

---

Oakwood College Students' Quest for Social Justice before and during the Civil Rights Era

Author(s): Holly Fisher

Source: *The Journal of African American History*, Vol. 88, No. 2, The History of Black Student Activism (Spring, 2003), pp. 110-125

Published by: Association for the Study of African American Life and History

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3559060>

Accessed: 15-02-2017 15:10 UTC

---

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at

<http://about.jstor.org/terms>



*Association for the Study of African American Life and History* is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Journal of African American History*

# OAKWOOD COLLEGE STUDENTS' QUEST FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE BEFORE AND DURING THE CIVIL RIGHTS ERA

by Holly Fisher\*

The Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church is a worldwide, multiracial, and conservative Christian denomination with a well-established educational system that includes Oakwood College, located in Huntsville, Alabama, and founded in 1896 as the denomination's only historically black college. Prior to the U.S. Supreme Court's landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in 1954, Oakwood College students often displayed strong determination and perseverance in organizing their own social and civil rights "movements" within the SDA church. The students occasionally organized demonstrations and even participated in sit-ins and other nonviolent protests in an attempt to eradicate racially discriminatory practices inside and outside the denomination. In the 19th century within the sensitive area of race relations, Seventh-day Adventist leaders opposed slavery, but accepted the practices of segregation and the doctrines of white racial superiority pervasive in the post-Reconstruction era. The conservative SDA tradition in racial matters presented a challenge to the black student activists in the 1930s and the 1960s. This study focuses on the student struggles over civil rights and social justice at Oakwood College. In explaining the social activism of Oakwood College students, it is important to understand the origin of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination, its unique history of race relations, and the purposes for establishing Oakwood College.<sup>1</sup>

## ORIGIN AND FOUNDING OF THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

The Seventh-day Adventist church grew out of an interdenominational movement of the 1840s during the "Second Great Awakening" of religious fervor in the United States.<sup>2</sup> William Miller, an ordained Baptist minister, preached in Low Hampton, New York, and its surrounding cities and towns about "the second coming of Jesus Christ," based on his rigorous study of the book of Daniel in the Old Testament.<sup>3</sup> From his initial preaching at the Baptist Church of Dresden on August 14, 1831, to the fall of 1834, Miller worked as an intermittent speaker in Dresden, New York, Poultney and Pawlet, Vermont, and other towns in the rural areas of the upper Northeast.<sup>4</sup> On September 14, 1833, the congregation of the Baptist Church of Hampton-Whitehall voted to "issue him a license to preach." Likewise, in 1835 he was "credentialed" by several Baptist and other denominational

---

\*Holly Fisher is Historian/Museum Specialist in the Arts and Culture Heritage Division for the National-Capitol Park and Planning Commission, Riverdale, MD.

## OAKWOOD COLLEGE STUDENTS' QUEST FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

clergymen of New York, Vermont, Massachusetts, and Canada. By 1843 he and Joseph Himes, a Millerite minister, issued the first publications of the "Advent Movement," including the *Signs of the Times*, *Glad Tidings*, *Midnight Cry*, and *Advent Chronicle*. However, by 1843 traditional clergymen vehemently opposed the Millerite movement because of its strong adherence to setting a specific date for the return of Jesus Christ. Inevitably, the clergymen gave ultimatums to their membership who became Millerites to either renounce these religious convictions or leave their respective churches. However, the Millerites maintained their beliefs, remained in their churches, and continued to spread their religious message.<sup>5</sup>

It was also during this time that Rev. Miller outlined a series of dates for the "return of Jesus Christ," and as a result, the date October 22, 1844, is generally referred to as the day of the "Great Disappointment."<sup>6</sup> Although Christ did not return, some of the followers re-evaluated the purposes of the movement, and decided that they should emphasize the "second advent of Christ" through evangelism, and not predicting specific dates for the second coming.<sup>7</sup>

Joseph Bates, a Millerite and Sabbatarian (one who worships on Saturday, the biblical Sabbath), issued a pamphlet in 1844 entitled, "The Seventh-Day Sabbath: A Perpetual Sign," that convinced two Millerites, Ellen Gould White and her husband James White, to become Sabbath observers.<sup>8</sup> After the Great Disappointment, the Millerite movement split into three different camps: the proponents of a return date of Christ after 1844, those who believed in promoting a primitive organization of "Evangelical Adventists," and the group known as "Sabbatarians" who espoused the teaching of the Biblical seventh-day Sabbath.<sup>9</sup> After several Millerite conferences and meetings in 1848, the three theological groups merged, and became known as the "Sabbathkeepers" or believers in the Second Advent.<sup>10</sup> Without a formal name, James White and Joseph Bates organized the group into several "conferences" in the New England and New York areas, similar to the Methodist denomination. In 1860 the name "Seventh-day Adventist" was chosen because it denoted the fundamental belief of the seventh-day Sabbath and the second return of Jesus Christ. By 1863 the name was legally adopted and the group formally organized as the Seventh-day Adventist Church with the headquarters in Battle Creek, Michigan.<sup>11</sup>

## THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH AND RACE RELATIONS

Race relations within the denomination had two major influences: 1) the contemporary sociopolitical interpretations of the white SDA leaders, and 2) the theological concepts based on the teachings of early denomination founders, specifically Ellen G. White.<sup>12</sup> In 1865 at the end of the Civil War, the "General Conference," the governing unit of the SDA church, recognized that a missionary field had opened in the South among formerly enslaved African Americans.<sup>13</sup> However, SDA leaders' racial attitudes reflected the times, and D. M. Canright urged that the Adventists follow the principle of "separate churches" for the blacks and whites.<sup>14</sup> The practice of separating the races in religious services began in most Christian denominations well before the Civil War.

At the SDA General Conference meetings in 1877 and 1885 heated discussions took place over southern whites' prejudices and practices.<sup>15</sup> In 1889 the first recorded ordained

## JOURNAL OF AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY

African American minister Charles M. Kinney questioned the validity of the practice known as the "principle of separation" adopted in 1889.<sup>16</sup> During the 1891 General Conference, Ellen White presented to the church leaders her pamphlet, *Our Duty to the Colored People*.<sup>17</sup> Although she had discussed social equality in some of her earlier writings, the leaders focused on passages written later that reflected the secular view among white Americans that African Americans should be considered "second-class citizens."<sup>18</sup> Though the General Conference was continually confronted by the African American communicants, it hesitated to formulate a plan that dealt with the race question. Consequently, the African American membership remained a separate and unequal entity within the church.<sup>19</sup>

The SDA leaders often cited one of the writings of Ellen White, stating that, "We cannot lay down a definitive line to be followed in dealing with this subject," as a foundation for their adherence to segregation and racial discrimination.<sup>20</sup> However, after much consternation from its African American members, the General Conference in 1909 established the Negro Department, which was to support evangelistic work in the African American community.<sup>21</sup> Nine years after its establishment, an ordained minister, William H. Green, an accomplished black attorney who had argued cases before the U.S. Supreme Court, was appointed to the post of Department Secretary. Pastor Green held that position for ten years until his untimely death in 1928.<sup>22</sup>

These early debates over the race question at General Conference meetings and the establishment of the Negro Department were significant; however, four fundamental SDA theological beliefs greatly influenced the church leaders in the area of race relations: apocalyptic historical eschatology, sectarian ecclesiology, radical deterministic doctrine of God, and the "free-will" image of man.<sup>23</sup> In many ways these theological concepts provide historical context for examining the responses and participation of Oakwood College students in civil rights activities.

