



Institutional Report

“Black Mood”: The Emergence of Africana Studies at Trinity Washington University

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Abstract

This article will explore the emergence of Africana Studies at Trinity Washington University, formerly Trinity College, a predominately Black institution, and a Hispanic serving institution. The research will examine Trinity’s history of integration, the Afro-American Society’s student activism, and institutional reports on the Black experience. Examining Trinity’s history of the Black experience will shed light on the role students, faculty, and administration played in developing Black courses and programs. The principal research methodology relies heavily on Trinity’s archives which houses the *Trinity Times* newspaper and documents of the Afro-American

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Society and the Black Experience Research Committee. Primarily, this article will connect the activism of students from the 1960s and 1970s to the development of Africana Studies at Trinity today. It will also highlight the support students received from faculty and staff at Trinity and Howard University. Furthermore, using newspaper articles, student-led events, and moments of self-expression, this article will emphasize the creative ways students addressed the racism and discrimination they faced as Trinity women.

Keywords

Black Studies, Black student activism, Africana Studies, Women's History, Afro-American Society

The call for a Black studies program ranks as the number one demand. The type of Black studies program ranges from courses in Black history to intensive and extensive programs leading to a degree in Black studies.

~Lorraine Brock, "Black Mood: On Demands"

Introduction

In 1970, Louise V. Miles, student journalist for the *Trinity Times*, expressed frustration with the racism and racial tension Black students experienced at Trinity College. Her article titled, "Black Studies," criticized how white students treated Black students. "Some of the whites here (and elsewhere) have been and would be willing to deal with Blacks - as maids, porters, butlers and in other subservient roles, wrote Miles."¹ Miles endorsed the need for a Black Studies curriculum as she and others believed it would help alleviate racial issues on campus.² Her words reflected the sentiments of other African American students at Trinity and throughout the United States. In 1966, a few blocks away at Howard University, students took control of the administration building, pushing for a "Black University." The voices of Black students like Miles prompted Trinity's administration and faculty to offer more courses on the Black experience. Through writing for the school newspaper, organizing in the Afro-American Society, and collecting data for the "Black

Experience Report,” Black students at Trinity College were able to push the needle towards a Black Studies curriculum. This chapter will explore the emergence of Africana Studies at Trinity Washington University, formerly Trinity College, which is now a predominately Black institution (PBI) and a Hispanic serving institution (HSI). The research will examine Trinity’s history of integration, the Afro-American Society’s student activism, and institutional reports on the Black experience. Unveiling Trinity’s account of the Black experience will shed light on the role students, faculty, and administration played in developing Black courses and programs.

The Integration of Trinity College

Founded in 1897 as Trinity College in Washington, D.C., by the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur (SNDdeN), Trinity was the nation’s first Catholic liberal arts college for women built from the ground up. Trinity opened its doors to its first students in 1900 – the Red Class of 1904. Trinity’s neighbor, Catholic University, denied women admission. When the Sisters of Notre Dame approached Catholic University about creating their own institution, Catholic gave the Sisters all the women applications they received.³ Catholic would not admit its first female student until 1927.⁴ Against all odds, Trinity’s founders were persistent in creating a Catholic women’s institution in the nation’s capital. Trinity’s early students were upper and middle-class Catholic white women, who were underrepresented in America’s colleges across the United States. While Trinity is unknown to many, it is the alma mater to notable alumni, including Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi, Kellyanne Conway, and Jennette Jackson Clark. In 1948, Trinity began accepting African American students. Harriet Parker, Frances Carter, and Sylvia Washington were the first African American students. With the assistance of a Carnegie Corporation grant, Trinity’s African American population grew in 1965. The grant funded nineteen students with a yearlong scholarship.⁵ President Patricia McGuire, of the 1974 graduating class, helped advance the education of women and men by offering coed programs. Although a liberal arts women’s college, Trinity also accepts men in graduate programs in education and professional studies. Under McGuire’s leadership, Trinity was transformed into the Trinity of today. Trinity was renamed Trinity Washington University in 2004 with the following academic schools: College of Arts and Sciences,

School of Nursing and Health Professions, and School of Professional and Graduate Studies.⁶

Diversity is not a new phenomenon at Trinity. Before World War II, Trinity began receiving women of color. Most of these brown students came from wealthy families in Latin America who tended to be more affluent than the white families who sent their daughters to Trinity. The experiences these students faced assimilating into campus life and Washington, D.C., have not been documented.

Black women came to Trinity in one of three ways: the Graduate School, the Weekend College, and the College of Arts and Sciences (CAS). Trinity's first graduate program existed from 1904 to the mid-1920s. When it was revitalized in the late 1960s, with grant money to create a pre-service Master of Arts and Teaching program, it attracted a growing number of aspiring Black teachers who ended up working in D.C. and Prince George's County public schools. The Graduate School was far more diverse than CAS before the 1990s.

Trinity inaugurated its Weekend College in 1985 with a diverse population.⁷ Working women, ages twenty-five to sixty, from the Washington metropolitan area took undergraduate level courses on Friday nights and all day on Saturday. In most cases, these women worked during the day. They were married with children, single mothers, and single women without children. In most cases these women entered the program with some college credits. Black women were the majority population attending the Weekend College, but there were also white and Latina students. In the early 2000s, the Weekend College became the School of Professional Studies undergraduate program, open to men and women.⁸

Since the late 1990s, most of Trinity's Black population has resided in the College of Arts and Sciences (CAS). The integration of CAS took place six years before the United States Supreme Court's historic *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in 1954. At the time, Washington, D.C., was still a very segregated city run by southern white congressmen who looked down on the city's Black residents. Nevertheless, some groups and individuals began chipping away at Jim Crow's stranglehold on the city after World War II. One such person was Patrick O'Boyle, the newly appointed Archbishop of Washington. O'Boyle, who became Cardinal in 1967, came to D.C. from New York City. He had a reputation for being a New Deal era progressive devoted to anti-racist activism. One of his first actions was

to order the integration of all Catholic schools in D.C., beginning with the colleges and universities.⁹

