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# FROM REVOLUTION TO REVELATION

THE HOWARD  
EXPERIENCE  
1969-1976

By Larry D. Coleman

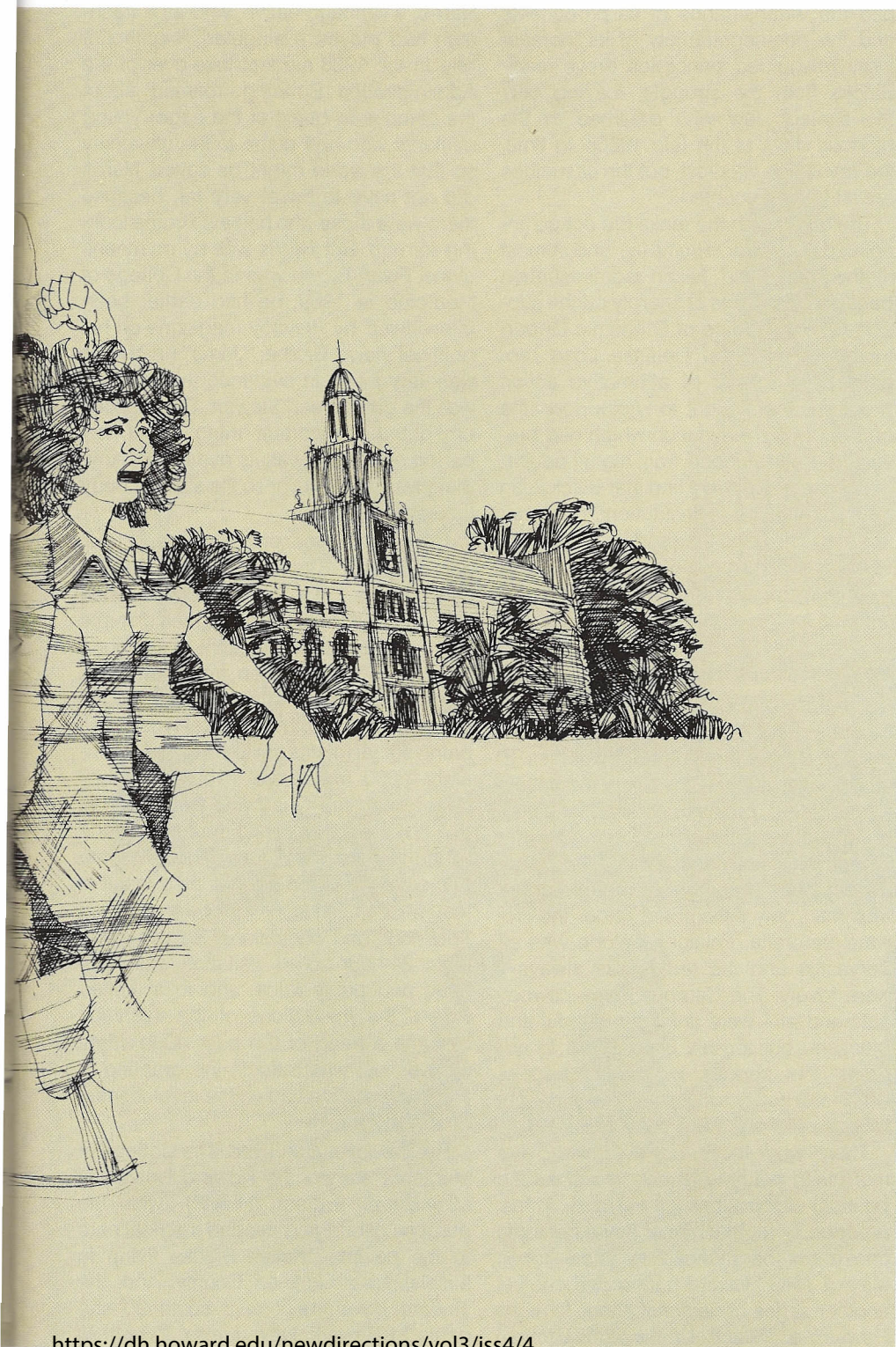
## I. The Ethos and Pathos

The revolution had come as suddenly as a late spring tornado in the Midwest; coming without warning, it left without notice, leaving in its wake a disparate aggregation in quest of direction. Somewhere in the process, the student movement at Howard University had lost its direction, its momentum, its substance and into this void rushed the charlatans, the pimps, and the agents provocateurs. The Revolution at Howard had peaked—as it had around the country—and yesterday's flaming oratory became today's clichés.