The first concept, apocalyptic historical eschatology, is the belief in the imminent return of Jesus Christ and the destruction of the world as espoused by the Millerite followers. Elder Calvin Rock declared that this theological interpretation is the belief in a "catastrophic destruction of the world, when the glorious dawn of the next life will begin." As a result, early Adventists did not concentrate on social ills because of the imminent return of Jesus Christ; hence temporal efforts to resolve social problems were seldom considered. Accordingly, early Adventists urged believers to be ready for the second coming.<sup>24</sup>

Second is sectarian ecclesiology, which is the belief that Christians are not to be conformed to a secular world. Rather Christians are "to come out of Babylon, a biblical symbol for false religious systems, an apostate Christendom."<sup>25</sup> Early church leaders often admonished the members not to involve themselves in secular social issues. In a definitive statement on the relationship between this concept and the race question, Ellen White wrote that, "We are to avoid entering into contention over the problem of the color line. If this question is much agitated, difficulties will arise that will consume much precious time to adjust. We cannot lay down a definitive line to be followed in dealing with this subject."<sup>26</sup>

The radical deterministic view refers to the systematic belief that God directly intervenes in human history. According to Ellen White, the omnipotence of God is revealed

## OAKWOOD COLLEGE STUDENTS' QUEST FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

as He directs history. "In other words, man was created equal by the Creator and at His appointed time, he [man] will receive his portion," declared political scientist Gary Marx.<sup>27</sup>

The fourth concept, "free-will" image of man, maintains that God has a specific will for man.<sup>28</sup> According to social scientists Charles Glock and Rodney Stark, this particular concept explains the conservatism of the Adventist denomination.<sup>29</sup> Since the condition of man will not change until God "moves" to change a particular plight of a specific group or person, the need for a formal plan to deal with social issues such as black-white relations is not considered paramount.<sup>30</sup>

In contrast, black liberation theologian James Cone and others have portrayed God as a source of freedom for oppressed groups or individuals as described in the Old Testament with God's freeing of the Hebrews who had been captured and enslaved by the Egyptians in ancient times.<sup>31</sup> However, Ellen White envisioned the role of God quite differently. White argued that, "The religion of the Bible recognizes no caste or color.

It ignores rank, wealth, worldly honor. God estimates men as men; with Him character decides their worth."<sup>32</sup> Theologians who promoted "Black liberation theology" and secular movements for social justice claimed that Jesus Christ is the Savior from both spiritual and temporal oppression. Thus, the belief in God possesses a dual mission in the lives and experiences of many African American Christians.<sup>33</sup> These contrasting theological concepts came into conflict on the campus of Oakwood College, the historically black institution founded by the SDA church.

### THE FOUNDING OF OAKWOOD COLLEGE

At the end of the Civil War, many philanthropic organizations provided aid to the newly-freed African Americans in the South. However, the Seventh-day Adventist church did not enter the South to work among the African Americans until the 1890s when prompted by the strong admonitions of Ellen White. On March 21, 1891, White announced at the twenty-ninth General Conference session that, "it is the plan of God to work unceasingly to bring salvation to the colored race."<sup>34</sup> In 1895 the church leadership responded to her declaration and formed a committee composed of the president of the denomination, Elder O. A. Olsen, and two others, Elders George A. Irwin and H. Lindsay, to select a suitable site for a school for "colored people."<sup>35</sup> The committee members decided on the city of Huntsville in northern Alabama. Huntsville was chosen because it is steeped in local history as the oldest English-settled town in Alabama; and it serves as the county seat and municipal center for Madison County.<sup>36</sup>

The Adventist church acquired the property on January 1, 1896. Mr. and Mrs. Grant Adkins were the first caretakers of the school. The name chosen for the school was "Oakwood Industrial School" because of the large numbers of oak trees on the site and the white SDA church leaders' belief that industrial education was most appropriate for southern blacks.<sup>37</sup> The school officially opened on November 16, 1896, with four habitable buildings on three hundred and eighty acres of land, four faculty members, and sixteen students enrolled.<sup>38</sup> Even though the school was established for African Americans, Solon M. Jacobs, a white minister and educator from Iowa, served as the school's first principal.<sup>39</sup> The school's curriculum followed the contemporary notion that black industrial education should emphasize agriculture, carpentry, masonry, domestic service,

## JOURNAL OF AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY

and horticulture.<sup>40</sup> However, within a few years of its establishment, the name was changed to the "Oakwood Manual Training School," and in 1917, it became "Oakwood Junior College."<sup>41</sup>

Although white church leaders shared southern whites' belief that industrial education was best suited for southern African Americans, in 1931 northern black SDA Pastor Owen A. Troy of Shiloh SDA Church in Chicago, Illinois, wrote to the president of the General Conference, J. L. McElhany, that, "Oakwood needs building up and if we fail to bring in men who can do this, [such as Arna Bontemps], we cannot hope for the school to have the support that it should have." Unfortunately, white church leaders still believed that African Americans were "intellectually inferior" and would not benefit from a liberal arts curriculum.<sup>42</sup> However, Oakwood College students in the 1930s and the 1960s would challenge the idea that African Americans only needed an industrial education and accepted second-class status in American society.

