spelman, it can be assumed that much of his information came from personal papers and documents. The vast majority of his graphs were from the United States Department of Education reports.¹⁴ The bibliography was extensive but seemingly focused on texts that discussed the roles of HBCUs. He obviously relied on a university course catalog for some information but this was not indicated in the bibliography. His bibliography was indicative of texts that were never intended to provide a historical account of the institution but a manuscript that creates space for the Spelman woman during the Civil Rights Movement and after. It was intended to help establish the brand of Manley's legacy and help Spelman maintain its title of the premiere

14. Ibid.

institution for African-American women. Again, there was no mention of faculty or staff and their contributions to the legacy of the institution.

Since the publication of these manuscripts, new historical accounts have emerged about some of these institutions. *Daring to Educate: The Legacy of the Early Spelman College Presidents* published in 2005 focuses on the contributions of the first four presidents. Written jointly by Yolanda L. Watson and Shelia T. Gregory, this book is filled with enough documentation to support Read's *The Story of Spelman College*. Watson and Gregory provided an extensive look into the roles of the previous presidents and how their policies and practices provided the foundation for their successors to build upon. The forward was written by former president Dr. Johnetta B. Cole and the epilogue was written by Dr. Beverly E. Tatum. At the time of publication, Tatum was the current president of the institution.

Jones' *A Candle in the Dark: The Complete History of Morehouse College* is the most recent edition of the history of the institution. One can find the favoritism towards his alma mater as almost overbearing at times. He uses Brawley's text as the foundation for his book, which is problematic given Brawley's lack of verifiable source materials. Additionally, he openly criticizes the neighboring AUC institutions, "Atlanta University, Clark University, and Morris Brown University were all, at the outset, elementary and secondary schools. Later, they became colleges, first in fact and eventually in name (with the exception of Atlanta University), with grandiose dreams and ambitions of becoming universities."¹⁵ Yet, a mere 191 pages later he makes the following statement regarding the evolution of Morehouse College "Morehouse had begun as an elementary school

15. Edward A. Jones, *A Candle in the Dark* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1967), 114.

ministering to the needs of ignorant freedman athirst for knowledge and eager to function a men—free men—in a democratic society, just as their former white masters were functioning.”¹⁶ Jones’s inability to remain objective overshadowed his attempts to introduce the history of Morehouse into the international arena historically. He placed extreme emphasis on the college’s relationship to Africa and the demographics of its African students during the fifties and sixties. He also spent dozens of pages discussing the contributions of late Morehouse President, Benjamin E. Mays, and the advancements made under his tutelage. One will find an array of texts that chronicle the life of Benjamin E. Mays, the seventh president of the college and the man credited with reviving the institution. May’s contributions, however, were but one branch on the Morehouse history tree. It is important to recognize that while great gains may be made during an individual presidential term, these were not accomplished by one or two people but with the support of the faculty, staff, and sometimes students of these institutions.

Clark Atlanta University: Charting a Bold New Future was published in 2013. Written by the first president of Clark Atlanta University, Dr. Thomas W. Cole Jr., *Charting a Bold New Future* chronicles the consolidation of Clark College and Atlanta University. A chemist by nature and training, Cole’s approach was stoic at times. The book discussed the origins of CAU but not the ending of Clark College or Atlanta University. Given that this manuscript was the first text written about the history of CAU and no texts were written after Bacote and Brawley’s works, Cole missed an opportunity to discuss the advancements of each institution prior to the consolidation. There is a

16. Ibid., 305.

decade of undocumented Clark College history missing and at least two decades of Atlanta University history omitted from the story of CAU.

In addition to the exclusion of several years of history, another voice is missing from all of the aforementioned texts. It is the voice of the faculty and staff—the men and women who performed the day-to-day tasks that kept the institution functional. These men and women were the ones on the frontlines of higher education. They oftentimes taught multiple classes, (in some cases in multiple disciplines) and served as mentors and advisors to students who became celebrities in their own rights. They were the heart of these institutions and yet their names were not found unless they were considered relevant by the author. That was the purpose of this study: not to revise the history of Clark College but to revisit it and focus on those individuals who were excluded. To provide a voice to the second largest population of any institution, second only to the students in most cases, was the goal of this study and it began with a man whose only desire was to give back to an institution that gave him the opportunity to be great—Dr. Joseph James Dennis, a humble servant of Clark College.

History, Mathematics, and African Americans

In 1975, Brawley (Clark College) said, “When one thinks of mathematics, he thinks of Joe Dennis. When one is in search of the name of a mathematician, he will find the name of Joe Dennis among few.”¹⁷ This may have been true in 1975, but in 2015 neither a Google search nor a trip to the library will yield one with many mentions of Joseph James Dennis. His work as a mathematician was original. There has been no work

17. “James P. Brawley Collection,” Archives Research Center, Robert W. Woodrull Library, Atlanta University Center, Atlanta, GA.

able to disprove his 1944 thesis “Some Points in the Theory of Positive Definite J-Fractions.” However, like many mathematicians, Dennis’ work is printed but never discussed in any of the texts that explain the field of mathematical sciences. As an African American, Dennis’ contributions to the field were not included until the mid-sixties, almost twenty years after he completed his thesis at Northwestern University.

Although Dennis’ thesis was published in several texts, which will be discussed later in this chapter, the impact of his work on the field of mathematics have not been assessed in any text. While one can find an explanation of how geometric formulas like Pythagorean Theorem have advanced not only the field of mathematics but engineering and physics, there is no written information of the influences of Dennis’ works. However, he is not alone, there are other African Americans who, like him, have theses and dissertations published without an explanation of how these works have changed the landscape of mathematics or other disciplines, thus leading to the understanding that there are a number of issues with the historical documentation of the history of mathematics.

There is no historical account of the history of mathematics that was written by a trained historian. Furthermore, the person most often referenced and considered the first historian of the history of mathematics was not an actual historian. Eudemus of Rhodes, former student of Aristotle, is often bestowed the aforementioned title because he was responsible for the preservation and duplication of much of Aristotle’s work. He was considered a brilliant scholar but chose not to expound upon Aristotle’s previous research. Instead, at the request of Aristotle, he began to write the histories of

mathematics and astronomy. He authored multiple works, including *The History of Arithmetic*, *The History of Geometry*, and *The History of Astronomy*.

Only a few of these works remain but they are the primary sources for the history of mathematics and astronomy. Because much of the documentation of the history of mathematics from the early fourth and fifth centuries only included records of the equation and the author, this is the formula that has consistently followed the practice of mathematics historiography until recent years. The formula for recording the history of mathematics is comprised of two components. The first component is the equation, formula, or theorem and the second component is the author. Nominal historical context was provided to explain the circumstances of their origins. Many scholars have explored the topics in terms of the quantitative results and not the qualitative impact that these advances have had across various disciplines.

Despite the lack of historical content and the aforementioned limitations of previously written histories of mathematical sciences, the works discussed in the following pages are noteworthy and served as the primary foundation for reviewing the field in a historical context. A topic that is not often explored unless one is an active participant in this field of study, mathematics has exclusively been written and recorded by those who were engaged in the field. It is rare that one is able to find a history of mathematics that was written by a historian who was not first a mathematician or scientist. Nonetheless, these men and women have managed to capture many of the key discoveries within the sciences and have been widely published. Because of these accomplishments, they deserve respect and admiration for documenting the history of one of the most used disciplines around the globe.

An exploration of the historiography of mathematics has proven to be an exhaustive and cumbersome task for several reasons. The first and most obvious was the lack of trained historians recording the history of mathematics. Many of the authors were mathematicians or scientists, and in some cases psychologists. There were also several methods that were recognized within the practice of recording mathematical history. Most writers discuss the evolution of mathematical methods, explain theories or proofs, or attempt to provide insight into the thought process of the mathematician. The attempts to analyze the thought processes of mathematicians were often recorded by both a mathematician and a psychologist. The last form is the publication of the works of mathematicians. Some texts exist simply to serve as repositories for the works of these individuals, oftentimes with limited information about the authors and their research interests.

The inclusion of African Americans and their contributions to the study of mathematics have been limited. Given that the majority of the scholarship surrounding mathematics is written by German and British scholars, the theories and history of American advances in the discipline are few and far between. While acknowledging these limitations, it is also important to recognize that much of the literature surrounding the subject, the history, and contributions is extremely dated. Given that most literature regarding the history of mathematics primarily focuses on the origins and contributions of the Greeks, Egyptians, and later Japanese, it would appear that African Americans made few contributions to the field of mathematics.

Despite developing new methods of problem solving within the disciplines, mathematicians like Jesse Ernest Wilkins Jr., a nuclear scientist, mechanical engineer, mathematician and former Clark Atlanta University professor, who also worked on the Manhattan Project along with Katherine Johnson, the mathematician responsible for calculating the trajectory for Project Mercury and Apollo 11, are not mentioned in the accounts of mathematics history.¹⁸ Wilkins' genius was used but not acknowledged, and although Johnson co-authored twenty-six articles for the National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics (NACA), which later became known as NASA, she was not listed because protocol during the mid-1950s did not allow for a woman to be cited as the co-author of research, despite the amount of work that was put into it.¹⁹ Then there were those mathematicians who earned their degrees and returned to the world of academia to pass their knowledge on to the next generation. The world of mathematics does not pay homage to those who elected to share their abilities in the classroom and not for monetary consumption.