Trinity accepted its first two Black undergraduate students in 1948. It is unclear if this action was due to O'Boyle's mandate or the decision of the university president, Sister Katherine Dorothea Fox. According to Sister Mary Hayes, the university archivist and author of "Retrieving the Past: Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur," since 1945 President Fox had been a member of a national committee discussing the prospect of school desegregation. The two Black students who entered CAS in 1948 were the first Black people enrolled in any of Trinity's programs. Those students were Barbara Black and Harriet Hayes from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Black dropped out and eventually completed her degree at Westchester State University in Pennsylvania. The archival records do not reveal her reasons for dropping out. For years, many thought that she left due to racist behavior from fellow students and faculty. However, archival records show letters she sent to the president thanking her for her time at Trinity and updating her on her mother's health and her admission to Westchester.¹⁰ Harriet Hayes, however, became Trinity's first Black graduate in 1952. The 1952 yearbook lists her as an officer in the school's literary society. Hayes, who passed in 2001, never returned to Trinity after graduating. Her reasons for not returning to her alma mater or attending class reunions are unknown.

In *Trinity College*, Sister Columba Mullaly wrote:

In 1948 two Black students, Barbara Black and Harriet Parker, from Notre Dame High School, Moylan, PA registered as Trinity freshmen. Because Washington was still a segregated city they were advised by their families, pastors, and teachers in Pennsylvania to live with Black families in the city for their own comfort. Though the number of Black students increased slowly through the fifties it was the early sixties that brought significant increase in numbers, resident students, and an organized recruitment program especially in Washington.¹¹

Mullaly briefly mentions two African students who graduated from Trinity in 1964, Angelica W. Gesuga and Perpetua W. Kamunya, who are pictured in her book alongside two men in the "Student Life" section. Seemingly, from 1948-1964 there

were very few Black students in each class. One could argue that because there were so few, perhaps racism was not as evident.¹²

“Black Mood” and the Afro-American Society

In 1965, the number of underrepresented students increased at Trinity. The institution went from having one to two African American students in each class to admitting twenty-five students in a freshman class. Among these students was Lorraine Brock, a co-founder of the Afro-American Society on campus. Founded circa 1967, the Afro-American Society was a space for Black students to feel empowered, united, but also, most importantly, heard.¹³ Although Leah O’Leary, a white Trinity student, started an interracial discussion group in September of 1965, Black students, nevertheless, moved away from an integrationist approach and supported the development of the Society.

Brock also worked as a columnist for the campus paper, *Trinity Times*, writing a weekly column titled “Black Mood.” In 1968, students Brock, Jeanette Jackson, Mike Wiley, Allyson Griffith, Rachelle Puryear, and Annette Melton occupied an entire page of the student newspaper, *Trinity Times*. The page-length feature was titled, “Six Blacks ‘Tell It Like It Is’ in Mini-World.” As co-founder of the Afro-American Society, Brock explained that when the organization was created, white students said it would only increase tensions between Blacks and whites and make matters worse. However, because white administrators, faculty and students did not create a climate in which Black students felt a sense of security or awareness of self, the Society instilled a sense of pride and purpose for Black students at Trinity. Documenting the transformative impact of the Society on her sense of self and community, Brock wrote, “In classroom discussion I eagerly interject the Black point of view. Black students must take the knowledge gained here and relate it to how it will help the Black community to which we return.”¹⁴ Her approach was therefore clear; if you, the professors, refuse to integrate Black history, culture, and contributions in the curriculum, then I will.¹⁵

Mike Wiley shared a different experience in the feature, writing that she does not feel different or unique being Black at Trinity. Perhaps because of her lighter complexion, she noted, that people did not immediately know that she was Black and she did not point it out. Wiley also revealed that she was criticized for not joining the

Afro-American Society on campus. “I’m not rejecting my African heritage or my race by this attitude. I have many relatives in Africa and we visit and communicate often,” she wrote.¹⁶ Wiley’s experience addresses colorism and class dynamics on campus and within the Black community.

Jeanette Jackson’s article is a letter to her Black sisters. Her college journey began as a “dayhop,” meaning she commuted to campus from home since her family was local. However, when she moved onto campus her second year, she was faced with a harsher reality. “Case in point- a record player was placed in Social Hall for student use. When my Soul record came on, a white student removed the needle and informed me that ‘we cannot study to that kind of music,’” writes Jackson.¹⁷

During the spring semester of 1969, Brock’s column outlined demands to the Trinity administration on behalf of the Black students on campus. She stated that administration and faculty should consult the Afro-American Society about any concerns or programs for and about Black students on campus. While the Afro-American Society did not push Trinity similar to other Black organizations at other universities, their demands and requests were made clear, and they refused to remain quiet or back down. These demands included: calling for a Black Studies program, hiring of Black teachers, ending token integration, enrolling more Black students, and creating more Black facilities, namely Black dorms.¹⁸

In October of 1969 Brock penned, “Stagnation Prevails for Another Year.” Within this article she discussed how not much had changed since Black students voiced their concerns a year prior. “For a little more than four years Black students have been handled by this school; we have been insulted and we have been repeatedly fooled by our “kindhearted” and “do-good liberal” friends- both in administration and among the students,” she wrote.¹⁹ Brock went on to discuss the long list of grievances including the Afro-American Society’s request to hire more Black faculty. Instead of the administration meeting the needs of students, students were continuously reminded that there were two Black faculty at Trinity, Sylvia Washington (Sylvia Washington Bâ) and Mr. Fletcher. Brock noted that they rarely saw either of these teachers on campus and that there were faculty who could not identify Fletcher.²⁰ Brock wrote, “Instead of boasting of ‘our Miss Washington’ and holding her up as part of the integrated faculty, Trinity should have been ashamed of the fact that it only had one Black faculty member. She was Trinity’s token Black, a symbol of Trinity’s progressiveness, something to keep the masses quiet.”²¹

The Afro-American Society also wrote a letter to the Curriculum Committee and Trinity faculty in 1969, fully endorsing a student proposal presented to the committee by the Howard University Interchange Committee. The proposal modeled Trinity's interchange with its neighbor Catholic University and focused on students interested in the social sciences, including, Sociology, History, Anthropology, and Literature courses at Howard. Black students at Trinity were attracted to Howard's curriculum and professors; they were interested in learning from scholars who were more knowledgeable about Black history and culture. This request for an interchange with Howard would come to fruition two years later, and in doing so, Howard graduates and faculty would become influential in the development of the minor in Africana Studies at Trinity almost fifty years later.