### THE 1931 STUDENT PROTEST

When the school became a junior college in 1917, increasing numbers of northern African Americans began to enroll. By the late 1920s and early 1930s, some students started complaining about the conditions at the school, calling it a "plantation" because of the heavy work schedules, low wages, and the inability to accumulate academic credit due to the work loads.<sup>43</sup> Prior to the Oakwood College student strike of 1931, there were many student rebellions at other historically black southern colleges. In 1914 students at Alabama's Talladega College staged a strike to challenge white paternalism and the mistreatment of black students by white faculty members.<sup>44</sup> Likewise, in 1918 Elsie Graves, an Oakwood Junior College student, led a two-day strike against the school's all-white administration. In 1931, however, under a committee known as the "Excelsior Society," several students at Oakwood College formulated a plan calling for the appointment of a competent African American as the college president, African American faculty members, as well as more emphasis on liberal arts education rather than vocational training.<sup>45</sup>

In the words of a former Oakwood College student from the 1930s, students called the practice of "separating the races" on campus "an overseer plantation relationship" and many students felt insecure, as if they were being watched continuously.<sup>46</sup> One student, A. V. Pinkney, reported the practice to the head of the SDA Negro Department, William H. Green. Most students opposed the principle and practice of separating the races as well as its ethical validity and even the biblical principle that supported such a practice. But in 1931 several members of the "Excelsior Society" developed a secret plan, initially referred to as "P.O.T." (Put Out Tucker, the college president), to protest the conditions on Oakwood's campus. In October 1931 the plan was modified by Alan Anderson to protest against the custom of separating the races, instead of its being a personal attack on the college president. The Excelsior Society and the female members, known as the "helpers," also sought the support and spiritual counsel of "progressive" black SDA clergy, specifically Elder Owen A. Troy, Sr., of Chicago, Illinois, and Elder George E. Peters of Harlem, New York.<sup>47</sup>

The protest leaders decided on October 8, 1931, as the date to present their "demands," the day the Oakwood College Board of Trustees was scheduled to meet on campus.<sup>48</sup> At the

## OAKWOOD COLLEGE STUDENTS' QUEST FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

time the board meeting began, student leader Samuel Rashford announced at the Bell Tower, located at the center of the campus, that "there will be no chapel this morning, no classes and no work until further notice."<sup>49</sup> From the Bell Tower, students were alerted about the next series of activities, including the sealing off of the campus from outside forces, such as the Huntsville City Police, and the placing of monitors at the entrance of each building to ensure that students were informed about the strike.<sup>50</sup>

In the effort to maintain the support of the student body, the strike leaders held pep rallies, made speeches about the situation, and had worship. They also read a letter sent to the General Conference stating,

We are tired of lying. In view of the fact that conditions at Oakwood Junior College are not favorable to mental, physical, and spiritual advancement, we the student body, are appealing to our interested brethren in the field for help. Too long, Oakwood has had to feel the brunt of despotic rules. Too long, we have been living under conditions entirely contrary to God's plan of operation for Christian institutions.<sup>51</sup>

By nightfall students assembled at the water fountain near the Bell Tower and sang, "We Shall Stand the Storm," and other songs that spoke to the need to stand up against injustice.<sup>52</sup> Upon learning about the movement on campus, the president of the board of trustees, Elder N. A. Ashton, invited the strike leaders to meet the board of trustees in the chapel. The student strike group chose Stewart Brantley to present the "demands" to the board. After Brantley's presentation, the board informed the strike leaders that, "No action would take place prior to the commencement of the [General Conference] Fall Council meeting later that year."<sup>53</sup>

The African American trustees later asked the strike leaders to moderate their demands. Thirty-one males and sixty-four female students assembled in Irwin Hall, the women's dormitory, to resolve the matter.<sup>54</sup> At this point the strike leaders and the students relinquished some of their resolve and decided to wait for the General Conference Fall Council meeting.<sup>55</sup> As a result, the board of trustees designated a "grievance committee" of two white and two black Oakwood College faculty members—Professors A. N. Atteberry, Otis Edwards, Arna Bontemps, E. Counsell—and President J. A. Tucker to hear petitions and statements, and hopefully resolve some of the students' complaints about college management, policies, and conditions.<sup>56</sup>

Though the grievance committee was established, some of the black leaders within the General Conference, especially Frank L. Peterson, secretary of the Negro Department, commented that "the students were acting rashly and not fully cognizant of the true nature of the church and General Conference nor the significance of their actions."<sup>57</sup> Responding to the students' "demands," General Conference officials wrote to President Tucker that, "it would not tolerate nor comprehend that students would attempt to dictate to them proper modes and policies in which to operate the school."<sup>58</sup> Likewise, the president of the Southeastern Union Conference, W. H. Heckman, and Oakwood trustee Elder Ashton, also president of Southern Union Conference, declared to General Conference officials and other SDA church leaders that "there would [be] a dilemma if the 'colored race' insist on asserting themselves."<sup>59</sup> In a flurry of correspondence between Elder Ashton, Elder C. H. Watson, president of the General Conference, and the Oakwood College president, white

## JOURNAL OF AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY

church leaders freely expressed their belief that, "coloreds could not supervise nor manage themselves."<sup>60</sup> As a gesture to end this student "uprising," General Conference officials in 1932 offered the positions of "bookkeeper" and "Dean of Students" to African American men, but the position of college president was initially extended to and declined by two white men, Professor D. A. Ochs and Professor Leon Cobbs.<sup>61</sup> Prof. Ochs wrote to M. E. Kern, a General Conference official, to formally document his uneasiness with the invitation to be the next college president.<sup>62</sup> During the summer of 1932, the offer was extended to African American educator James L. Moran, the principal of Harlem Academy in New York City.<sup>63</sup> Even though the presidency was extended to an African American, General Conference officials wrote to James Oss in July 1932, that they wanted him to "be the controller and business manager [at Oakwood College]. The Board has arranged to put in a colored faculty with Professor J. L. Moran acting as president. The business affairs of the institution, however, are to be administered by a white controller and business manager, who would be the link between the school board and the General Conference."<sup>64</sup>

Although the presidency of Oakwood Junior College was now in the hands of Moran, the ousted college president J. A. Tucker was adamant that the "agitators" must be "dismissed" for a time.<sup>65</sup> Five of the most influential and prominent strike leaders were expelled—Alan Anderson, Walter W. Fordham, Samuel Rashford, Ernest Moseley, and Herman Murphy.<sup>66</sup> However, the actions of the student protesters resulted in a major precedent for Oakwood Junior College, the appointment of the first African American president, as well as a predominantly African American faculty. Moreover, President Moran oversaw the elevation of the school to senior college status in 1944.<sup>67</sup>

### OAKWOOD COLLEGE STUDENTS AND CIVIL RIGHTS PROTESTS IN HUNTSVILLE, ALABAMA

Throughout the first half of the 20th century, African American SDA members continually agitated for acceptance, inclusion, and equal status within the denomination. The results were the establishment of Oakwood College, the Negro ("Colored" in the 1940s) Department, and the increased numbers of African American General Conference officials and ordained ministers. However, the SDA church in the 1960s was still very conservative and guarded in its policies on race relations. Its language in official statements was clearly conservative, and while acknowledging the external pressures to integrate, the denomination was slow to change its policies and practices in its educational and medical institutions.<sup>68</sup>

Civil rights activism on the part of Oakwood students was always framed within the ideological context of the conservative religious beliefs and doctrines of the Seventh-day Adventist church. Though some participated in sit-ins, prayer-ins, and various civil rights marches, students' activism tended to be moderate rather than confrontational. More often than not, the actions of other high school and college students in and around Huntsville often provoked heated debates and discussions on Oakwood's campus among students and faculty members. However, official SDA denominational histories do not dwell on the Civil Rights Movement or the participation of Oakwood College students in nonviolent protests. Rather, the students' participation in protests was on an individual rather than a collective basis. Consequently, individual students insisted that their support for black civil rights

## OAKWOOD COLLEGE STUDENTS' QUEST FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

was in the form of attendance at a political rally or even completing their collegiate education. Until now the perspectives and activities of the Oakwood students have not been part of the historical record.