There is also the recognition that many of these authors were either mathematicians or psychologists and not trained historians. Some authors were considered historians because of the nature of their work. For example, David Eugene Smith, author of *History of Mathematics*, chronicled the evolution of mathematics using a global approach. Smith was a mathematician who primarily focused on mathematics education. He spent the majority of his life as an educator. His two-volume work on the

18. The Manhattan Project was a research and development project that produced the first atomic bombs during World War II.

19. National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), Oral History Archive: Katherine Johnson, 2005, National Visionary Leadership Project, Washington, DC:

history of mathematics was an extension of his career as an educator but it also served as a primary source for the history of mathematics. Smith used the first volume to explore the origins of mathematics in Greece and the expansion of the discipline across the globe as well as its application. He used an entire volume to discuss the history of the individual disciplines within mathematics such as algebra, geometry, and arithmetic. In the case of the history of mathematics, rarely was an author a trained historian, something historian Arthur Marwick cautioned against when reviewing literature. Because many of these individuals were not formally trained in the implementation of historical methods, in some cases the selection of evidence presented to the reader was not based on primary sources but on assumptions made by the author.

Erica N. Walker explored the history of mathematics from the African-American lens. *Beyond Banneker: Black Mathematicians and the Paths to Excellence* explored the lack of representation of African-Americans in the historiography of mathematics. Walker juxtaposed the story of two eighteenth century African Americans, Thomas Fuller and Benjamin Banneker. With a little more than two decades between the births of Fuller and Banneker, Walker implied that Banneker's status as a free black aided him in having his mathematical abilities recognized. Fuller was nicknamed the "Virginia Calculator" or the "Negro Tom" because of his ability to perform complex calculations in his head in a short period of time and before the invention of the modern calculator. Walker's assessment of these two men was spot on. Given that the lives of slaves were rarely recorded during the early 1700s, any mention of Fuller was a testament to his mathematical abilities. Walker then compared the experiences of Fuller and Banneker to

contemporary mathematicians. She recognized that “Talent unrecognized and sometimes unrewarded, as well as the sometimes startling and serendipitous nature of opportunity, resonate throughout the lives of contemporary black mathematicians, young and old.”²⁰ Walker sought to include African Americans in the dominant narrative regarding the history of mathematics and focused on bringing lesser known African Americans, like Fuller, to the forefront.

Walker’s used *Beyond Banneker* to share the accounts of thirty-five African-American mathematicians, men and women, who, in her opinion, had significantly contributed to the field. She specified that these individuals earned their degrees between 1940 and 2010. She further classified each group of mathematicians into one of three categories: first generation mathematician, second generation mathematician, or third generation mathematician. Each generation was delineated based on the year they earned their doctoral degree. First generation mathematicians earned their doctoral degrees between 1940-1965 (before Civil Rights Legislation had been passed), second generation between 1965-1985, and third generation between 1985-2010. She used the technique of periodization to chronicle the journeys of these men and women and used the climate of the country during each time period to provide the reader with additional knowledge regarding the challenges these individuals faced during the time they obtained their doctoral degrees.²¹

Walker limited her study to twentieth century mathematicians, with the exceptions of Banneker and Fuller, largely due to the lack of information about African

20. Erica N. Walker, *Beyond Banneker: Black Mathematicians and the Paths to Excellence* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2014), 17.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 17.

Americans in mathematics prior to that time. Although she focused her study on the years after 1940, she did mention Elbert F. Cox, the first person of color to receive a Ph.D. in mathematics in the world, and Euphemia Lofton Haynes, the first African-American woman to obtain a Ph.D. in mathematics. Cox earned his degree from Cornell University in 1925, and Haynes earned hers from the Catholic University of America in 1943. She made the erroneous claim that “Blacks, in whatever era, have always attended predominantly White institutions for their baccalaureate degrees.”²² This statement was her personal opinion and should have been omitted. As a historian, it is important to understand that both first and second generation mathematicians were subjected to racism and segregation to a point where the federal government had to intervene in some cases. To make the broad and sweeping generalization that blacks attended predominately white institutions for their undergraduate degrees was contradictory to the data that were available for consumption and her study as well. Prior to the above statement, she declared that “The mathematicians who attend HBCUs [Historically Black Colleges and Universities] in this study are fairly equally distributed across the generations.”²³ Ironically, only one of the three first generation mathematicians in her study was a graduate of an HBCU. Given that these individuals completed their undergraduate degrees in the late 1930s and early 1940s, it is impossible to gauge how Walker could have made this statement without acknowledging some credible source.

There are issues with her use of periodization because of a lack of clarity in the ending and beginning dates of each period. For example, she ended first generation

22. Walker, *Beyond Banneker*, 116.

23. *Ibid.*

period in 1965 but started the second generation at 1965. She then ended the second generation period at 1985 and started the third generation at 1985. In an effort to maintain the integrity of her study, she should have ended the first generation period in 1964 and began the second generation period in 1965 in order to align with the federal shift in civil rights policies and legislation. Furthermore, this would have allowed for an entire calendar year to be included and could have potentially shifted the placement of some of the individuals who she considered first and second generation mathematicians.

Walker also relied heavily on in-depth interviews with these mathematicians. She mentioned nothing in regards to her interviewing methods and techniques. In her appendix, she provided a copy of her interview protocol but no interview guide. She asked a myriad of questions that were concentrated on the individual's experiences as a mathematician and their journey to obtaining a doctorate in this field. An example she used was that she asked the question of whether or not the individual attended an HBCU or a predominantly white institution (PWI), but there was no follow-up question inquiring why. As her subtitle indicated, she was interested in exploring these mathematicians' "path to excellence;" therefore, it is a reasonable assumption that the rationale for attending either an HBCU or a PWI would be considered necessary to determine how their individual "paths" began. She would have benefited from consulting Valerie Yow's *Recording Oral History: A Guide for Humanities and Social Sciences*. This text provided guidance regarding interview techniques, disclosure forms, and constructing an interview guide.²⁴ Yow provided the foundation for properly

24. Valerie Yow, *Recording Oral History: A Guide for Humanities and Social Sciences* (Lanham, MD: Altamira Press, 2005), 18.

documenting oral history and formatting it to an acceptable form of scholarship. As Marwick stated, “Primary sources are inadequate and imperfect; oral accounts are subject to the fallibility of the human memory.”²⁵ Because of this fallibility, one must be equally conscious in observing body language, tone, and unwitting responses that are often unspoken. There is no indication that she encountered issues with memories. Given that some of these individuals were elderly (some as old as seventy), it would stand to reason that, unless there were diaries or journals kept, one would encounter difficulties regarding the recollection of their experiences pursuing advanced degrees. Although there are areas in which Walker could, and should, improve upon, her text is just the beginning of a new branch of study for the history of mathematics. If she were to combine her work with the research of a historian, this sub-history of mathematics could be greatly expanded.

The Mind of the Mathematician by Michael Fitzgerald and Joan James is a psychological approach to understanding the thought patterns of mathematicians. Given that the purpose of this text was to provide insight into the thinking patterns and thought processes of mathematicians, criticisms regarding the lack of historical training were not as relevant to this work as they were with Walker’s text. Where Walker sought to expand upon the history of African Americans within the study of mathematics, Fitzgerald and James did not. The combination of their individual backgrounds, psychology and mathematics, respectively, allowed them to marry the fields and produce a text that focused on the thought processes of the mathematician. Despite a lack of training in

25. Arthur Marwick, *The New Nature of History: Knowledge, Evidence, Language* (Chicago, IL: Lyceum Books Inc., 2001), 135-136.

history, Fitzgerald and James succeeded in accomplishing their goal of identifying the thought processes and redefining the mathematical experience as a creative one and not purely an academic one.

Together Fitzgerald and James sought to redefine the image of the mathematician as someone who did more than solve equations and create proofs. They wanted to counter the popular impression that mathematicians were not interested in anything else.²⁶ *The Mind of the Mathematician* is divided into two sections: a literature review and a series of biographies on twenty selected mathematicians. The literature review was subdivided into three different sections; however, the first two were the most important for this study. The first chapter reviewed mathematicians and how they think. James, the mathematician of the duo, was instrumental in providing insight into the world of the mathematician. Although James was the mathematician, both he and Fitzgerald recognized that it takes a special individual to be attracted to mathematics as a desired field of study. However, they were careful to state that “We must also be careful not to make sweeping generalizations on the basis of what we know about pure mathematicians, especially the select group of specialists in the theory of numbers.” This reminder is paramount to any study on mathematicians. Fitzgerald and James recognized that there could never be a standard model of the mathematician’s mind because there was no way to truly assess how one processes information.