The vein from which so much rhetorical and progressive gold had been extracted was depleted, and those in the forefront began to diversify or flee or suffer incarceration or extermination. Yet fool's gold remained in the old mother lode; indeed, it even sparkled like the real thing and the jackals moved in and began to offer up to the people this fool's gold which they devoured ravenously. As a consequence, the distinction between the real and the surreal became blurred and many innocent well-meaning people became terribly disappointed, threw up their hands in despairing resignation, and drifted into apathy. The Black revolution, whose genesis originated with the importation of Africans to America, had hit a plateau.

No doubt such had to be the penultimate fate of a revolution whose sustenance was contingent upon the philanthropy of Northern liberals and the good graces of media king pins. When the smoke had risen, Blacks in America had made substantial strides in diverse areas of endeavor, but the redistribution of wealth—the *sine qua non* of any bonafide revolution—remained a dream deferred; indeed, the disparity between white income and Black income widened.

Long before the final death knell had sounded on the revolution of the 1960s, many people began to re-assess the coordinates under which they navigated 2



10 their lives. Some turned to Jesus; others to drugs, Eastern religion, and so forth. Each person went his/her own way in quest of oneself. *Laissez-faire* and do your own thing became the raging preoccupation; almost anything was "hip." In the wake of this revolution, a period of intense introspection set in and continues to this day unabated. The people have turned inward in quest of truth, and in the process, a number of fundamental conceptions had to be altered.

At last, it was resolved that money was not the antagonist, but the lack thereof. Nationally, a significant number of students changed their majors from psychology and sociology to business and zoology or communications. Generally, money and wealth had been viewed as despicable evils to be avoided at all cost. So rancid was the rhetoric, in fact, that blue jeans (dungarees), bush jackets and uncombed Afros and pious platitudes about salvation of the people overwhelmed the inclination to seek the material comforts. Yet this curious turn in events was especially short-lived as the "Great Society" (as envisioned by President Lyndon Johnson) collided head-on with the "Silent Majority" of President Richard Nixon. And the anti-poverty funds began to dry up.

Moreover, the front-streetism that had assured the demise of the Black Panther Party, students for Democratic Society, and a long list of other vanguard oriented type of activist organizations compelled the donning of camouflage by those who were enamored to their tenets.

Further, the Blacker-than-thou syndrome which evolved from this revolution had the effect of alienating a substantial segment of the Black student body; soon such cosmetic contests as who had the biggest Afro, or acted most belligerently, or was capable of spouting the most African liberation phrases—among many other equally insubstantial evidences of dedication to the cause—became the criteria by which Blackness was judged. Indeed,

and the intransigence of its proponents and the non-negotiability of its increasingly misguided principles drove many Blacks from the struggle, leaving only the esoteric few who dreamed of the glorious days of the late 1960s. In time, the revolution was lost, but the casualties are still being counted.

The disarray in the ranks did not go unnoticed, however. Promptly, and almost methodically, the Nixon administration began to dismantle or sharply curtail support from the Office of Economic Opportunity, the National Defense Loan program, and a host of affirmative action programs that sought to knock down the barriers of discrimination which had prevented Black students from higher education. Now, in 1976, we find that Blacks can gain admittance to institutions of higher learning, provided they score on the same level as whites on the various entrance examinations and turn to their own resources for the required tuition.