The Civil Rights Movement arrived in Huntsville, Alabama, in January 1962 with sit-in protests to desegregate restaurants and public restrooms.<sup>69</sup> At that time the NAACP and the Congress for Racial Equality (CORE) had come under attack from southern politicians and legislators and as a result, the African American community in Huntsville created an umbrella organization, the Community Service Committee (CSC), under the leadership of Rev. Ezekiel Bell, to organize protest activities.<sup>70</sup> Although white city officials established a "biracial committee" to facilitate communication between the white and black communities, Dr. Sonny Hereford recalled that, "the conditions were very hostile, with no mixing and no type of cooperation between the races."<sup>71</sup> Likewise, individual African Americans in Huntsville were very active in the struggle by launching voter registration drives and working closely with the civil rights organizations, such as the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and CORE.<sup>72</sup>

The actual participation of Oakwood students began with their attendance at a political program to be held on campus and sponsored by the CSC in which Dr. Martin Luther King was to be the guest speaker.<sup>73</sup> While attitudes among whites in the city as well as within the denomination were hostile to the request, the board of trustees convened to discuss the possibility of Dr. King speaking at Oakwood.<sup>74</sup> After much deliberation, the board granted the CSC the use of the gymnasium because at the time it was the largest auditorium in the area. At the same time, the trustees were adamant in stating that the speech was under the sponsorship of the CSC, not the Seventh-day Adventist church.<sup>75</sup>

Dr. King's speech was highlighted on the front page of *The Spreading Oak*, the Oakwood student newspaper, noting that 2,000 people attended the program. The article mentioned three challenges issued by Dr. King: (1) to develop a world perspective, (2) to strive for excellence, (3) to continue to engage in creative nonviolent protests.<sup>76</sup> Although the program was sponsored by the CSC, Oakwood College president Dr. Garland Millet and several students participated on the program.<sup>77</sup> The fact that 2,000 people attended Dr. King's address was significant, and the audience was quite diverse, due to the presence of personnel from the federal Redstone Arsenal.<sup>78</sup>

Though some students recalled their commitment for social justice began with that political rally, Oster Paul, a Caribbean student, discussed in *The Spreading Oak* his decision *not* to participate in the Civil Rights Movement. Paul stated that, "No one is ignorant of the fight for racial freedom and equality being fought in the U.S. . . . A Negro leader comes to Huntsville to find out why two Negro colleges in Huntsville do not join in his fight—religious principles is the answer."<sup>79</sup> However, according to General Conference official Elder Edward E. Cleveland, "many Black pastors and SDA members secretly involved themselves in the Civil Rights Movement and the NAACP organization," because the official position of the SDA denomination was not to participate, or to advocate participation by its members in civil rights protests.<sup>80</sup> Elder Cleveland recalled that the "General Conference knew better than to restrict the students' access to Dr. King's speech. However, [the Conference] did set boundaries as to what could be said and done during the speech."<sup>81</sup>

## JOURNAL OF AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY

Although the official position from the General Conference was "non-participation," Oakwood students still received news about the protests through the black-owned radio station WEUP, even though the owners were sometimes forced by local authorities to censor the reporting on civil rights matters. Most former students did not recall local television or news reports on civil rights protests. At the same time, outside influences, such as a television or radio, were closely monitored and were not allowed in dormitory rooms. African American ministers who were faculty members or other denominational officials recalled that Oakwood students "were isolated from [their] sister school, Alabama A&M College, and other area schools because of the religious belief about social association with others outside of the Church. Therefore, the Oakwood College administration was hesitant about allowing interaction with other schools and their students."<sup>82</sup> Elder Cleveland declared that, "the college instituted non-verbal or 'subtle hindrances' so that students would be fully cognizant of the stance of the church regarding participation in the Civil Rights Movement. Frequently, many students were not aware of the latest events or actions" in the civil rights arena.<sup>83</sup>

Interviews conducted with former faculty members who were present on the campus in the early 1960s were influenced by their professional involvement in the denomination, and their views on civil rights protests tended to be conservative. However, the former students' responses to the questions ranged from timidity to bold assertions, and varied according to the region of the country, gender, age, political knowledge, and personal reactions to the overall protest movement. The women interviewed provided a greater diversity in their comments than the men. Oftentimes, the factor that determined if a female student participated in protests was whether or not she had the opportunity to leave the campus and spend time in the city.<sup>84</sup> Most of the female students were not accustomed to the social conditions in the South since the majority of them were from northern cities and from home environments that protected them from racist practices. However, since women were attending school in the Deep South, they mentioned that they wanted to participate in the Civil Rights Movement.

Sexist beliefs and practices also hindered women from actively participating in civil rights protests. Most of the women mentioned that "there was a particular 'place' for women, and to be vocal and highly expressive was not an option."<sup>85</sup> Consistently, the women admitted that their "place" was to be in the home (if married) or earning a living to be independent of parents, and not to be involved in "social matters" that had no bearing on their "spiritual life." The women who belonged to the school choir recalled that Dr. King praised their singing and musical style, while he "blasted" the college administrators and nonparticipating students for not joining in the civil rights struggle. Frequently, women mentioned that they were strongly admonished, "not to make waves, but maintain good Christian and Adventist ethics."<sup>86</sup>

Male students at Oakwood College at that time had different experiences and perceptions. Male students had more freedom and were given passes frequently to go into town. The limitations on the male students were somewhat different. For instance, most of the male students recalled that faculty members generally did not share national and local news with them. However, some males mentioned that several professors would "pull them aside" and discuss certain current events with them individually.<sup>87</sup>

## OAKWOOD COLLEGE STUDENTS' QUEST FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

Some male students were involved in sit-ins, store boycotts, and the attempt to integrate a local white SDA church.<sup>88</sup> The most frustrating experiences for the men were the futile attempts to integrate white SDA churches in the area.<sup>89</sup> The white members were extremely hostile and frequently would change the order of Sabbath School (comparable to Sunday School) and the regular worship hour (11 o'clock) so the students would miss the service. At other times, the white deacons and other church officials called the local police to "efficiently" remove the students from church property. Many white SDA segregationists were extremely hostile toward their black "brethren."<sup>90</sup> One of the male students commented that "the white SDA church shifted their [service] times, so Oakwood College students could not attend worship. . . . Even the local NAACP chapter was aware of the problems experienced by Oakwood College students in the white churches."<sup>91</sup>