The second chapter focused on the development of mathematical ability. The authors discussed the various methods of developing mathematical ability, gender roles in determining mathematical abilities, and child prodigies. In the discussion regarding

26. Michael Fitzgerald and Ioan James, *The Mind of the Mathematician* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 2007), xi.

the determination of abilities, they indicated that there has been a shift in the learning process and stated that “Until fairly recently, it was not uncommon for children to begin their education at home rather than at school.” The authors essentially stated that the learning process used to begin at home and that the first teachers that children encountered were those in their households. There was discussion surrounding the roles of family members in which aunts and uncles serve as mentors and supplement the reading, writing, and mathematical skills learned from their parents. There was also discussion surrounding women’s aptitude for mathematics and sciences in general. The limitations placed on women in regards to formal learning were exposed. The authors indicated that women in general were not allowed to enroll at universities in France until 1861 nor Germany until 1900. Individuals who subscribed to a thought process that declared anyone inept in a field because of their gender, race, or sexuality were ignorant. The authors boldly stated, “There can be no doubt that many other women were gifted mathematically but lacked the opportunity to develop their gifts.”²⁷ The same can and has been said in regards to African Americans. The last topic covered in this chapter was child prodigies. A common thread between the children (William James Sidis and Norbert Weiner) that was discussed was an over-emphasis on discipline from the parents, fathers in particular, which related to the section on developing mathematical abilities.

Although Sidis’ father recognized his son’s potential, he did not foster his son’s creativity. He focused on academics and achievement which caused his son to evolve into the quintessential stereotype of a mathematician. Lastly, there are those

27. Ibid., 31.

individuals who make it their life's work to collect and preserve the works of mathematical geniuses. They collect primary documents and create anthologies of theses and dissertations of famous mathematicians. An example of one of these works is *Black Mathematicians and Their Works*, published in 1980 and compiled and edited by Virginia K. Newell, J. H. Gipson, L. W. Rich, and B. Stubblefield. The text featured twenty previously published articles by black mathematicians and three articles from mathematics educators. The editors of this text also collected correspondence between math departments and national organizations that were indicative of these men and women encountering and challenging racism within the larger society. Each previously published article was again reviewed and edited for inclusion in this anthology. This particular issue also provided brief biographies and, in some cases, pictures of the featured mathematicians.²⁸

Women of Mathematics: A Bibliographic Sourcebook edited by Louise S. Grinstein and Paul J. Campbell, features a comprehensive listing of women mathematicians that includes a biography, a synopsis of their work, and a bibliography listing publications for each mentioned mathematician.²⁹ Like African Americans, women were almost always underrepresented in the history of mathematics. The biography portion chronicles the women's personal and professional lives; the section titled "works" explains the mathematician's area of research and/or expertise. It may also detail any theories discovered, proved, or disproved. The last and possibly most

28. Virginia K. Newell, Joella H. Gipson, L. Waldo Rich, and Beauregard Stubblefield (Eds.), *Black Mathematicians and Their Works* (Ardmore, PA: Dorrance & Co., 1980), 277.

29. Louise S. Grinstein and Paul J. Campbell (Eds.), *Women of Mathematics: A Bibliographic Sourcebook* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1987), 208.

important portion of this text is the complete bibliography of the mathematician's work. This not only includes published articles but references any other works in which her research appears. Published in 1987, this is one of the best guides for researching women in mathematics today.

It is not surprising that there is little inclusion of African-American contributions to mathematics in history. However, much of the problem derived from the lack of professional historical accounts written by historians. Because of this, a truly objective view of the history of mathematics does not exist. While Smith compiles the most comprehensive text on the subject, it is more than ninety years old. Furthermore, it consists of what Smith considered to be the greatest contributions to the field at that time. There have been multiple advancements and contributions to the field since then; however, there has been no update on Smith's work since he wrote it himself.

After reviewing the aforementioned texts, it is obvious that the historiography of American mathematics is, like many tributaries of American historiography, in need of an update. The field is riddled with mathematicians and scientists turned historians. These individuals have expansive knowledge of the field but no formal training regarding the practice of recording history. Because of individuals like David Eugene Smith, Erica N. Walker, Michael Fitzgerald, Ioan James, and a host of other like-minded individuals, there is a plethora of information available for a historian to mold into the history of mathematics. Because Walker specifically focused her work on black mathematicians, there is the opportunity to further include their contributions into the history of mathematics. The geniuses who edited and compiled *Black Mathematicians and Their Works* and *Women in Mathematics* have created a

compendium of information on individuals who were routinely omitted from the annals of history.

CHAPTER III

A HUMBLE SERVANT

Most people who really knew him personally knew him as a deeply religious man. I always saw him as a fisher of men and women, I want them to know that he was a person who laid it all out there every time he did it and anytime he wrote something or he spoke, and he spoke everywhere, that it would always be Clark College. He tried to carry himself in a way that he was not compromised. He believed what he believed. His mantra was Micah ‘Do justice love mercy and walk humbly with your God.’ I think he tried to do that and I think he was successful. He came up in a time when it was difficult to be black in America but a black man especially and he did it with grace.¹

Born twenty-five years after Clark University² conferred its first degree, Joseph James Dennis could have had a future in farming—if he ever became an early riser. On April 11, 1905, Mary Fisher Dennis gave birth to Joseph James Dennis.³ As the youngest of three boys, it was expected that he would follow in the footsteps of his father, James Dennis, and help with the family farm. Until he was old enough to work the fields, Dennis went to school with his older siblings because there was no nursery or daycare center for him to attend. He and his sister, Estella, were sent to the church school and when he returned he had a book—a math book. At the age of six, Joe Dennis began his

1. Jacquelyn A. DeBose, interview by Sherese L. Williams, *McPheeters-Dennis Oral History Project Interview I*, November 6, 2014.

2. Clark University was established in 1869. The name of the institution changed to Clark College after its fourth and final move from South Atlanta to Chestnut Street in 1941.

3. Jacquelyn A. DeBose, interview by Sherese L. Williams, *McPheeters-Dennis Oral History Project Interview I*, November 6, 2014.

academic career at Liberty Hill Methodist Church School (the first school for blacks in Florida) in Rutledge, Florida, a town located just outside of his hometown of Gainesville, FL.⁴ While his parents worked and maintained the farm, Dennis attended school. As in many southern families, farming was considered a family business and as such, after Dennis completed the seventh grade, his father felt that he was old enough to shift his focus from school to the family farm. With much regret, Dennis left Liberty Hill and returned to Gainesville to work on the farm alongside his father and older brothers, George and Henry. Fate, however, had different plans for him. Not long after he left school, a former teacher who taught at Liberty Hill Methodist Church, came to the farm to speak with his father, James, about possibly allowing Dennis to attend the new black high school, Lincoln High, to further his education. If he was allowed to attend, it would require Dennis to relocate from his family home to stay with his teacher in order to be successful. It took much thought and with the prodding from friends and neighbors, his parents finally agreed to allow Dennis to attend Lincoln High School.

Although Dennis was an academic, he was also a football-playing, tenor singing, mathematical machine.⁵ While attending Lincoln High, Joe played football and was a member of the Lincoln High 1923 Championship Football Team, a championship team that only had eleven members who played both offense and defense without any relief other than the breaks between the first and third quarters and halftime. They played the

4. Jacquelyn A. DeBose, "The Joseph J. Dennis Endowed Scholarship in Mathematical Science at Clark Atlanta University," *Clark Atlanta Magazine* (Spring 2003): 23-24.

5. Jacquelyn A. DeBose, interview by Sherese L. Williams, *McPheeters-Dennis Oral History Project Interview I*, November 6, 2014.

full sixty minutes of football and went on to have an undefeated first season in 1923.⁶ He went on to complete his studies at Lincoln High and was one of the thirteen graduates of the class of 1925, the first graduating class from Lincoln High School. He was a true renaissance man in the making. For Joe, mathematics, not farming, was his passion and it was the Freedman's Aid Society that presented him with the opportunity to continue his studies at Clark University.

Clark University Bound

Clark University was the crown jewel of the Freedman's Aid Society. It was different from other institutions during the early 1920s. It had the normal school, the four year program collegiate program, a high school, and the equivalent of a technical school.⁷ During the early 1900s, students could learn trades that ranged from carpentry and blacksmithing to the proper culinary skills to become a chef, or even how to be the proper maid. Clark University represented the land of milk and honey in a society that wanted nothing more than to see a black person fail. The Freedman's Aid Society took great pride in the institution that they helped to create and thus personally recruited many of the students who they believed would continue the traditions and legacy that was being built. Dennis along with five of his classmates, Benjamin Childs, Edgar Daniels, Carlos Hale, Eric Roberts, and Claronelle Smith, made the decision to continue their studies at Clark University after meeting with the Freedman's Aid Society and the Clark University

6. Arthur O. White, *The History of Lincoln High: "The Big Red": The Lincoln High School History Project, written and administered by Arthur O. White* (Gainesville, FL: Vocational Office Education Department of the Lincoln Center, 1972), 6.

7. Jacquelyn A. DeBose, interview by Sherese L. Williams, *McPheeters-Dennis Oral History Project Interview I*, November 6, 2014.