In 1964, only five D.C. universities, American University, Catholic University, Georgetown University, George Washington University, and Howard University belonged to what is now the Consortium of Universities of the Washington Metropolitan Area. Sister Margaret Claydon, president of Trinity College, was adamant about becoming a member of the consortium alongside other D.C. universities. This would allow cross-registration on the undergraduate and graduate level. When asked about Trinity's contribution to the D.C. consortium she said, "A smaller institution has the advantage of smaller classes, a chance for more discussion, and individual attention. It would be a worthwhile experience for the university student to have such advantages as a smaller faculty-student relationship."²² Claydon encouraged the idea that a small liberal arts college would be an ideal place for college students from larger universities in the area and therefore Trinity officially joined the consortium in 1971. Interestingly, while Trinity attempted to overcome its own issues of racial tension, it opened its doors to neighboring institutions and potentially outside criticism.²³

The Society also raised their voices in solidarity with Black people locally and nationally. For instance, in response to the murder of Charles Oatman, a sixteen-year-old Black teenager that led to the Augusta Riot of 1970, the Society wrote a letter expressing students' frustration, and their support of the mass organizing and protests happening in some southern cities. The Black students made their position on the racial violence and murder of Black people throughout the nation very clear. Invoking the sentiments of Black nationalist and civil rights leader Malcolm X, Trinity students expressed the following:

In light of these incidents, we, the Afro-American Society of Trinity College, are obligated to take and act upon the following positions “by any means necessary:”

1. To support the Coalition of Black Students in the Washington Metropolitan Area;
2. To demand that the Administration, Faculty and Students of Trinity College formulate a statement concerning these recent incidents;
3. To incorporate an emphasis in Black Awareness in all facets of college life on this campus, i.e. (a) Invite Black lecturers to come to Trinity on a regular basis. (b) Have an all Black College Day;
4. To move in a direction despite the hostilities and encroachment of this college and the nation which will lead to the true liberation of all Black people.²⁴

They further explained that they will continue to incorporate these ideas throughout campus including in class so that Trinity never forgets the experiences of Black women students, many of whom felt in “jeopardy as Black women on a white campus.”²⁵ The Society also called for a fund to be created to contribute to the struggle of the Black movement, evoking what Abdul Alkalimat highlighted in *The History of Black Studies* as the importance of study and struggle.²⁶ Influenced by campus movements across the country, Trinity students recognized the power they possessed on their own campus and sought to create new policies at Trinity.

The Black Student Alliance

By the mid-1970s the Afro-American Society had transitioned into the Black Student Alliance (BSA). To incorporate Black culture into Trinity, the BSA hosted several Africana themed events during the 1990s. These events included Jazz Poetry Fusion, Black History Month programs, and other Black cultural events. Students brought nationally recognized speakers to campus including Joy Jones, Nikki Giovanni, Congressman William Clay, and Washington, D.C., organizer Josephine Butler. BSA also hosted several book discussions on texts including, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, and movie nights where students watched Haile Gerima’s “Sankofa,”

“Kings and Cities,” and Henry Hampton’s “Eyes on the Prize.” They also engaged local talent in Washington, D.C., such as the Metropolitan African Methodist Episcopal Gospel Choir, C.R. Gibbs, Asa Gordon, and Go-Go artists. These fellowships and events brought Black students a sense of community. Despite not having a Black Studies program on campus, they created their own experiences and ensured that Black culture was a part of campus life.²⁷

Racial tensions were rising throughout much of America in the 1990s, as evidenced by the Rodney King beating, the Los Angeles Uprisings, the O.J. Simpson murder trial, and the Million Man and Million Woman Marches. Popular culture was being infused with an aggressive attitude of Black consciousness led by filmmakers like Spike Lee and John Singleton and young hip-hop musicians. Many of the Black residents in D.C. accused white paternalistic officials in the FBI and other government agencies of taking down their beloved Mayor Marion Barry on trumped-up drug charges. Disgruntled Black students at nearby Howard University took over their administration building in 1989 and forced the resignation of their president, James Cheek. Howard students continued to disrupt and push for change throughout the nineties. Consequently, it is not surprising that Trinity’s women were outspoken and engaged in radical behavior during this decade.

At a college admissions event during the 1990s, the BSA created a flier addressing the racism Black students experienced at Trinity. “If you are Black Trinity College is Definitely the Place for You!!!,” was displayed in boldface on the flier.²⁸ Using sarcasm on the flier to gain attention, the students highlighted four reasons why Black students should not attend Trinity. These included:

1. An Instructor of Sociology who tells his class they must call Blacks—Negroes.
2. A Professor of Spanish who refuses to call on Black students for class participation.
3. An Advisor of political science dept. who tells Black advisees they are concentrating too much on Black studies.
4. A Counseling Service which promotes Black/White encounter groups to make whites aware of the Black problem.²⁹