"Cooperative coalitions" existed between Alabama A&M College and Oakwood students. The Oakwood students remembered that the politically active (male) A&M College students attempted to compel them to participate in local protest activities.<sup>92</sup> Plans to support students from A&M College in their protests activities were often thwarted by impromptu visits from black SDA officials, such as Elder Frank L. Bland, who discouraged any participation in civil rights protests.<sup>93</sup> Thus, Oakwood students who participated did so on the basis of personal principles. Other male students demonstrated their personal commitments by forming "activist bands" that traveled around the city and attempted to be served at businesses that catered only to whites.<sup>94</sup> One former student commented that, "Open discussion about the Civil Rights Movement at Oakwood resulted in a few people being named 'activists' in the classrooms, assembly halls, and even around the dinner table."<sup>95</sup>

To participate in the social protests was to make a personal decision to reject segregation and racial inequality. Meanwhile, the visits by high church officials and the strong verbal and nonverbal policy calling for nonparticipation coming from the college administration greatly limited civil rights awareness and activism. Nevertheless, a few male students recalled that occasionally an "activist" on campus openly opposed a General Conference official or an Oakwood College administrator.

It appears that in the 1960s many Oakwood College students held a dualistic concept of black liberation and the role of Jesus Christ. Thus, the conservative theology did not deter some students from combining aspects of the theological doctrines of the denomination with their personal beliefs about racial equality. Although they were admonished by the school administrators not to form activist coalitions with other schools, many Oakwood students joined with those from Alabama A&M State College and participated in local demonstrations. Local activists transported some Oakwood students to white SDA churches, while others were part of "activist bands" to desegregate local lunch counters. It is clear that black SDA students of the 1960s were very conscious of their dual mission in life—to spread the gospel, as well as fight against social injustice outside and within the denomination.

## CONCLUSION

In the 1920s Oakwood Junior College students were greatly affected by the political and cultural changes the "New Negro" demanded at other educational institutions.

## JOURNAL OF AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY

Although Oakwood students did not protest the strict discipline or the policy of required attendance at religious services, they resented the lack of academic courses at the collegiate level. They grew weary of working long hours and not being able to accumulate academic credit hours toward graduation because of their workload.

The demand for black self-determination hit Oakwood Junior College in the 1930s. By their solid support for the strike leaders, the students demonstrated their commitment to an improved curriculum, which subsequently resulted in a change in the educational philosophy and practices for African Americans within the denomination. Though it is evident that some of the protests at other institutions were aimed at white paternalism, the Oakwood students of the 1930s openly challenged the practice of segregation on campus as a moral issue to be addressed by church leaders, as well as the board of trustees. The action of the strike leaders in writing to and involving progressive northern African American ministers was a way to inform the entire denomination about the conditions at Oakwood College. This prompted local congregations to agitate for change and express their displeasure to the ministers, who communicated the dissatisfaction to church leaders. The tactic of writing to progressive ministers worked well because they proposed to church leaders that a survey of the conditions at other institutions be made to see how Oakwood College (and the overall denomination) measured up against other black schools with regard to their social policies. And northern black SDA ministers would point out that Tougaloo College in Mississippi, Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee, and other black colleges did not practice racial separation on their campuses.

In the black student rebellions of the 1920s, one of the major objectives of the strike leaders was to transform the school's curriculum in order to adequately train them for professional careers outside and within the denomination—as ministers, teachers, and other professionals. Many students understood that industrial training alone would limit them professionally. Also, the 1930s student of Oakwood Junior College recognized the need for black faculty with advanced degrees and a broad professional experience to serve as role models. Moreover, the students of the 1930s did not want to be educated on a campus that functioned within a vacuum, disconnected from its political, social, economic, and cultural surroundings, and the changes taking place at black colleges throughout the country.

The demonstrations and protests by Oakwood College students in the 1930s and the 1960s dispel the myth that African American Seventh-day Adventists conformed to and accepted social injustice within or outside the denomination. More importantly, the conservatism within the denomination did not immobilize African American students. The actions taken by students in the past can serve as precedents for contemporary Oakwood College students who wish to organize or participate in social movements to end racial bigotry, sexism, and social injustice. It is clear that agitation and activism is a part of the cultural, social, and religious legacy for African American students at Oakwood College. According to one Oakwood student from the 1960s, "Adventist young people must be educated by the legacy of those who sacrificed to join the civil rights struggle, as well as those who did not take the risk."<sup>96</sup> In other words, SDA young people need to be educated and informed about the actions of Oakwood College students of the 1930s and 1960s, and how they altered the nature of race relations within the institutional structures of the SDA church.

# OAKWOOD COLLEGE STUDENTS' QUEST FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>The founders of the SDA church were abolitionists—though not active in the movement. Some of their sentiments are expressed in a variety of denominational sources. Though they believed that every human being is a Child of God, they still adhered to the social policy of that era in thinking that Blacks were "beneath" whites.

<sup>2</sup>LeRoy E. Froom, *The Prophetic Faith of the Fathers: The Historical Development of Prophetic Interpretation* (Washington, DC, 1954), 466. See also Anne Devereaux Jordan, *The Seventh-Day Adventists: A History* (New York, 1988), 29; T. Housel Jemison, *A Prophet Among You* (Mountain View, CA, 1955), 187–89; *SDA Commentary Encyclopedia*, vol. 10 (Washington, DC, 1976), 892–98 for approximate date of the Millerite movement.

<sup>3</sup>Jordan, *The Seventh-Day Adventists*, 30. For further information regarding the various signs outlined in Daniel, see Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Washington, DC, 1888), 328, 332–35. See also Matthew 24:29; Revelation 6:12, 13–17 New International Version (NIV).

<sup>4</sup>Jordan, *The Seventh-Day Adventists*, 32. See also Froom, *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers*, 487, 503–4. Eventually, Miller journeyed to New England, eastern Canada, Ohio, and Maryland in his early years of preaching. Later, he and a band of Millerite ministers would travel the eastern seaboard, Ohio, and then on to the West, as well as Canada and overseas in the 1830s and the 1840s.

<sup>5</sup>Froom, *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers*, 499.

<sup>6</sup>White, *Great Controversy*, 332–37. The early believers called it the "Great Disappointment" because of the failure of Miller's prediction.

<sup>7</sup>Jordan, *The Seventh-Day Adventists*, 37.

<sup>8</sup>For further information regarding the acceptance of the biblical Sabbath by Joseph Bates and the Whites see *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 10 (Washington, DC, [n.d.]), 1250.

<sup>9</sup>Froom, *Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers*, 839–40. The Sabbatarians noted were Joseph Bates, James and Ellen White, Hiram Edson—all of whom were evangelists in the Millerite movement.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.* See also Jemison, *A Prophet Among You*, 200, for the names of some of the founders of the SDA church, who were T. M. Preble, Frederick Wheeler, James White, Hiram Edson, Ellen G. White, and Joseph Bates.