Alumni Association.⁸ By this time, his father had already acquiesced and acknowledged that his youngest son would not be a farmer and agreed to support him as he entered the world of academia. By the time Dennis left Florida to attend Clark, both of his older brothers—George and Henry—were enlisted in the military and only his oldest and youngest sisters, Rosa Lee and Estella, remained at home. As he prepared to continue his studies, he bid farewell to his family and made the journey to Atlanta, GA in search of a new opportunity.

Dennis arrived at Clark University during the establishment of the Football Athletic Program. He came with the belief that he would play football at the University. Although the records are not clear, it could be assumed that one of the reasons for the recruitment of the four men from Lincoln High School had something to do with football. Just one year before Dennis' arrival at Clark, the athletics department established a football program under the leadership of Henderson A. "Tubby" Johnson, a former football star at Fisk University.⁹ Johnson only coached for one year before he was called back to Fisk to serve as the athletic coach, but he built the framework of what history has come to call the Black Battalion of Death at Clark University.¹⁰ Upon his arrival, Dennis did intend to play football for Clark; however, the head coach, Samuel B. Taylor, who also served as the chairman of the Physical Education Department and professor of Bookkeeping, Accounting, and Marketing saw things differently. Coach Taylor pulled

8. Ibid.

9. James P. Brawley, *The Clark College Legacy: An Interpretive History of Relevant Education 1869-1975* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977), 193.

10. Ibid.

him to the side and told Dennis that while he knew of his love of the game there was a greater need for him elsewhere at Clark, and he asked Dennis to teach high school math at Clark University. Instead of playing football, Dennis went to the classroom to teach and thus began his service to Clark.¹¹ He was so successful teaching high school math that by the end of his sophomore year, he was teaching freshman math at the college level. He also took the time to pledge Omega Psi Phi Fraternity Incorporated, Beta Psi chapter. It was during the end of his freshman year or early sophomore year that he lost both of his older brothers to malaria and scarlet fever leaving only his sisters, Estella and Rosa Lee, in Florida with his parents.¹² Not allowing this to deter him from his achievement Dennis worked hard and did everything he could to ensure that his parents were proud of their remaining son. During his time at Clark, he sang in the Philharmonic Choir and worked as a waiter in the dining hall. It was in the dining hall of the old Clark campus in South Atlanta where he met his future wife, Ms. Sammye Griffin.

Dennis and Griffin were a couple truly worthy of riding the Clark Atlanta University Love Float in the homecoming parade, if they were still alive; the beginning of their relationship seemed almost scripted. It started when Sammye Griffin, a native of Chattanooga, Tennessee, arrived on campus and her trunk was misplaced. Her parents, like many students, did not have the funds to replace her belongings and was worried with classes scheduled to begin shortly. As she was preparing to go to dinner with her dorm mates, their den mother, Ms. Russell, informed her that she had a guest. As it

11. Jacquelyn A. DeBose, interview by Sherese L. Williams, *McPheeters-Dennis Oral History Project Interview I*, November 6, 2014.

12. Ibid.

turned out, her trunk was delivered to the male dormitory because it was assumed that Sammye was a male. Sammye then thanked Dennis and he brought her trunk inside for her and departed for work while she continued to prepare for dinner. Their love was so strong that in 1931 when Sammye was invited to join Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Incorporated and Sammye's parents could not afford to pay for both her and her sister Gussie to pledge, Dennis took on another job in order to pay for her to pledge after he had already graduated from Clark in 1929. On December 28, 1931, Dennis married Sammye Griffin.¹³

Returning to the Classroom

Always a servant and ever appreciative of anyone or institution that helped him achieve his goals, Dennis moved back to Gainesville, FL in 1929 to teach mathematics at his Alma Mater, Lincoln High School. He taught for a year before returning to Clark University at the invitation of President Dr. Matthew Simpson Davage. His daughter, Jacquelyn DeBose, vividly recalls her mother speaking to her about these times. They had gotten married against the wishes of their parents. Not because their parents did not wish to see them happy but because each set of parents desired for their children to return home and help contribute to the family income. The Depression was hitting hard and every little bit helped. Debose recalls one memory in which her mother informed her of the dire situation that Clark faced during this time. The average salary for the period was \$1,350.00 per year.¹⁴ No one was safe from the Depression and it was evident that the shift in the economy would affect the historically black colleges and universities; it was

13. Ibid.

14. James P. Brawley, *The Clark College Legacy*, 96.

unclear just how badly it would until Dr. Davage called a faculty meeting and informed the faculty of the financial status of the school.

Dr. Davage called a faculty meeting and stated, ‘This depression is getting worse. Most of our benefactors have been affected and they aren’t going to be able to give to us, not even the church. Those of you who want to and can, you need to go because I can’t guarantee you a paycheck. If you stay, all I can promise you is I can give you script, which is a promissory note saying that you will be paid.’¹⁵

“My dad would not leave,” DeBose said. Both Dennis and Sammye were first-generation college students. They felt that the University had been good to them; they really believed in the institution and Dennis did not feel drawn to leave. This did shift the dynamics of the household. During the height of the Depression employment was a commodity. Everyone was on rations, and there were restrictions placed on every household. Because of the Works Project Administration, there were regulations that only permitted one employed person per married household. Because of this regulation, Sammye had to quit her job as the Business instructor at Booker T. Washington High School. However, Sammye could not just quit her job without ensuring that there would be some type of income to support her family. Dennis’ family in Florida was still in the agriculture business and they sent food and other perishables and non-perishables that they were able to spare to their son and daughter-in-law while maintaining their own livelihood.¹⁶

Thanks to Richard H. Rich from the Rich’s Department Store, the employees of Clark University were able to get paid. Rich accepted the scripts written and signed by

15. Jacquelyn A. DeBose, interview by Sherese L. Williams, *McPheeters-Dennis Oral History Project Interview I*, November 6, 2014.

16. Ibid

Davage and would cash them.¹⁷ Once the Depression was over and the institution had financially recovered, Dr. Davage went to Rich's office and purchased every script that Rich's had paid over the course of the Depression. Despite the Depression, Dennis managed to earn a General Education Board Fellowship to further his studies at Northwestern University. In 1935, Dennis received his Master of Arts in Mathematics. His dedication to Clark and academic excellence was rewarded four years after accepting the invitation to teach and one year shy of earning his master's. Dennis was promoted to Head of the Department of Mathematics, a position that he held for 41 years before later earning the title of Distinguished Professor in 1975.¹⁸ Loyalty was a premium and those who stayed at Clark during the Depression deserve a level of recognition that can never truly be given. It takes an exceptional type of love and respect for an institution to continue to uphold its traditions and legacy with no compensation.

Always attentive in his duties, Dennis recognized that teaching styles needed to change with each entering class. It was in 1937 that Dr. Dennis restructured the freshman mathematics course as a general mathematics foundation course. The course emphasized the development of techniques for teaching mathematics to students with wide variations of backgrounds and abilities for learning what is usually conceded to be a difficult subject.¹⁹ He recognized that teaching methods needed to evolve with each generation and had the foresight and ability to plan for these changes. Although he was dedicated to

17. Celestine Sibley, *Dear Store: An Affectionate Portrait of Rich's* (Atlanta, GA: Peachtree Publishers, 1990), 15.

18. Brawley, *The Clark College Legacy*, 305.

19. *Ibid.*, 94.

Clark, he did not restrict his mathematical abilities to the institution. He also taught summer school courses at Atlanta University from 1940-1946. During the summer of 1939, he taught summer school at the Agricultural, Mechanical and Normal College in Pine Bluff, Arkansas, now known as the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff. In order for him to teach the students at AM&N College he had to pick his weight in cotton with them.²⁰ Growing up in Florida and working on a farm, Dennis was no stranger to hard work or the fields. He wanted to teach and provide these students with the opportunity to achieve at a higher level. If it meant that he would need to pick his weight in cotton before he could do this, then that is what he would do. After teaching at AM&N College, Dennis received a letter from President John W. Parker thanking him for his work with the students and wishing him a successful school year. Dennis could also be found teaching mathematics in Orangeburg, South Carolina. Even in his later years of service to the institution, Dennis taught mathematics at Albany State College, now Albany State University, in Albany, GA from 1971-1977, where he later earned the title of Fuller E. Calloway Chair of Math.²¹ Although he taught at other institutions, he always came home to Clark.

Dennis felt indebted to Clark University. Clark saved him from the fields and provided him with the opportunity to pursue his passion and for that reason alone, Clark would always be number one in his heart. This indebtedness led to his return to his classroom in Haven-Warren every fall semester and earned him the respect of his family,

20. Pearlie Craft-Dove, interview by Sherese L. Williams, *McPheeters-Dennis Oral History Project Interview II*, November 24, 2014.

21. "James P. Brawley Collection," Archives Research Center, Robert W. Woodruff Library, Atlanta University Center, Atlanta, GA.

friends, colleagues, and students. “He was a stern professor but he handled questions well. He didn’t take any nonsense,” Dr. Pearlie Craft-Dove, a former student and colleague of Dennis recalls. She vividly remembered her older cousin Marguerite advising her to take Dr. Dennis for her freshman math class. “I wasn’t a math major either but if you really followed him and did the exercises and came in during office hours he would help you. You could make it. You didn’t have to be a brilliant student in math to get out of his course,” Dove stated of Dennis’ teaching style. He had a desire to ensure that each student could not only solve the mathematical equations but understand them as well.