There were a few controversial *documented* events at Trinity College pertaining to race and racism. One event occurred when an elevator was defaced with written racial

epithets and pictures of Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. were torn down. Subsequently, the president sent a letter to the student body addressing the n-word being written on the main elevator and pride posters being destroyed. “Anonymous, hateful graffiti that is intended to provoke racial conflict is an act of community terrorism that must be condemned in the strongest possible terms,” McGuire writes.³⁰ She continues, “Anonymity is cowardice, and racial hatred is sick.”³¹ Not assuming that the culprit or culprits are a part of the Trinity community, McGuire explains that if they are not, they are not welcomed on campus. In response, students and faculty asked what the administration intended to do to address the issue; she responded writing, “the question is not what “the administration” intendeds to do, since our powers are quite finite and likely to cause derision, if not even worse behavior, whatever we might attempt on our own.”³² She concluded by opening the dialogue to the community and hearing suggestions on what the university can do “to root out the sin of racism, to overcome prejudice, and to reach a greater level of harmony and understanding and appreciation for the rich and lifegiving differences among us that make us strong and vibrant.”³³

Months before the elevator incident, in January 1993, McGuire encouraged faculty to incorporate more Black history in their courses during Black History Month. Aligning with Trinity’s mission and commitment to justice and celebration of diversity she invited faculty to “use the occasion of Black History Month in February to advance learning, understanding and appreciation of Black history through all of our academic opportunities.”³⁴ Similar to the ways that faculty make the effort to incorporate Trinity’s commitment to women, the same can be done for Black history. Whether or not faculty incorporated Black history within their courses in February is unknown. What we do know from the teaching of Carter G. Woodson and many historians is that focusing on Black history only during the month of February is not enough.³⁵

In 1994, the Campus Activities Association (CAA) at Trinity created a tee-shirt to celebrate Christmas. Unfortunately, the tee-shirt excluded Black women on campus and only had images of white women. The incident was later discussed in a Colloquium on Race, Class, and Community. In addition, the BSA voiced their concerns with a flier evoking the words of abolitionist Sojourner Truth, stating:

CHRISTMAS ON CAMPUS: NICE BUT AIN'T I A (TRINITY) WOMAN TOO? SOJOURNER TRUTH THOUGHT SO.....HINT...HINT NO PEOPLE OF AFRICAN DESCENT ON TEE-SHIRT. PLEASE BOYCOTT. THIS MEANS YOU SISTER.³⁶

They also wrote a letter of frustration to the entire Trinity community expressing the lack of diversity reflected in CAA's campus shirt design. CAA explained that "all were invited to be a part of the planning committee."³⁷ BSA responded saying, "We feel our presence need not be mandatory if members of the C.A.A. respected the diversity of cultures on Trinity's campus...Being Trinity sisters we should exult diversity, not defend the lack of diversity. If we are forgotten on a t-shirt, where else are we sisters forgotten?"³⁸ As a result of ongoing racist actions on campus, the university hosted a "Colloquium on Race, Class, and Community" on March 22, 1995. The members of the planning committee published a proclamation and advertisement in the *Intercom*, a newsletter for Trinity College faculty, staff, and students. The colloquium was designed as a day of "scholarly discussion and reflection of race, class, and community."³⁹ Regularly scheduled classes were suspended. The committee went on to "proclaim this day as a day of celebration, informal interaction and discovery of ourselves as a community committed to examining the concepts of race class as they affect the Trinity community."⁴⁰

There were several events and hosted conversations to discuss racial tensions on campus. "Goodwill to All" was co-sponsored by the Student Association and BSA; "Do We Discriminate," "Racism at Trinity," and "Dialogue About Race and Planning an Agenda for Action" were a few of the events held to address campus concerns.

In 1995, Black Student Alliance vice-president, Billie R. Ylas, wrote an open letter to address rumors and negative images of the BSA. She wrote:

First and foremost BSA is for the uniting of the Black students here on campus, but what many fail to see or ignore is that we are also for the unity of the Trinity community. With all of the racial tension in the air it is hard to bring about a more unified community; but if we all put our differences aside and understand one another as humans instead of races, we can make the atmosphere of Trinity comfortable for everyone.⁴¹

The Black Experience Report

The creation of the “Black Experience Report,” a semester-based report on Black students' perspectives led by a committee of the Afro-American Society, faculty, and staff, sought to explain the challenges and issues of Black students. Formed in the late 1960s, the Black Experience Research Committee was composed of seven faculty members and eighteen students; the committee was further divided into nine research groups. As a collective, they wanted to generate a report on Black students who had left Trinity to attend other universities, possibilities of scholarship funding for Black students, the attitudes of white students, Black workers (cooks, custodial staff, etc.), recruiting Black teachers, and evaluation of Black Studies courses. Even with the largest group entering Trinity in 1965, many Black students felt isolated, unsupported, and lost, even in a familiar environment. The committee’s questionnaire, therefore, consisted of thirty questions that were distributed to freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors with ethnic backgrounds of African, African American, Costa Rican, Haitian, or Central American. Questionnaires were answered anonymously, but they provided a safe haven for Black students to honestly express themselves and provide feedback on gaps they saw at the level of institutional support.

One of the nine research groups studied Trinity’s curriculum and the courses about the Black experience. The committee report concluded:

The Black Experience per se was not included in courses at Trinity until the 1968-1969 school year. At that time, new courses were introduced which dealt directly with this area. This was continued in the 1969-1970 school year. The number of courses dealing directly with the Black Experience was increased. Two more courses included the Black Experience, though their actual focus was a larger area.⁴²

As a result of these conclusions and in the tradition of the Afro-American Society, in 1972 BSA president Linda Turner wrote a letter to Trinity president Sister Margaret Claydon requesting the university adopt more practices reflecting the Black experience. These demands included the creation of a Black Studies program, hiring of Black faculty members, a request for “HIS 399: The Black Experience” to be taught by a Black professor, and for BSA to be involved in the screening and hiring of Black faculty. Alongside a Black Studies major, students were also in support of an Urban Studies program. The request for a Black Studies program was also supported by members of the Black Experience Committee including two white faculty, Eileen

Fairbanks, and Sister Mary Hayes, and two Black students, Mary Kelly, and Claudia Smith. The report stated:

Although it is not clear from the results of the questionnaire, whether of not the sixteen respondents support a Black Studies Interdepartmental Major to the extent that they support an Urban Studies Major, we recommend, nevertheless, that in light of the Task Force proposals, and in light of the already existing courses at Trinity relating directly to the Black experience, that a Black Studies Program be available to these students who wish it, that a co-ordinator for such a program be named, and that the availability of such a program be listed in the catalogue. We further recommend that direct contact between Trinity and the Afro-American Studies Program at Howard be established to determine the possibilities of cross-registration between the two programs.⁴³

Sylvia Washington Bâ: Trinity's First Black Faculty

Trinity's first or second "confirmed" Black faculty member was Sylvia Washington Bâ. A nun from Jamaica taught French classes for years before Bâ, but her racial identity cannot be verified. Bâ, born Sylvia Washington in 1937, grew up in the Northwest D.C. neighborhood now known as Adams Morgan. Her family moved to the Brookland neighborhood in Northeast D.C. in 1952. She graduated from Dunbar High School in Washington, D.C., in 1954. At the time, Dunbar was known as one of the best high schools for Black students to attend. Furthermore, Dunbar also had an 85 percent college acceptance rate. Washington, D.C., ended segregation for all schools in 1954; thus, Bâ was a member of the last segregated class.

After high school, Bâ decided to attend nearby Trinity. She was among Trinity's first four Black students. There was another Black student in her class named Marie, who also graduated from Dunbar. Their white classmates often mistook Marie for a white woman due to her pale skin, blond hair, and blue eyes. Nonetheless, after Bâ was appointed to the freshman class student committee, she learned that she was given the opportunity because her white peers wanted to appear liberal on race. Marie, however, was privy to this information because the students spoke freely in her presence, thinking she was white.

Trinity did not offer courses in Africana Studies during Bâ's time as a student. According to Bâ, the faculty teaching during the 1950s would have never thought to offer anything other than courses in Western civilization and European history as part of the standard curriculum. She did not recall much racial tension on campus during her matriculation, however. Her peers and professors treated her fairly and did not make her uncomfortable. This was also true when she served on the faculty. She did provide a possible explanation for the difference in her experience compared to that of Black people who attended in the turbulent times of the later decades. In an interview with Salena Geahwie she explained:

We came from backgrounds that were intellectually and socially (though less financially perhaps) close to those of the white students. As a Trinity student I never personally experienced racial animosity as the students who were "racist" were too well-bred to show it openly. And given the fact that we were only four out of the total four-year enrollment and the novelty of integration, we did not represent a threat to the status quo.⁴⁴

In the 1990s one of her former Italian American classmates revealed that her mother would have died if she knew she had a Black friend in college.⁴⁵

Bâ, a French major, was able to earn money by working at the university library. That experience ignited her passion for conducting research. Bâ also worked as the secretary for Sister Ann Francis, dean of students, and later Sister Mary Lawler, director of admissions. Lawler was writing a dissertation on a French philosopher and hired Bâ to type it and peer review her French translations. She recalled two Black domestic workers at Trinity, a mother and daughter named Hattie and Dorothy, who would bring her cookies and a Coca-Cola whenever they saw her typing the dissertation on the second floor of Alumnae Hall.⁴⁶

Bâ graduated from Trinity in 1958. The news of her becoming Trinity's first Black valedictorian was covered in local newspapers and in national periodicals such as *Jet Magazine*. She recalled one local Black woman coming to her graduation ceremony to tell her, "I just had to come. I had to see you because you have done what I couldn't."⁴⁷ After graduating she received a Fulbright scholarship to study in France for a year. Subsequently, a Woodrow Wilson grant allowed her to complete graduate studies at Fordham University in New York during the 1959-1960 academic

year. She was then hired to teach French language and literature courses at Trinity in 1961. However, Bâ left Trinity in 1964 to work on her doctoral degree in Paris, France. Two years after returning to Trinity in 1965, she finished her Ph.D. After living in Senegal, West Africa to conduct research, she returned to Trinity from 1969-1973. At this time, she and a white Political Science professor created a new course focusing on French colonization in Africa and the Negritude intellectual and literary movement. She taught at the University of Dakar, now Cheikh Anta Diop University in Senegal, from 1973-2002. Bâ, who currently resides in D.C., served on Trinity's alumnae board from 2009-2015. She received one of the university's highest honors during its 125th anniversary celebration in October 2022 for her contributions.⁴⁸ It is important to note, then, that Bâ's presence as Trinity's first full-time Black faculty member and her teaching and scholarship in the area of West African literature and culture must be considered a part of the evolution of Africana Studies at the institution.

The Birth of Africana Studies at Trinity: 1960s and 1970s

The development of Africana Studies at Trinity is a product of the Afro-American Society's (later Black Student Alliance) activism and student demands in "Black Mood" and the Black Experience Committee's research findings. As mentioned above, the Society, BSA and the "Black Experience Report," identified the need for Africana/Black Studies at Trinity during the late 1960s and early 1970s. In response, administration and faculty slowly began to create courses. Between 1965 and 1969 the faculty did not offer courses in which the Black experience was the central subject matter, although faculty in Sociology offered courses that focused on racial and minority groups; faculty might have incorporated the Black experience within its contents. However, it was not until the 1968-1969 academic year when administrators and faculty began to take seriously the curricular needs of African American students.

During the 1968-69 academic year there were three Africana themed courses. HIS 339: History of the Negro American; Pol. Sc. 469: Political Problems of Sub-Saharan Africa; and Art 538: African Art and Culture. This was a major development for Trinity students who expressed the need for Black themed courses. The History of the Negro course enrolled thirty-nine students in its first semester taught and ninety-one in the second semester. The enrollment in the History course demonstrated the

interest and need to increase awareness about and discussions on the African American experience.