<sup>11</sup>Jordan, *Seventh-Day Adventists*, 60.

<sup>12</sup>Jemison, *A Prophet Among You*, 199.

<sup>13</sup>Richard W. Schwarz, *Light Bearers to the Remnant: Denominational History Textbook for SDA College Classes*. (Mountain View, CA, 1979), 233.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, 234.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup>Pastor C. M. Kinney to Elder R. M. Kilgore, 2 October 1889, in Calvin B. Rock, "Institutional Loyalty versus Racial Freedom: The Dilemma of Black Seventh-Day Adventist Leadership," Ph.D. diss., Vanderbilt University, 1984, 27. For additional information see Delbert Baker, ed., *Make Us One: Celebrating Spiritual Unity in the Midst of Cultural Diversity*, (Boise, ID, 1995), 88.

<sup>17</sup>Arthur L. White, ed., *Survey of the Ellen G. White Writings Concerning the Racial Question*, Special Collection of Ellen G. White Writings, Eva B. Dykes Library, Oakwood College, Huntsville, Alabama. See also Baker, *Make Us One*, 92.

<sup>18</sup>Ellen G. White, *Our Duty to the Colored People* (Washington, DC, 1891), 6, as cited in the *Survey of the E. G. White Writings Concerning Racial Questions*, 3.

<sup>19</sup>White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9 (Washington, DC, 1909), 213.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup>Schwarz, *Light Bearers to the Remnant*, 564. See also Rock, "Institutional Loyalty versus Racial Freedom," 23. See also Louis B. Reynolds, *We Have Tomorrow: The Story of Seventh-day Adventists with an African American Heritage* (Washington, DC, 1984). The author discusses briefly the evangelistic work that was started in Vicksburg, Mississippi, by Ellen White's son, Edson White, in the 1880s and the 1890s prior to the establishment of Oakwood School.

<sup>22</sup>Schwarz, *Light Bearers to the Remnant*, 564. See also Baker, *Make Us One*, 73, 74.

<sup>23</sup>Rock, "Institutional Loyalty versus Racial Freedom," 54. See also Sinclair Ferguson, David Wright, and J. Packer, eds., *New Dictionary of Theology* (Chicago, IL, 1988), 34.

## JOURNAL OF AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY

- <sup>24</sup>Rock, "Institutional Loyalty versus Racial Freedom," 55.
- <sup>25</sup>White, *Great Controversy*, 529–38; Rock, "Institutional Loyalty versus Racial Freedom," 61.
- <sup>26</sup>White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, 213.
- <sup>27</sup>Gary P. Marx, "Religion: Opiate or Inspiration of Civil Rights Militancy Among Negroes?" in *Religion in Sociological Perspective*, ed. Charles Glock and Rodney Stark (Belmont, CA, 1973), 70.
- <sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*
- <sup>29</sup>Charles Glock and Rodney Stark, "Prejudice and the Churches," in *Religion in Sociological Perspective*, 95.
- <sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, 73.
- <sup>31</sup>James Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation* (Philadelphia, PA, 1970), 17 & 19.
- <sup>32</sup>White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, 223.
- <sup>33</sup>Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 20.
- <sup>34</sup>Ellen White, *Southern Work* (Washington, DC, 1899), 9.
- <sup>35</sup>Otis B. Edwards, "Origin and Development of the SDA Work Among Negroes in the Alabama-Mississippi Conference." M.A. thesis, SDA Theological Seminary, 1942, 594, Special Collections, Oakwood College, Eva B. Dykes Library, Oakwood College, Huntsville, Alabama. The initial colored mission field was in Vicksburg, Mississippi, operated by Edson White, son of Ellen and James White. See also Arthur W. Spalding, *Lights and Shades in the Black Belt: Containing the Story of the Southern Missionary Society, the Oakwood School, and the Hillcrest School* (Mountain View, CA, 1924), Ellen G. White Estate, General Conference World Headquarters of the Seventh-day Adventists, Silver Spring, MD, 229. For more information, see Schwarz, *Light Bearers*, 244. For information about housing, see Charles H. Nichols, *Arna Bontemps, Langston Hughes: Letters 1925–1967* (New York, NY, 1980), 19. The Old Manorhouse on the property served as one of the housing facilities for the faculty. It is not stated if the manorhouse served as a biracial facility.
- <sup>36</sup>Thomas M. Owen, *Northern Alabama: Historical and Biographical* (Spartanburg, SC, 1976), 243.
- <sup>37</sup>Edwards, "Origin and Development of the SDA Work Among Negroes," 130. The church leaders realized that an educational endeavor in the South was risky especially because of the church's religious beliefs. Hence, they accepted the educational philosophy of the South by calling it an "industrial" school.
- <sup>38</sup>*Ibid.* See also *The Oakwood Bulletin* vol. 10 no. 12 (Winter 1923), Special Collections, Oakwood College Bulletins 1911–1930, Archives and Museum, Eva B. Dykes Library, Oakwood College, Huntsville, Alabama. The names of the students were: Robert Hancock, Harry Pollard, Frank Brice, Charles Morford, Mary Morford, Nannie McNeal, Grant Royston, Thomas Murphy, Ella Grimes, Etta Little-John, Daisy Pollard, Lela Peck, George Graham, Sam Thompson, and Francis Worthington.
- <sup>39</sup>Edwards, "Origin and Development of the SDA Work Among Negroes," 133. For more information about the farming of the site, see *Advent Review & Herald*, July 6, 1897, 12. The General Conference Committee voted on March 1, 1896, for Solon M. Jacobs to head up the school; see Oakwood College Papers, 1931–1932, General Conference Archives, General Conference World Headquarters of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, Silver Spring, MD (hereafter GCA).
- <sup>40</sup>Spalding, *Lights and Shades in the Black Belt*, 244. See also James D. Anderson, *Education of Blacks in the South, 1860–1915* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1988); and Reynolds, *We Have Tomorrow*, 191.
- <sup>41</sup>Edwards, "Origin and Development of the SDA Work Among Negroes," 140–41.
- <sup>42</sup>Walter W. Fordham, *Righteous Rebel: An Autobiography* (Washington, DC, 1990), 33. See also Letter from Owen A. Troy to G. C. President J. L. McElhany, 3 September 1931; General Conference Officers' Minutes, 1 November 1931, GCA. The major portion of the letter dealt with the hiring of Mr. Arna Bontemps to be the English teacher at Oakwood Junior College. Pastor Owen emphasizes that, "Oakwood will not be able to sustain support from northern African American SDA's unless the school upgrades its faculty."
- <sup>43</sup>Jacob Justiss, *Angels in Ebony* (Toledo, OH, 1975), 73. See also Ron Graybill, "Oakwood College Student Strike of 1931," *Columbia Union Visitor*, February 1986, 4, GCA.
- <sup>44</sup>Raymond Wolters, *The New Negro on Campus: Black College Rebellions of the 1920s* (Princeton, NJ, 1975), 276. In some instances faculty members resigned their posts because of the seemingly "backward-ness" of the school administration in promoting vocational training instead of a liberal arts

## OAKWOOD COLLEGE STUDENTS' QUEST FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

curriculum. For example in 1923 at State Normal School—Bowie (now Bowie State University) all of the faculty members resigned.