In 1944, nine years after completing his master’s degree, Dennis earned his Ph.D. in mathematics from Northwestern University under the mentorship of Dr. Hubert Stanley Wall. At the time, he was the eleventh African American to earn a Ph.D. in mathematics in the United States and the first African American in the state of Georgia. However, he did not achieve this feat with ease. As an African-American male in a doctoral program, he had to do more than prove himself in the classroom; he also had to maintain a sense of decorum about himself. He recognized that while at Northwestern he was an agent of change and he represented the entire entity that composed Clark University. He represented the faculty, the staff, the students, and the alumni, and his success or failure would dictate the future of Clark alumni at Northwestern. He encountered racism in and out of the classroom and handled each situation with the poise of a man who knew the true power of education.

As a child, Isabella T. Jenkins, a surrogate daughter to Dennis and future colleague at Clark College, would overhear discussions between her father, Prince Albert Taylor, one of Dennis' closest friends, and Dennis. The two men would discuss their experiences at their respective institutions, Dennis at Northwestern and Taylor at Columbia and Union Theological Seminary in New York. They would converse about the challenges they encountered and how they handled being a black man at these institutions.

They would exchange the kinds of things that they encountered. They would hear professors try to belittle their functioning as intellectuals. One professor would say that they couldn't make anything above a 'C' because they were Negroes and Negroes couldn't function in that light. Negroes couldn't do this and Negroes couldn't do that and what they set out to do, they set out to prove, they knew what they could do, that they were just as good and better.²²

With the help of Taylor, McPheeters, and Brawley, Dennis was able to overcome racism and bigotry with strategy. He would not be defeated and his friends and family would not allow him to be defeated. These men, while all married, provided a support system among themselves for themselves. This support system afforded them the freedom to worry and overcome potential obstacles without adding to their wives' emotional discomfort. As each man had to move away to work on their degree, their wives would become the primary caregiver for a period of time. No man wanted to cause any additional stress on his family. The danger for a black man traveling in the country during the late thirties and early forties was enough stress without compounding the issues that they faced once they arrived at their respective institutions. Nonetheless, these men succeeded beyond measure and blazed the trail for future African Americans to travel.

22. Isabella T. Jenkins, interview by Shereese L. Williams, *McPheeters-Dennis Oral History Project Interview III*, November 24, 2014.

It would be advantageous to attempt to explain Dennis' thesis or dissertation, *Some Points in the Theory of Positive Definite J-Fractions*, as I do not possess the advanced level of mathematical skills to explain his work in laymen terms. Jenkins describes Dennis' dissertation as a "lil bitty thing" based on the simplest of concepts.

I did not know anything about math but I knew that you would expect a dissertation to be real thick and big because my daddy's was real and what not. Then when he got his, he gave daddy a copy of it and it was about this big [holding her thumb and index finger less than an inch apart] lil' bitty thing but what he went about to do is still being looked at today. So how can you talk about this man not having the ability to survive in a doctoral program when he comes out with this idea and I think it was something about proving that one and one don't equal two or two and two; whatever it is and I understand that that is still being studied and explored today.²³

His work and his transcript were so exceptional, that when offering congratulations to Dennis on the completion of his master's work, Dr. Davage stated that Dennis would "make it easier for Clark students in the future who go there."²⁴ Dennis was awarded Phi Beta Kappa honors with each degree and also extended membership into Pi Mu Epsilon Mathematics Fraternity, The Society of Sigma Xi, a scientific research society, the American Mathematical Society, and the Mathematical Association of America during his time at Northwestern.²⁵

Like his former football coach Taylor, Dennis wore multiple "hats" during his tenure at Clark. He served alongside his colleagues to ensure that student athletes adhered to the academic standards on the athletic committees and served as chair on some

23. Ibid.

24. Matthew Simpson Davage, "Letter to Joseph J. Dennis," June 19, 1935.

25. "James P. Brawley Collection," Archives Research Center, Robert W. Woodruff Library, Atlanta University Center, Atlanta, GA.

occasions. His commitment to athletics was recognized and he was elected by his peers to serve as President of the Southern Intercollegiate Athletic Conference, more commonly referred to as the SIAC, in 1959.²⁶ Dennis was the second president in the history of this conference founded in 1913, a mere two years after his birth. His position as president of the conference required him to ensure that each active member institution of the conference was in compliance, that the players' contracts were negotiated fairly and enforced in the same fashion, and of course, to attend the conference games. Like he handled everything, Dennis took his responsibilities as president seriously. However, he did do something that many people would find uncharacteristically generous.

During a preliminary interview with his only daughter, Jacquelyn DeBose, she indicated that as president of the SIAC her father did not have to pay to enter any SIAC game. They were able to go to any games played by Clark, Tuskegee University, Morehouse College, Morris Brown College, and Alabama Agricultural and Mechanical University, including tournaments and championships, for free. She said, "But he always paid for Clark games, even when the ones we got to go in for free because of his being an employee; we always paid." Before I could ask why she continued: "My father said he worked at Clark and he knew we needed all the money we could get." A man who never had to pay for another athletic event after becoming president of the SIAC would always pay when Clark was the home team, if for no other reason than to show his support not just for the athletics but for the newly minted, Clark College, the institution that built him.

26. Marion E. Jackson, "Dr. Dennis of Clark College Elected President of SIAC," *Atlanta Daily World*, December 9, 1954.

Not to be outdone in service, Dennis also served as the campus advisor for Beta Psi Chapter of the Omega Psi Phi Fraternity Inc. and continued to work with his fraternal brothers on a multitude of initiatives including voter registration. As campus advisor, he would often supervise the social events of the Omegas and Deltas. He was also responsible for ensuring that the students were compliant with Clark's standards. His service was again recognized in the 1953-54 academic year and was named Omega Man of the Year. He later went on to chair the Omega Man of the Year Award Committee in 1970. Dennis also served as a member of the Men's Council. The Men's Council was formed to handle judicial matters concerning the young men of Clark. Dr. Dove, during this time, was also a member on the faculty and served on the Women's version of the Council as well.²⁷ "The people always felt that Dr. Dennis was fair you know," Dr. Dove spoke of her experience working with him on the council. "If the committee said you go home, nobody argued with it; you went home. But everybody always felt that he [Dennis] was very, very fair—sure but fair."²⁸ He commanded a level of respect not just for himself but for the people around him. He required men to take off their hats upon entering a room and avoided using profanity in the presence of women, all things that he was raised to do.²⁹

27. Jacquelyn A. DeBose, interview by Sherese L. Williams, *McPheeters-Dennis Oral History Project Interview I*, November 6, 2014.

28. Ibid.

29. Ibid

His dedication to Clark College was even recognized by the students and in 1955 *The Panther* yearbook was dedicated to Dennis.³⁰ The dedication ended with the statement “With deepest gratitude for all that he has given, the staff takes this means of honoring Dr. Dennis. He has exemplified the traits of a true gentleman, an outstanding educator, and a loyal friend.”³¹ He also celebrated twenty-five years of service to Clark College during this time and was featured alongside Dr. Alphonso A. McPheeters, Dean of Clark College, and Professor A. B. Wright, Chairman of the Business Administration Department in the 1955 edition of *The Panther* for having a combined total of seventy-five years of service to the institution among the three of them.

Despite the numerous accolades and awards, Dennis maintained a sense of gratitude towards Clark College. He accomplished many feats and he did so during what some might consider the most tumultuous times for a black man in the South. He served the institution in any capacity that was needed. Throughout his tenure at Clark, he along with Dean McPheeters and President Brawley worked on initiatives meant to enhance and advance the institution and its longevity. His forward thinking led to him contributing to an editorial that was published in the January 11, 1968 edition of the *Wall Street Journal* in which he discussed the need for a closed circuit television for the mathematics department.³² His cry was heard and answered by Mrs. Christian A. Johnson of the Christian A. Johnson Endeavor Foundation. Mrs. Johnson saw this editorial and took the information to her board of trustees and they voted and approved a \$10,000.00 grant for

30. Clark College, “Dedication,” *The Panther Yearbook* (Atlanta, GA: Clark College, 1955), 5.

31. Ibid.

32. Christian A. Johnson, “Letter to Joseph J. Dennis,” 1968.

the purchase of a closed circuit television for the Mathematics Department and the Student Government Association.³³ Dennis would also personally travel to meet Clark alumni at their respective jobs and request (and received), donations on behalf of the institution.³⁴ There was nothing he would not do for his Clark.

While he achieved many milestones throughout his career, he always humbled himself to Clark; without Clark he would not have been the man he was. After being honored by the men of Omega, *The Panther Yearbook*, and being elected to serve as President of the SIAC, Dennis was still hard at work attempting to advance the institution. He worked with President Brawley and Dean McPheeters to improve morale and academics at Clark. They ensured that all faculty and staff knew that Clark College was “Second to None,” the new slogan of the institution that was derived from a speech given by Dr. Brawley when Clark University moved from its South Atlanta campus to its current location. Dr. Dove fondly recalled the “Three Musketeers” discussing the new location with the Clark family and reminding them that Clark was more than worthy to be located in the Atlanta University Center.