Despite the influence of Black students, specifically members of the Afro-American Society, in the development of African American courses, the university did not acknowledge their efforts. When explaining the historical academic changes from 1897 to 1977, Sister Columba Mullaly wrote, “During these years, interest and course offerings in American history have continued to increase. History of the American Negro, introduced in 1968 and later developing into courses and seminars in the Black Experience, became part of the American Studies major which was first announced in the catalogue of 1972-1973.”⁴⁹ There was no mention of student or faculty contributions to the changes within the curriculum.

Administrators did not comply with students’ requests for Black faculty to teach new African American courses. For instance, Sister Mary Hayes, archivist, and former professor, inaugurated the American Studies major in 1972. She taught HIS 339: History of the Negro American, the course the Afro-American Society requested be taught by a Black professor. From 1969 to 1970 there were six courses that dealt directly with the Black experience: Ec 340: Urban Economics; Eng. 329: Ethnic Literature; Soc 437: Urban Problems; His. 339: Black History; and Soc 460: Theory and Source, Social Inequality. From 1970-1971 HIS 639: Seminar in the History of the Negro American (Sem in Black History: Slavery in Antebellum United States) and HIS 339: History of the Negro American, which had various titles from, History of the Negro American, and History of the Black Experience in America, to African American History, were never taught by Black professors during these years.

Africana Studies at Trinity in the Twenty-First Century: The Creation of the Africana Studies Minor, Auxiliary Programming, and Research

Today, Trinity’s student body is over 55 percent Black and 30 percent Latinx. As of November 2022, the total undergraduate enrollment is 1,560 with 700 students enrolled in the College of Arts and Sciences (CAS).⁵⁰ “Trinity is one of only three private institutions of higher education to have U.S. Department of Education classification as both a Predominantly Black and Hispanic Serving Institution.”⁵¹ Given

the student demographics, the push for Africana Studies curricular development has regained momentum in the last few years. With the help of the Department of Afro-American Studies at Howard University, Trinity professors in History and English developed the Africana Studies minor during the spring and fall of 2020.⁵² The Africana Studies minor at Trinity was officially approved on February 10, 2021.

Kimberly F. Monroe arrived at Trinity in fall 2019 with the vision to create a Black Studies program. While attending Howard for a PhD in African Diaspora Studies and being mentored by members of the Department of Afro-American Studies there, she met with Sita Ramamurti, Trinity's Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, to discuss the steps to develop an Africana Studies minor at Trinity. Monroe began by compiling a list of Africana themed courses being offered at Trinity. She also drafted a proposal that discussed the need for the Africana Studies minor. An excerpt from the final proposal reads:

Students at Trinity want to learn more about the people and history of the African Diaspora. Semester after semester, HIS 339 African American History and ENGL 220 Introduction to African American Literature fill to capacity. Students from all cultural backgrounds understand that Civil Rights movements led by people of the African Diaspora serve as templates for cultivating cultural pride and building successful coalitions to resist unjust governments. The participation of Black people in social justice movements in the West is only half of the story. The purpose of the Africana Studies Minor is to provide our students with the opportunity to develop an interdisciplinary and global understanding of the complex histories and diverse experiences of African people and their descendants. The courses in this minor will expand the worldview of students so that they can move beyond the limitations of Western thought about Blackness, migration, community, and human rights.⁵³

Valethia Watkins and Mario Beatty from Howard University's Department of Afro-American Studies assisted in developing the minor by meeting with Monroe during the spring of 2020. Watkins and Beatty provided proposal suggestions, referenced key books and articles in Black Studies, and sent curriculum resources including syllabi.⁵⁴ Monroe designed the Introduction to Africana Studies course to mirror the one taught by Africana Studies professors at Howard. The collaboration

was just what Trinity students had envisioned in the 1970s. With the help of Howard's scholars, Trinity students who enroll in Introduction to Africana Studies can discuss the general intellectual genealogy of the discipline, know the importance of Mbongi,⁵⁵ understand the Africana Studies Framework, and more. Furthermore, Trinity students who have adopted the minor are encouraged to take courses in Afro-American Studies at Howard and possibly take advantage of the long list of African languages offered. At Trinity, Introduction to Africana Studies and courses with the designation "AFST" are housed within the Global Affairs Department, however, these courses are a part of the College of Arts and Sciences General Education curriculum. Each undergraduate student is required to complete the General Education checklist and can select from a variety of courses including Africana Studies.

Several established courses at Trinity include content pertinent to Black studies, such as Twentieth Century Civil Rights Movement, African American Liberation Movements, Literature of the African Diaspora, and a seminar on Toni Morrison. New courses have been created since the spring of 2020 to complement the growing Africana Studies minor and concentration. The new courses include Afro-LatinX Literature, Global Hip-Hop, and African-Centered Psychology. Internship opportunities were created for students at the African American Civil War Museum and the Africa Faith and Justice Network. New courses on African Spirituality, The Black Church, Black Internationalism, and The Black Radical Tradition are scheduled for 2023. In addition, the curriculum for the Honors program at Trinity was revised to place emphasis on social justice. Its new student orientation features a scavenger hunt that introduces students to notable Black women activists Fannie Lou Hamer, Shirley Chisholm, and the founders of the Black Lives Matter Movement.