<sup>45</sup>Justiss, *Angels in Ebony*, 73. For additional insight, see Fordham, *Righteous Rebel*, 26. Elder Fordham explains how the students felt distrust and unrest, while noting, "That preparation for the ministry and teaching profession within the ranks was dismal and opened to a few" (p. 25). See also Anderson, *The Education of Blacks*, 110. Du Bois is quoted as saying, "He was convinced that no system of education could succeed without qualified teachers who had received training in the liberal arts."

<sup>46</sup>Justiss, *Angels in Ebony*, 74. See also Wolters, *The New Negro on Campus*, 248. Students at Hampton Institute highly resented the acceptance of its white faculty members of the practice of segregation on campus. Wolters also discusses the passage of the Massenburg Law (1920s) that stated that in any public assemblages whites and African Americans were to be separate. For further information regarding the reason behind the law and its proponents, see Wolters's chapter on the struggle at Hampton Institute.

<sup>47</sup>Fordham, *Righteous Rebel*, 25. See also Justiss, *Angels in Ebony*, 75. There is a discrepancy concerning the number of males in the society. In *Righteous Rebel*, the number is twelve, instead of eleven, as in Justiss's book. The names of the members were: Frank Bland, Monroe Burgess, Samuel Rashford, Herman R. Murphy, A. Stewart Brantley, Ernest Moseley, Frederick B. Slater, Walter W. Fordham, Alan Anderson, Vernon Smalls, Moses James, William Betts, and the women—Louise Critchlow Murphy, Octavie Bowman Bland, Bernice Johnson Reynolds, and Maxine Brantley.

<sup>48</sup>*Columbia Union Visitor*, 1 February 1986, 4. See also Justiss, *Angels in Ebony*, 75. It is debatable whether or not the students knew about the annual Fall Council meeting, but they were aware of the board meeting to be held on the campus of Oakwood Junior College. The Fall Council meeting is significant because it establishes the mode of operation for domestic and global concerns of the SDA church.

<sup>49</sup>*Columbia Union Visitor*, 4. For more information, see Letter from J. A. Tucker (president of Oakwood Junior College) to J. L. McElhany, president of the General Conference, 20 November 1931, GCA. Some of the facts that are listed in the letter do not match the account of Fordham or Justiss.

<sup>50</sup>Fordham, *Righteous Rebel*, 28.

<sup>51</sup>*Ibid*, 29–30.

<sup>52</sup>Justiss, *Angels in Ebony*, 75.

<sup>53</sup>*Ibid*, 76. For further discussion regarding the meeting, see Fordham, *Righteous Rebel*, 30. Here, he states that the vice chairman of the board, in the attempt to break the students' solidarity, took a hard line saying, "Cease this strike and return to your classes. Those leaders who will continue to rebel and defy this counsel will never find a place in the labor of this denomination."

<sup>54</sup>Anna Knight (Oakwood Junior College faculty member) to Elder W. H. Heckman, 11 October 1931, GCA. See also Justiss, *Angels in Ebony*, 76.

<sup>55</sup>Fordham, *Righteous Rebel*, 31 and 32. See also Justiss, *Angels in Ebony*, 76. Fordham acknowledges that trivial issues were heard, not the "hard-line" concerns of the Excelsior Society.

<sup>56</sup>Fordham, *Righteous Rebel*, 32. For further information, see J. A. Tucker to his brother, 20 November 1931; Anna Knight to Elder W. H. Heckman, 11 October 1931; N. A. Ashton to Elder C. H. Watson and Elder J. L. McElhany, 11 October 1932, GCA. The letter from Elder Ashton clearly states that the "grievance committee" is to include two white and two colored faculty members along with President Tucker. It is interesting to note that the two black faculty members were members that had advanced degrees—higher than their white counterparts.

<sup>57</sup>Justiss, *Angels in Ebony*, 76.

<sup>58</sup>*Ibid*, 77. See also C. H. Watson, President of the General Conference to J. A. Tucker (president of Oakwood Junior College), 2 November 1931; J. A. Tucker to his brother, 20 November 1931, GCA. Correspondence between conference members and the board of trustees continued until the spring of 1932. Likewise, Watson wrote to Tucker and the board of trustees stating that "the G. C. is confident that the proper thing will be done."

<sup>59</sup>Elder C. H. Watson (president of the GC) to J. A. Tucker, 20 November 1931; General Conference Officer's Minutes 1 November 1931. For more insight into the personal convictions of white church leadership, see Letter from Elder N. S. Ashton to Elder J. L. McElhany, 15 November 1931, GCA. Elder Heckman states that, "We should pay no attention to their [student strikers] demands for colored leadership, first, because they are not capable of self government, and second, because they haven't financial ability to manage their affairs." The president of the General Conference concurred

## JOURNAL OF AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY

with Elder Heckman. Likewise, Elder N. S. Ashton to Elder J. L. McElhany states that, "I believe you are right about a spirit working amongst our colored believers on the race question. It is my personal conviction that this will become more and more difficult to deal with as the colored race asserts itself."

<sup>60</sup>Elder Ashton to Elder C. H. Watson (president of the GC) and J. L. McElhany (Secretary of the GC), 11 November 1931, GCA.

<sup>61</sup>M. E. Kern to Professor Leon Cobb (Pacific Union College), 17 May 1932; D. A. Ochs to M. E. Kern, 8 June 1932; M. E. Kern to J. L. Moran, 17 May 1932, GCA.

<sup>62</sup>D. A. Ochs to M. E. Kern, 8 June 1932, GCA. Professor Ochs states that, "I am a little fearful of the Oakwood project. I have never lived in the South, and know nothing about the colored people and their ways. Up to the present moment I can't fully conceive how a German would deal with the colored psychology especially when all the [not readable] school is turned over to the dean of the school—he being a colored."

<sup>63</sup>Justiss, *Angels in Ebony*, 78. See also letters from J. L. McElhany to Professor J. L. Moran, 22 July 1932; J. L. McElhany to J. L. Moran, 27 July 1932 (Moran's acceptance letter); for information on some of the misgivings Moran had about the offer, see Letter from J. L. Moran to M. E. Kern, secretary of the General Conference, 17 June 1932, GCA. Writing from his current post as principal of Harlem Academy in New York, Moran questions the validity of the call to serve as president since Professor Ochs and Professor Cobb declined the offer. He also inquires about the student morale, the faculty size and retention rate, and the future of a northern school project. In the letter to Professor Moran dated July 22, 1932, Elder McElhany states that the business manager of the school will be James Oss.