Those three guys they all had their Ph.D.'s; they all loved Clark. Now Dr. Dennis was the only one that graduated from Clark because I believe Dr. Brawley graduated [from] some college out in Texas, might have been Huston-Tillotson, and Dean McPheeters was from Ohio and he finished from up there. But even coming from different intellectual academic groups they really wanted to make Clark in terms of a motto that Brawley started ‘second to none.’ Everybody they hired they said ‘we want you to know we are small we’re a black college and we

33. Ibid.

34. Jacquelyn A. DeBose, interview by Sherese L. Williams, *McPheeters-Dennis Oral History Project Interview I*, November 6, 2014.

don't have [it] all but we want everybody to give their best and make it second or none.' They really worked together.³⁵

Dennis appeared to be a man of his word. He lived the rules and discipline that he enforced at Clark College. There was no expectation of a false sense of achievement or relaxed morals and standards for anyone, including his own daughter. During a preliminary meeting to discuss this project, DeBose told a story of how one of her former instructors came to dinner at her home, as was the norm growing up, and the instructor stated, "Jackie is going to fail my class if she doesn't get her act together." She said even as this conversation occurred, her father said, "If she earns an F give her an F.' That was the semester I learned what a withdrawal form was." Jenkins recalled Dennis' treatment of her as a student. "What I admired about him, although there were close family ties, when I was there [at Clark College] as a student—I was a student. I was given nothing special, you got put on probation—yes I got put on probation and if I had been really bad, I would have been sent home. And my parents would have accepted it." Dennis was as unmoving as the Rock of Gibraltar. In his belief that you must earn your way in life and not ride the coattails of those who came before you. It is because of this that it came with little surprise in the spring of 1972 when the newest academic building at Clark College was officially opened and named McPheeters-Dennis Hall, in memory of Dr. Alphonso A. McPheeters and in honor of Dr. Joseph J. Dennis, two thirds of the Three Musketeers.

It was a celebration for all those in attendance. Clark College was honoring two of its greatest supporters, advocates, and achievers. It was also the first time in the history of the institution that an academic building was named after an alumnus of the institution.

35. Jacquelyn A. DeBose, interview by Shereese L. Williams, *McPheeters-Dennis Oral History Project Interview I*, November 6, 2014.

Prior to this, only outstanding administrators and financial contributors were bestowed that honor. It was a community affair. The community was as much a part of the celebration as the institution. Dr. Dove fondly recalled the April 14, 1972 dedication ceremony. She reminisced about a time when the community was just as important to the success of Clark College as its administration, faculty, staff, and students:

In those days you had really a kind of intergenerational thing. The community was there. There was a closer knit thread between the community and the university than it is now, because we didn't have the places downtown to go to like symphonies and music you know. So they invited the community to come to all of the kinds of things that they had and we don't have that now... But whenever the community knew something was going on they knew it they came and joined in. Then we had the people who lived in the old Clark College community who still identified [with the institution]. So you had the South Atlanta people all of those people who had connections and it was more of a family.³⁶

The dedication was covered by the *Atlanta Daily World*, the oldest African-American newspaper in Atlanta. The *Atlanta Daily World* sang the praises of Clark College and the dedication ceremony for the newly minted McPheeters-Dennis Hall. The celebration was attended by Mrs. Annie Lou McPheeters, widow of the late A. A. McPheeters, Dennis and his family, Clark College President Emeritus James P. Brawley, current President Vivian W. Henderson, and the Clark College Board of Trustees led by Board President C. R. Roberts. The ceremony was held in the courtyard of McPheeters-Dennis immediately following the private luncheon for the honorees. The dedication ceremony was presided over by President Henderson and had musical selections from the Clark College choir under the direction of Mr. J. Killingsworth.

They were building, but he never considered that someone would name a building for him. What he did know, what we knew, what everybody who ever knew him knew was that Clark College was his life's work. He used to get offers every

36. Ibid.

week from the federal government, other universities, large schools and he would say I'm not going anywhere this is my life's work. He was dedicated to the university and dedicated to faculty and staff. Everything he did was not about them.³⁷

Just a month prior to the dedication of McPheeters-Dennis, the Atlanta Clark Club, Clark College Alumni Association and the Men of Clark honored Dr. Dennis with an official "Joe Dennis Day," complete with a proclamation from State Representative James E. Dean which was read by Alderman Ira Jackson.³⁸ This event featured tributes from Beta Kappa Chi National Scientific Honor Society, Society of Sigma Xi, National Scientific Institute, Warren United Methodist Senior Choir, the Athletic and Science Departments at Clark College, SIAC, Omega Psi Phi Fraternity Inc., the graduates, and the YMCA. Even after the multitude of tributes, Dennis' humility remained when he stated, "There is no greater honor or award than to know, after giving your best for a long time, that someone cares."³⁹

In 1973, Dr. Dennis was named Distinguished Professor of Clark College for his work continuing the Clark College legacy.⁴⁰ Three years later in 1975, Dr. Dennis officially retired from Clark College after 45 years of service. At the time of his retirement, he was bestowed the title of Professor Emeritus by the Clark College Board of Trustees. His retirement did not stop him from continuing to improve the institution. In fact during his retirement, he worked with President Henderson to help establish the

37. Jacquelyn A. DeBose, interview by Shereese L. Williams, *McPheeters-Dennis Oral History Project Interview I*, November 6, 2014.

38. Ruth Scott, "Several Hundred Pay tribute to Dr. Dennis," *Atlanta Daily World*, March 17, 1972.

39. Ibid.

40. *Atlanta Daily World*, "Clark's Dr. Dennis To Be Honored Today," May 15, 1975.

curriculum for Mass Media Arts, Allied Health, Medical Illustration, and Pre-Pharmacy programs for the institution. He also worked diligently to help President Henderson find funding for these programs as well. He continued to work with his fraternity, Omega Psi Phi, the YMCA, the Clark College Alumni Association, and any organization that sought his assistance.⁴¹ He was a servant to anyone in need.

In the spring of 1977, Dr. Dennis took his first and only vacation with his wife to Switzerland. It was on May 12, 1977 that Dr. Dennis passed away from a heart attack while standing on the balcony of his hotel while admiring the Swiss Alps. His untimely passing rippled throughout the Clark family and his remains were flown from Switzerland to Atlanta for his funeral.⁴² His good friend and classmate, Bishop Prince Albert Taylor, performed the eulogy. His funeral was attended by hundreds and was featured on the front page of the *Atlanta Daily World*. Dr. Brawley, the last remaining Musketeer, spoke on behalf of the Atlanta University Center and stated that “he [Dennis] taught more than math, he taught life,”⁴³ a sentiment that was echoed throughout the service.

Four months after his passing, the Department of Mathematics wanted to honor the memory of Dr. Dennis and met with his widow, Sammye, on September 27, 1977 to discuss establishing a scholarship. The outcome was positive and the group, with the support of Sammye, set a goal to endow the fund for \$20,000 before awarding a

41. Jackie DeBose, interview by Sherese L. Williams, *McPheeters-Dennis Oral History Project Interview I*, November 6, 2014.

42. James P. Brawley, “James P. Brawley Collection,” Archives Research Center, Robert W. Woodruff Library, Atlanta University Center, Atlanta, GA.

43. *Atlanta Daily World*, “Dr. Joseph Dennis Paid High Tribute,” May 26, 1977.

scholarship.⁴⁴ The scholarship sat dormant for eight years before Mrs. Dennis began to make inquiries. Not satisfied with the progress or lack thereof, Mrs. Dennis took things into her hands and began to seek out information for herself. In early 1985, Mrs. Dennis met with former mathematics professor, Dr. Louise Raphael, to ask for her assistance with raising funds for the scholarship.⁴⁵ Neither woman was familiar with the guidelines for establishing an endowed scholarship at the College and took the first logical step to finding this information. Mrs. Dennis and Dr. Raphael also recruited the assistance of Clark College alumna and former Director of Alumni Affairs, Juanita M. Eber, to help with fundraising. There was much discussion between the three women and once they obtained the guidelines for establishing an endowed scholarship, they scheduled a meeting with the Mathematics Department and then president, Elias Blake, to discuss the future of the scholarship fund.⁴⁶

After meeting with the Mathematics Department and President Blake, the National Sponsoring Committee for the Joseph J. Dennis Endowed Scholarship in Mathematics at Clark College was formed. The committee was comprised of individuals who had served the institution in multiple areas. Mrs. Eber, as well as Dr. Raphael, served on the committee with Dr. Om Puri, then Chair of the Natural Sciences and Mathematics Division of Clark College, Mr. Charles R. Stephens, then Vice President for Development for Clark College, Mr. Oliver Wendell Hill, a member of the Clark College

44. DeBose, "The Joseph J. Dennis Endowed Scholarship in Mathematical Science at Clark Atlanta University," 23-24.

45. Ibid.

46. Jackie DeBose, Interview by Sherese L. Williams, *McPheeters-Dennis Oral History Project Interview I*, November 6, 2014.

class of 1930, Mr. Martin Lehfeltdt, and Attorney Henry C. Bowden Jr., a partner at King and Spalding law offices in Atlanta, GA.⁴⁷ This committee met for eight consecutive weeks, starting at the beginning of November, with the sole purpose of developing a strategic plan for fundraising specifically for the scholarship. The initial campaign goal was \$50,000.00; however, half way through the campaign they reached their goal and increased it to \$100,000.00. A large part of this can be attributed to Mrs. Dennis' desire to ensure that this scholarship was handled correctly.