Prior to the creation of the Africana Studies minor, Monroe and other faculty provided students with ongoing opportunities to immerse themselves in African and Diasporan history, culture, and ideas. Students went on field trips to the African American Civil War Museum, the National Museum of African American History and Culture, and prominent, local Black neighborhoods and landmarks to supplement their classroom learning. Special events were held on campus to promote Black history. Similar to the film events hosted by the Black Student Alliance in the 1990s, students watched a special screening of the documentary *Invisible Warriors* in February 2020. Jamal Watson, the executive editor for *Diverse: Issues in Higher Education*, serves as Director of Strategic Communication and Public Relations and

Journalism at Trinity. He has brought Reverend Al Sharpton, Cornel West, Yamiche Alcindor, Ibram X. Kendi, Ilyasah Shabazz and a list of noteworthy speakers to campus and via Zoom, during the COVID-19 pandemic. From March 16-17, 2022, the Global Affairs Department hosted a Mellon symposium titled, “Global Perspectives on Race and Racism.” To promote the Africana Studies minor, Monroe organized two sessions titled, “Rhythms, Roots, and Resistance in the Africana World” and “African Americans and Africa: Race in a Global Context.”⁵⁶

Affiliated Africana Studies faculty and students continue to initiate creative projects. HerStory, an oral history project launched in the fall of 2021, is capturing the history of integration and the evolution of Africana Studies at Trinity. This project consists of three research areas. The first focuses on the experiences of the oldest living Black graduates from the College of Arts and Sciences (CAS). Collecting the narratives of Latinx graduates is the second area of focus. The interviews within each of these areas will be categorized chronologically. Documenting how student experiences change across time and space is an important part of the project. The third and final component consists of interviews with alumnae who do not fall into either of the previous categories. These include white, Asian, and Indigenous students, and those who do not wish to be racially categorized. CAS undergraduate students enrolled in Joshua Wright’s independent study course (HIST 497) conducted the first round of interviews in the fall of 2021. Those students presented their findings at the 2022 Mid-Atlantic Regional Conference of Phi Alpha Theta held at The Catholic University of America. All digitized recordings will be housed at Trinity’s Sr. Helen Sheehan Library under the oversight of university librarian Trisha Smith. HerStory falls under the umbrella of President McGuire’s Trinity History Project and Driving Actions for Racial Equity (DARE) initiative to uncover and document Trinity’s evolution at the undergraduate level since integration and its continued efforts to promote racial equity and inclusivity. Kimberly F. Monroe has been tasked with leading the Trinity History Project, which enables faculty and students to collectively uncover Trinity’s history of race, racism, and social justice.

Conclusion

The history of Africana Studies at Trinity Washington University is a complex narrative deserving of more attention. Much like the first Black students at the

University to call for a meaningful education by way of the “Black Mood” column, the Afro-American Society, and the Black Experience Research Committee, contemporary faculty and students are issuing similar calls to action. While many institutions may have created Africana Studies programs or social justice centers in the wake of 2020 protests against police brutality and the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Aubery, Kimberly F. Monroe, with the help of Trinity and Howard University faculty, began the initial meetings and development of the minor in January 2020. Subsequently, on July 16, 2020, President McGuire hosted a virtual faculty panel on Black Lives Matter after the murders of Floyd, Taylor and Aubery. Faculty panelists discussed the role education plays in understanding the history of police brutality. After the panel, a reading list was created encouraging faculty and students to become more informed about these issues.⁵⁷ In addition, McGuire published a blog on Trinity’s website. The topics varied from politics, issues in higher education, and social justice. While many neighboring institutions in D.C. shunned student activism, McGuire not only encouraged students to be involved in social justice movements, but she also contributed to the discussion. Following the 2020 protests, students revived the Black Student Alliance on campus to connect and build community.

With the approval of the Africana Studies minor in 2021, there has been great excitement amongst the student body. In May of 2022, Sholachauntel Shoda and Naomi Jones became the first Africana Studies minor graduates, Nina Payne participated in a short-term study abroad trip to Ghana in summer 2022, and by the fall of 2022 there were eleven declared minors in Africana Studies.

There is still much work to be done at Trinity as it relates to research and preservation of Black Studies documents and the history of Black students and faculty at the institution. For instance, in the archive, there is only one document box dedicated to everything historically Black at Trinity. The box was used to conduct this research and includes records of the Afro-American Society, Black Student Alliance, “Black Experience Report,” and correspondents. After the late 1990s there are not many records highlighting Black student life.

Developing the minor, new courses, and connecting with the Black D.C. community are just a few of the ways Africana Studies professors at Trinity are building on this long institutional history of Black Studies. Africana Studies faculty are encouraging other CAS faculty members to incorporate African-centered topics within

their curriculum and pedagogy. There is also a push for Black Studies aligned programming beyond Black History month. In addition, there is also a need for a Latinx Studies minor. As Trinity and Washington, D.C., become more diverse, each student deserves to learn and appreciate their own history in and outside the classroom.

Notes

¹ Louis V. Miles, “Black Mood: Black Studies,” *Trinity Times*, October 7, 1970.

² In this article, the authors will use Black Studies and Africana Studies interchangeably.

³ Columba Mullaly, *Trinity College, Washington, D.C.: The First Eighty Years, 1897-1977* (Westminster: Christian Classics, 1987).

⁴ Mullaly, *Trinity College*.

⁵ E. Catherine Dunn and Dorothy A. Mohler, eds., *Pioneering Women at The Catholic University of America: Papers Presented at a Centennial Symposium, November 11, 1988* (Hyattsville: International Graphics, 1990), 1-18.

⁶ “Mission and History,” Trinity Washington University, accessed September 9, 2022, <https://discover.trinitydc.edu/mission/>.

⁷ “Mission and History.”

⁸ “Mission and History.”

⁹ Sister Mary Hayes, interview by Joshua K. Wright, June 7, 2022, tape recording, Washington, D.C.

¹⁰ Hayes, interview.

¹¹ Mullaly, *Trinity College*, 369.

¹² Mullaly, *Trinity College*, 369.

¹³ According to a recent discussion between the authors and Jeannette Jackson Clark, the Society was founded in the fall of 1967 and its first president was Beatty Grant Crawls who was in her junior year at Trinity.

¹⁴ Lorraine Brock, “Six Blacks ‘Tell It Like It Is’ in Mini World: Condensing, Paternalistic,” *Trinity Times*, November 2, 1968, 5.

¹⁵ Brock, “Six Blacks,” 5.

¹⁶ Mike Wiley, “Six Blacks ‘Tell It Like It Is’ in Mini World: Condensing, Paternalistic,” *Trinity Times*, November 2, 1968, 5.