<sup>64</sup>Letter from J. L. McElhany to Elders J. F. Piper and M. L. Andreason, 15 July 1932; in a separate letter Elder J. L. McElhany to James Oss, 15 July 1932, and another letter dated July 27, 1932, General Conference Archives. The letter dated July 15, 1932, states, "We feel, Brother Oss, that we need your services in connection with this school to help make a success of the new plans and policies that are being inaugurated."

<sup>65</sup>Justiss, *Angels in Ebony*, 78.

<sup>66</sup>*Columbia Union Visitor*, February 1987, 6. See also Fordham, *Righteous Rebel*, 33 and 34. President Tucker stated that if he had to go, then the agitators have to leave the institution. Evidently, Tucker wanted them expelled. Many of the student strike leaders stayed out the rest of the 1931–1932 school year, but were reinstated the following academic year. However, some of the strike leaders did not return, and even left the denomination for many years. See also Reynolds, *We Have Tomorrow*.

<sup>67</sup>Walter J. Brown, comp., *Chronology of SDA Education: Century of Adventist Education 1872–1972* (Washington, DC, 1972), 140. See also Reynolds, *We Have Tomorrow*. During that time, many African American ordained and lay ministers were agitating for a different organizational structure—the formation of black conferences in an area where 10,000 or more blacks resided. In the spring of 1944, at the G. C. Spring Council in Chicago, Illinois, black conferences were created.

<sup>68</sup>Rock, "Institutional Loyalty versus Racial Freedom," 47, 48.

<sup>69</sup>Theresa P. DeShields, "The Acquisition of Civil Rights in Huntsville, Alabama 1960–1965," M.A. thesis, Alabama A&M University, 1965, 40, Special Collections, J. F. Drake Memorial Library, Alabama A&M University.

<sup>70</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup>Dr. Sonny Hereford, interview with the author and questionnaire, Huntsville, AL, 9 September 1994. For further insight see Dr. Sonny Hereford, interviewed by the Statewide Oral History Project, Alabama Center for Higher Education, Madison County, Alabama, 18 September 1973, Special Collections, J. F. Drake Memorial Library, Alabama A&M University.

<sup>72</sup>Dr. John Cashin, interview with the author and questionnaire, Huntsville, AL, 9 September 1994. For further insight see Dr. John Cashin, interviewed by the Statewide Oral History Project, Alabama Center for Higher Education, Madison County, Alabama, 13 September 1973, Special Collections, J. F. Drake Memorial Library, Alabama A&M University.

<sup>73</sup>Oakwood College Board Minutes, 6 March 1961, Oakwood College Board of Trustees Minute Papers 1961, GCA.

<sup>74</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>75</sup>*Ibid.* As a sideline "move" the board distributed small pamphlets to the faculty of Oakwood College, which stated "This One Thing I Do"—another reiteration of the conservative precepts the denomination follows for its theological base. The pamphlet was designed to inform the faculty that

## OAKWOOD COLLEGE STUDENTS' QUEST FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

they were not to participate in the Civil Rights Movement. For more information on the use of the Ashby Gymnasium, see Dr. Richard Morrison, interview with the author, Alabama A&M University, Normal, AL, 22 August 1994. Dr. Morrison was the president of A&M College at the time of Dr. King's address. He states that because the school was a land grant institution and received financial assistance from the state, it was impossible to have Dr. King speak on his campus.

<sup>76</sup>Huntsville (AL) *Spreading Oak*, March 19, 1962, Oakwood Publications, Oakwood Archives.

<sup>77</sup>Dr. Garland Millet, interview with the author, Moseley (Religion) Complex, Oakwood College, Huntsville, AL, 22 August 1994. For additional insights, see questionnaire given to former Oakwood College students, G. J. S., November 1994 and C. C., 28 March 1995.

<sup>78</sup>Morrison interview. Dr. Morrison adamantly states that, "There was clearly a racially demarcated line within Huntsville and within the overall southern culture."

<sup>79</sup>Huntsville (AL) *Spreading Oak*, February 1962. The two Negro schools that student Paul Oster was referring to were Alabama A&M College (now Alabama A&M University) and Oakwood College.

<sup>80</sup>Elder E. E. Cleveland, interview with the author, Moseley (Religion) Complex, Oakwood College, Huntsville, AL, 22 August 1994.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid.

<sup>83</sup>Ibid.

<sup>84</sup>C. F. interview with the author, Howard University, 6 December 1994. The former Oakwood students interviewed for this study, many of whom currently are high-ranking officials in the SDA denomination, agreed to do so only if their names were not revealed. It should be noted that most women recalled that going into town was an infrequent and limited experience. Female students were given permission to leave the campus, but they were chaperoned. Likewise, other students mentioned that on Friday (in preparation of Sabbath) a van or small bus would transport women to the local shopping area to retrieve necessary toiletries. See also M. F. B. interview and questionnaire submitted to the author, Silver Spring, MD, November 1994. For additional information, see Wolters, *The New Negro on Campus*, especially the student protests at Hampton and Fisk Institutes and Lincoln University over the strict monitoring of students. Many students—male and female—challenged that school policy in the 1920s. Other women mentioned that occasional baby-sitting jobs in town afforded them the opportunity to hear updated news.

<sup>85</sup>All of the former Oakwood College female students interviewed were uniform in expressing this sentiment.

<sup>86</sup>A. R., interview with the author, Waldorf, MD, 4 April 1995.

<sup>87</sup>The men were interviewed mainly by questionnaire between the months of September and December 1994.

<sup>88</sup>Many of the men referred to their limited acts of participation, as well as the attempt to integrate the worship service of a local white SDA church.

<sup>89</sup>Ibid.

<sup>90</sup>D. W., questionnaire submitted to the author, Clarksville, MD, October 1994. He notes that the white brethren had a difficult time in understanding the biblical principle of equality as demonstrated when he and some friends were in a Sabbath School class at "their" church. The men noted that a local ad-hoc committee would transport them from the campus to the local white SDA church.

<sup>91</sup>W. P., questionnaire submitted to the author, Silver Spring, MD, November 1994.

<sup>92</sup>G. M., questionnaire submitted to the author, Huntsville, AL, December 1994; D. W. questionnaire; Dr. Richard Morrison, interview with the author, Normal, AL, August 1994.

<sup>93</sup>M. F. B. interview and questionnaire submitted to the author, Silver Spring, MD, November 1994.

<sup>94</sup>W. P., questionnaire, Silver Spring, MD, December 1994.

<sup>95</sup>D. W., questionnaire, Clarksville, MD, October 1994.

<sup>96</sup>W. P., interview with the author, November 1994.