One of the interesting things that happened, a lot of the fellas who had majored in mathematics and so forth, who before that time could do nothing but teach, but with the desegregation they could get these jobs outside in government and so forth and they were the ones making the salaries. And when Sammye thought about it she wrote all of them and asked them to help. I know she monitored it very well. She was up there [at Clark] every day making sure it [the donated funds] got put in the right [account].⁴⁸

The committee established a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Board of Trustees at Clark College, the President of Clark College, and the National Sponsoring Committee of the Joseph J. Dennis Endowed Scholarship in Mathematics at Clark College. This MOU outlined the rules and regulations for administering the scholarship fund. The criteria and guidelines for a potential recipient include a grade point average of at least 3.25 or higher in mathematics and at least a 3.00 cumulative grade point average overall. Eighty percent of the interest was used and 20 percent was always added to the principle. The minimum amount that could be awarded to an individual was \$1,000.00. The *Atlanta Daily World* announced the first scholarships

47. Ibid.

48. Ibid.

awarded in the fall of 1986 to Deltrye Eagle, a senior mathematics major and Jonathan Watkins a senior computer science major. Each recipient received \$1,000.00.⁴⁹

Mrs. Dennis' hands-on approach to the fund was passed on to her daughter, Jackie, when she passed in 2004. As of 2003, 24 students had received scholarships totaling over \$80,000.00. Ms. DeBose currently works with the Mathematics Department at Clark Atlanta University to ensure that her mother's wishes and her father's memory are honored.

The Concept of Spirit of Greatness

The Spirit of Greatness as described by Dr. Brawley: "Greatness is a Clark College tradition, not by proclamation, but by commitment and exemplification, attested by the records of good works of many dedicated people over a period of more than a century."⁵⁰ After reading about Dr. Dennis and his many accomplishments both inside and outside of the classroom, it is easy to compare Brawley's *Spirit of Greatness* to Dennis' own spirit of greatness. He embodied the very elements that, according to Brawley, comprise this spirit: excellence, achievement, devotion, good sportsmanship, invincibility, loyalty, idealism, compassion, and truth.⁵¹

Excellence: High standards in the work of the College, and excellence of work and character of students.⁵² Dr. Dennis demanded excellence first from himself. How

49. *Atlanta Daily World*. "Clark Announces Recipients of the Dennis Scholarship," October 9, 1986.

50. Brawley, *The Clark College Legacy*, 241.

51. *Ibid.*

52. *Ibid.*

could he require the best from his students, peers, colleagues, and family if he first did not require this from himself? He was a man of his word and lived by it. He demanded excellence in and out of the classroom, from his students and Clark College alumni, and as stated earlier, especially from his family.

Achievement: The best possible achievement in residence at the College and after college in the world of work.⁵³ It is undisputed that Dr. Dennis was a high achiever as a student and as an alumnus. He obtained both his master's and doctoral degrees from Northwestern University during the early years of the Civil Rights Movement and did both while continuing to serve the institution. He was the eleventh African American to receive a degree in mathematics and the field was even smaller in regards to an African American with a degree in pure mathematics.⁵⁴ However, it would be fair to assume that he would cite his greatest achievement as seeing his students succeed.

Devotion: To work, to duty, to the College, and to worthy causes.⁵⁵ In every interview that was conducted, a common sentiment related to Dennis' devotion to Clark College and all that was related to Clark College. Even after his retirement from the institution, he worked hard with then President Vivian Henderson on expanding the degree offerings to include Mass Media Arts, Allied Health, Medical Art, and a Pharmacy program.

53. Ibid.

54. Pure mathematics is the extension of the boundaries of mathematics, the invention of new mathematical systems, regardless of whether the new structures are of immediate use. The second function of mathematics is the application of mathematical knowledge to problems of other fields. This is applied mathematics.

55. Brawley, *The Clark College Legacy*, 241.

Good Sportsmanship: Fair play; justice, and honesty; in the game, in the stands, and in the game of life.⁵⁶ Dr. Dennis epitomized good sportsmanship. Despite the SIAC history records acknowledging the past presidents of the Conference, news articles and first person accounts of his leadership during this time indicate that he was strict and fair.

Invincibility: The will to never falter, never to give up, never to fail; the will to endure to the end; the will to be victorious, playing the game courageously from the beginning to the end in athletic games and in the game of life.⁵⁷ Without his desire to see things through and to help others achieve at his level or higher, it would have been easy for this young man from Florida to become content with just a bachelor of arts degree.

Loyalty: To Alma Mater and to the highest and best for which she stands⁵⁸ was an ever present theme with Dennis. He always spoke highly of Clark College and always attributed his success to his Alma Mater.

Idealism: Love of beauty—the beautiful, the good, the true; as stated in the text of the College, the true, the honest, the just, the pure, the lovely, the things of good report.⁵⁹ Although Clark College was the jewel of the South it had its not so proud moments. However, this did not stop Dennis from seeing the potential in the students and the institution and continuing to help it move forward.

56. Ibid.

57. Ibid.

58. Ibid.

59. Ibid., 241-242.

Compassion: Expressed in sharing and service,⁶⁰ he taught summer school sessions at South Carolina State for twenty-seven years, served on the Board of Directors for the Butler Street YMCA for more than fifteen years, and was a charter member of the Ollie Street YMCA. His commitment to the community was unquestionable. He served as a science fair judge for Atlanta public high schools and conducted math workshops in South Carolina and Florida.

Lastly, *truth:* Finding that true education is a search for truth, a search for knowledge and wisdom, a search for fulfillment, a search for *the good life*, a journey that he continued to take each day until his unfortunate death. As his daughter described him, “Everything he did he found it extremely important to make sure everybody knew where he was from. He never introduced himself as doctor anybody. He was J. J. Dennis and he made friends that way.” *The Spirit of Greatness* that Brawley outlined was, in fact, the spirit of Joseph James Dennis, a man who deserved so much more than to have his name carved in stone.

60. Ibid.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

“Suppose we cultivate the habit of looking after the little things and helping others to correct the things that are wrong.” Annie B. Thomas wrote this quote in the introduction to her book about the history of Morris Brown College.¹ An alumnus of Atlanta University, she discussed the role and importance of the historian in developing a written history. She acknowledged the potential conflicts that might arise while researching, but the most profound statement was the latter portion of the opening line of this chapter. Suppose the historian focused on correcting the mistakes, like including the narratives of the forgotten majority.

The introduction of Dennis’ contributions to the Clark College legacy does not negatively affect the public narrative of the institution but this will not always be the case. It enhances and provides supporting evidence to fortify the history of Clark College and by extension Clark Atlanta University. Prior to this study, research findings about Joseph James Dennis would yield minimalistic results a compendium of texts that published his thesis and the requisite note cementing his status as the eleventh African

1. Annie B. Thomas, *History of Morris Brown: From Its Beginnings in 1885 to Time of Removal* (Atlanta, GA: Morris Brown College, 1932), 11.

American to earn a doctoral degree in mathematics. His role as a professor, department chairperson, Clark College SIAC representative, and eventual president of the SIAC, are omitted.² While he was the eleventh African American to earn a doctorate in mathematics, he was only the third to earn a degree in the field of pure mathematics.³ Despite all of his achievements, Dennis' work and reputation suggest that he was dedicated and devoted to the success of the students at Clark College. Dennis' story, despite the disdain that historians have for the term, also opens the door for the in-depth inclusion of the student narrative into institutional history. As previously stated in chapter one, students are excluded from the narrative unless mentioned as alumni or for demographic purposes. The students are important. Students are the most valuable stakeholders of these institutions but have the least active voice in their historical accounts. The students are a reflection of the institution and can be the greatest advocate for their respective institutions or the downfall depending on the circumstances.

Yes, one can find information regarding the number of students who were registered and enrolled at Clark College, Atlanta University, Morehouse College, or Spelman College during the 1930s, 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s. However, what one will not find within these numbers are the experiences and the effects that the Great Depression, Jim Crow, and the modern Civil Rights Movement had on these students, many who were on the forefront of the latter. If it were not for the recollections of Dennis' daughter, there would be no mention of the economic structure or status of the institution during the

2. *Atlanta Daily World*, "Sports of the World," December 10, 1954.

3. A comment that was referenced but not validated until a review of the theses and dissertations of the ten African-Americans (nine men and one woman) to earn a doctorate in mathematics in previous years was conducted by the researcher.