¹⁷ Jeanette Jackson, “Six Blacks ‘Tell It Like It Is’ in Mini World: Struggle for Survival,” *Trinity Times*, November 2, 1968.

¹⁸ Lorraine Brock, “Black Mood: On Demands,” *Trinity Times*, March 15, 1969.

¹⁹ Lorraine Brock, “Black Mood: Stagnation Prevails for Another Year,” *Trinity Times*, October 4, 1969, 5.

²⁰ Lorraine Brock, “Black Mood: The Black Experience at Trinity,” *Trinity Times*, May 20, 1970.

²¹ Lorraine Brock, “Black Mood: Stagnation Prevails for Another Year,” *Trinity Times*, October 4, 1969, 5. Miss Washington, later becoming Madame Bâ after marrying a Senegalese diplomat, is an alumna and one of Trinity’s first Black faculty members. Brock goes on to write that during that same year, Trinity goes from having one known Black faculty, to three: Washington Bâ, Mr. Clair, director of Upward Bound, and Mr. Haynes, part-time Economics professor.

²² “Trinity Expands Programs: Howard Interchange Could Operate for Fall Semester,” *Trinity Times*, March 29, 1969, 6.

²³ Black Student Alliance Box, 1970s Folder, Trinity Washington University Archives, Sr. Helen Sheehan Library, Washington, D.C.

²⁴ Black Student Alliance Box, 1970s Folder.

²⁵ Black Student Alliance Box, 1970s Folder.

²⁶ Abdul Alkalimat, *The History of Black Studies* (London: Pluto Press, 2021), 12.

²⁷ Black Student Alliance Box, 1990s Folder, Trinity Washington University Archives, Sr. Helen Sheehan Library, Washington, D.C.

²⁸ Black Student Alliance Box, 1990s Folder.

²⁹ Black Student Alliance Box, 1990s Folder.

³⁰ President Patricia McGuire, Memo to Trinity College, May 3, 1994, Trinity Washington University Archives, Sr. Helen Sheehan Library, Washington, D.C.

³¹ McGuire, Memo to Trinity College.

³² McGuire, Memo to Trinity College.

³³ McGuire, Memo to Trinity College.

³⁴ Black Student Alliance Box, 1990s Folder.

³⁵ Jarvis R. Givens, *Fugitive Pedagogy: Carter G. Woodson and the Art of Black Teaching* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2021).

³⁶ Black Student Alliance Box, 1990s Folder.

³⁷ Black Student Alliance Box, 1990s Folder.

³⁸ Black Student Alliance Box, 1990s Folder.

³⁹ Black Student Alliance Box, 1990s Folder.

⁴⁰ Black Student Alliance Box, 1990s Folder.

⁴¹ Black Student Alliance Box, 1990s Folder.

⁴² Black Student Alliance Box, 1968 Folder, Trinity Washington University Archives, Sr. Helen Sheehan Library, Washington, D.C.

⁴³ Black Student Alliance Box, 1968 Folder.

⁴⁴ Sylvia Washington Bâ, interview by Salena Geahwie, December 2, 2021, HerStory Collection, Trinity Washington University Archives, Sr. Helen Sheehan Library, Washington, D.C.

⁴⁵ Bâ, interview.

⁴⁶ Bâ, interview.

⁴⁷ Bâ, interview.

⁴⁸ Bâ, interview.

⁴⁹ Mullaly, *Trinity College*, 213.

⁵⁰ Trinity's undergraduate population includes School of Professional Studies (SPS), College of Arts and Sciences (CAS), Early College Academy (ECA), and The School of Nursing and Health Professions (NHP). Information provided by Trinity Enrollment Services.

⁵¹ "Mission and History," Trinity Washington University, accessed September 9, 2022, <https://discover.trinitydc.edu/mission/>.

⁵² Kimberly F. Monroe formed a committee with Joshua K. Wright and Rewa Burnham to develop the Africana Studies minor at Trinity in spring 2020. Monroe also created a 15 credit Africana Studies concentration for the newly developed Global Affairs Major. Students who select a minor in Africana Studies, are expected to complete 18 credits including the required Introduction to Africana Studies course and one Africana themed English course.

⁵³ "Proposal to Trinity Washington University: College of Arts and Sciences Curriculum and Academic Policy (CAS CAP) for Consideration of the Africana Studies Minor" submitted October 16, 2020.

⁵⁴ Monroe met with Watkins and Beatty in the spring of 2020 to discuss the Africana Studies program at Trinity. Watkins and Beatty provided critical feedback and suggestions on the proposal and the Introduction to Africana Studies course. Howard's Introduction to Afro-American Studies syllabi was provided along with suggestions for course texts. The resources include the Africana Studies Framework created by Black Studies scholar, Greg Carr.

⁵⁵ The word "Mbongi" is taken from the Bantu-Kongo and literally means "house without rooms," (i.e. a house within which privacy has no room). The mbongi [lemba, lusanga, kioto, boko] is a convened space where public investigations and discussions of concerns are held; it is, in less complex words, a "think tank." Kimbwandende Kia Bunseki Fu-Kiau, *African Cosmology of the Bantu-Kongo* (New York: Athelia Henrietta Press, 2001), 58-61.

⁵⁶ “Rhythms, Roots, and Resistance in the Africana World” featured three Black women faculty from Howard University, Natalie Hopkinson, Msia K. Clark, and Aisha Cort. “African Americans and Africa: Race in a Global Context” featured Nemata Blyden, professor of International Affairs and History at George Washington University.

⁵⁷ The “Voices of Trinity: Faculty Speak on Black Lives Matter” program panelists included Kimberly Monroe in History, Jamal Watson in the Strategic Communication and Public Relations Program, Dean Peggy Lewis, Christopher Bishop in Psychology, and Vernon Scott in Criminal Justice. This panel took place on July 16, 2020.

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