Great Depression. The only financial records located in the archives are a part of the *Matthew Simpson Davage Papers* and they only reference Dr. Davage's attempts to raise funds for the institution in the years following the Depression.⁴

The student narrative will most certainly differ from the publicly presented history. The degree of difference will depend on the venue. A student who actively served his institution and worked with his administration throughout the duration of his matriculation will speak differently than one who simply paid his tuition and fees and went to class. The goal of the historian is not only to determine the worth of the student experience but to analyze students' experiences as they encountered administrative, curriculum, and structural changes within the institution with the anticipation of creating a narrative that is reflective of all stakeholders. Cole's *Clark Atlanta University: Charting a Bold New Future* (2013) focuses on the consolidation of Clark College and Atlanta University from the administrative lens, but it does not attest to the student perspective of how this consolidation changed the student experience. The students were critical to the success of the vintage, yet newly born, institution. If the students had not supported the newly formed institution, Clark Atlanta University could have failed and three HBCUs would have closed their doors in 1988 instead of two.

The inclusion of the student narrative is imminent. It is with hesitation that these words are typed as the methods for determining the historical value of student input has not been determined. Nevertheless, there is a level of importance to maintaining the integrity of institutional history, and to do this one must look at the entire picture, even if

4. Matthew S. Davage, Archives Research Center, Atlanta University Center Robert W. Woodruff Library.

it is from a broader view initially. African Americans hold the distinction of being one of the most marginalized groups in United States history and to exclude students from this narrative, intentionally or not, is a grave error. With no direct reason for the exclusion of the largest group of narrators, one theory that can be hypothesized involves understanding that the student narrative has the potential to cause the most disruption to institutional history. Disruption, however harsh sounding, is not always bad. In order to provide an accurate account of institutional history, one must first know all sides and possess the ability to avoid selecting one. Students might debunk the publicly approved history of these institutions. The advent of social media has seen to this.

Social media has provided a public platform for students to express their satisfaction and dissatisfaction with their respective institutions. The voices and accounts of the student body at all institutions will not stay silenced. The positive and negative experiences are forever saved on the internet and sites like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. Social media has presented everyday individuals with the opportunity to become “viral” or “famous” with one click.⁵ The evidence of this can be found on Twitter and Instagram. Historians have the opportunity to explore the commonalities among HBCU alumni through the use of trending topics and hashtags.⁶ Hashtags will soon be used as a method of tracking changes in public opinion. They will also eventually provide an avenue for future historians to gather data. The process will still be the same

5. Viral-relating to or involving an image, video, piece of information, etc., that is circulated rapidly and widely from one Internet user to another.

6. A trend on **Twitter** refers to a hashtag-driven **topic** that is immediately popular at a particular time. A hashtag is a keyword or phrase that is preceded with a pound (#) sign, as with #NBAFinals or #USElections.

and a strong foundation within primary sources but social media has opened the door to both collecting and sharing historical data.

In recent months, students in the Atlanta University Center have turned to social media to express their outrage at their administrations. The lack of administrative response to dealing with sexual assault on the campus of Spelman College was publicly introduced on Twitter⁷ May 2, 2016, when a user, @RapedAtSpelman, described the lack of support she received after reporting a sexual assault case to the Dean of Students in a dozen tweets; her tweets were shared over 20,000 times from her account.⁸ She publicly admonished her institution for teaching her to "...be a free thinking woman and also to be a woman who has to keep her mouths[sic] closed to protect her [Morehouse] 'brothers.'" The analytics for each individual share from the thousands of users would take months to determine. The newest question becomes, how will Spelman discuss these student concerns in future updates to the history of the institution?

Morehouse College faced a similar backlash in 2009, when former president Robert M. Franklin established a new dress code policy that specifically prohibited: "wearing of clothing associated with women's garb is banned." Some students felt that this policy was hateful and directed towards a specific group of Morehouse men. A year later, a former student expressed his opinion in the Vibe Magazine article "*The Mean Girls of Morehouse*." The question again arises: will the Morehouse College dress code debacle be included in the next Morehouse College history text especially with recent

7. Twitter is a social media platform that allows its users to express their opinions on various topics of interest.

8. This number was comprised by calculating the number of shares each of the initial twelve tweets generated.

legislation and United States Supreme Court rulings regarding the lesbian, gay, transsexual, and bisexual community? Clark Atlanta University students have recently taken to social media to lobby for the reinstatement of various faculty and staff members who they felt were unjustly relieved of their duties. Again, the question arises: will the activism of these students be included as a part of the institutional history?

History should be inclusionary not exclusionary. No singular account of an event or person will ever be the same. The credibility of a historical manuscript becomes attacked whenever an alternative analysis of a topic is discussed. The Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s has been re-evaluated to include accounts and narratives related to the contributions of Caucasians to the movement. The history of organizations like the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), have undergone scrutiny for their omission of Ida B. Wells as a co-founder of the organization.⁹ Omitting an individual or a group of individuals from a narrative is dangerous. It places both the historian and the actual historical account under unnecessary scrutiny. The moment a work loses its credibility, it loses a portion of its worth.

It is equally important to understand that the narrative may not always follow the public history or the current research. This possibility is always present. The greatest gain when this occurs is the opportunity to present new scholarship. While researching the AUC institutions, several historical inaccuracies were discovered. One of the most shocking revelations was Benjamin Griffith Brawley's admission that women enrolled at

9. Paula Giddings, *Ida: A Sword among Lions: Ida B. Wells and the Campaign against Lynching* (New York, NY: Amistad, 2008), 478.

Morehouse College were intentionally not documented as students. “While in the original enrollment taken by Mr. White the names of only men were written, in the earliest of days women also seem to have been more or less regularly in attendance. It was recorded by the first regular president that Dr. Parker ‘had two assistants to teach the females.’”¹⁰ Brawley unwittingly opened the door for the strong critique of his text. Why exclude women from the narrative? Why not explore the purpose for omitting them as they required two additional instructors due to the numbers? Brawley had the opportunity to discuss the reasoning for the intentional exclusion of women students from the history of Morehouse College. Given that his book was published during the timeline for the fiftieth anniversary of the institution, many of the founders and original trustees would have been able to provide insight into the reasoning behind the exclusion of women from the history.

A new account does not invalidate the original narrative. As an academic and historian, a new view represents a new academic discipline. Even Eugene Genovese’s studies and texts regarding slavery and the “positive views of it” offer an introspective view of the practice of history.¹¹ Genovese’s research proves that while the popular opinion is often the most researched and presented, the road less travelled often leads to new discoveries within the realm of history. There is much to gain from including the perspectives of all stakeholders. The presentation of the history will become forcibly

10. Benjamin Griffith Brawley, *The Story of Morehouse College* (Atlanta, GA: Morehouse College, 1917), 16.

11. Adam Rothman, “Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, Eugene Genovese, and the Proslavery Worldview,” *Reviews in American History* 41.3: 563-69.

objective. There will be no side to take but the goal will shift to providing an entire account, not a singular version.

It should be recognized and acknowledged that institutional histories cannot continuously be written from the administrative view without acknowledging all parties. There is a level of transparency that is necessary for achieving this goal. Transparency is not always found at the top of the hierarchy. One sometimes has to work backwards to achieve this goal. A certain level of transparency is expected when researching but the realization that transparency starts at the bottom is not realized until multiple sources offer the same views on defining issues. The rare cases in which a full scale exposé occur typically involve an upper-level “whistle blower” who exposes corruption; there is rarely a full picture presented. Even when this occurs the historian must be careful of the motives of individuals searching to expose them. If the intentions are malicious, the historian is in danger and risks the potential for lawsuits.

While there is the potential to create an inclusive history, there are also risks that come with the inclusion of all stakeholders, a risk that if not carefully weighed and determined before finalizing an approach, can destroy an entire account of history. This risk is that nothing will support the dominant narrative or everything will actively oppose it. While this was not the case when reviewing the contributions of Dennis, this is a possibility for including the narratives of faculty, staff, and students in the institutional history. There is almost always a level of disconnect when major policy decisions are made, curriculum is revised, or money is involved. When this occurs, it is important to remember the words of Valerie Yow, “One related to the ability to generalize

testimonies--lies in the selectivity of narrators.”¹² If all of the narrators hold similar positions and various levels (i.e., a department chair, a student government association president, and a Director of some sort), then they might respond to changes in policy differently than those who were not included in the discussion. They may discuss changes as necessary for the survival of the institution while the public opinion would not.

When these discrepancies occur it becomes more important to continue researching and probing. The narrative may shift but the goal of the historian should be to present the entire narrative as objectively as possible. The historian should remember that everyone makes history. Some individuals make it into the history books and others are kept in the hearts and minds of those that they have touched. Regardless of the level of impact these men and women may have had on the lives of others, it should be documented. Some believe that this cannot be done and that a historian must “pick a side.” A historian should always choose to provide an accurate account of institutional history whenever the opportunity arises.

12. Valerie Yow, *Recording Oral History: A Guide for Humanities and Social Sciences* (Lanham, MD: Altamira Press, 2005), 18.

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