## II. The Howard Experience

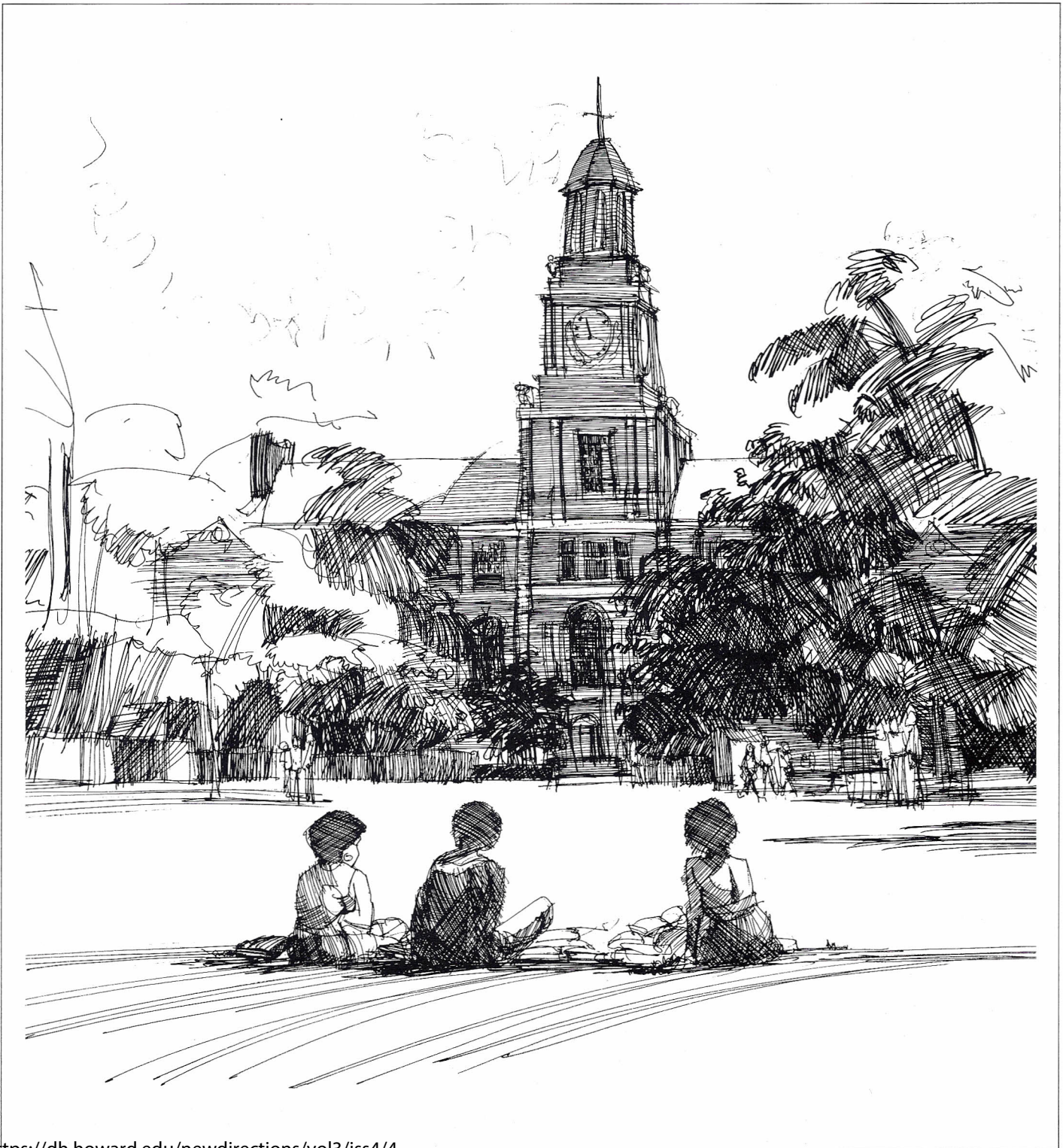
September 1969 was an especially hot month. The university was under the direction of a new president, Dr. James E. Cheek; Sly Stone's "Fun" was the hottest party record on campus, and students by the thousands partied on the main campus. It was an active month and great expectations poured from the lips of the freshman duly assembled under the Howard umbrella. Political rhetoric was all pervasive and the ladies—as always—were lovely. The Campus Pals—cowboy hats and all—were uniformly helpful and pleasant, but terribly unprepared to address the serious political questions which the newly arrived freshman sought to have resolved about Howard.

There were those, however, who were more than ready to launch into extended political discussions on Howard, Africa, America, or for that matter any other topic one might be inclined to raise—for in May of 1969 Howard had undergone yet another series of demonstrations to make a "Black University." Michael

Harris, a Chicago native, who as a freshman had played a singularly significant role in the 1968 student take-over of the Administration Building, roamed about the campus in quest of the eager young militants who had come to the university so that the world might be saved. Harris did not have to travel very far, because there were those who had also come looking for him. But Harris was by no means alone. Ewart Brown was in the College of Medicine in 1969; he had earlier been interviewed by *Playboy* magazine on his political views. Brother "Jomo" (Irvin Ray) was very much in evidence that year, as was the gifted Pearl Stewart. The list goes on, but the important thing about this period at Howard was its dynamism. Anything was possible, or so the student body thought.

1969 was the year of the final panty raid, also. Dubbed "The Panty Raid to End All Panty Raids," it came at a time when co-ed visitation ended in the men's dorms at 11 p.m. (was non-existent in the women's dorms); and when freshman male students were just beginning to appreciate the bittersweet truth about freshman men being social misfits at Howard. Approximately 1,000 men were involved as they swept upon the Quad and Bethune Hall like a horde of locusts. Fortunately, none of the women were hurt, although some of the men suffered injuries as a result of leaps from third-story windows, assorted abrasions and contusions. Shortly thereafter, 24-hour co-ed visitation was instituted and panty raids, and to a limited extent, the frustrations of the freshman became a thing of the past. (One might wonder just what affects the granting of 24-hour visitation had on the revolutionary fervor of Howard).

But the revolution lived. The College of Medicine started the Howard University Mississippi Project (HUMP), with the purpose of bringing needed medical care to the poverty-stricken Blacks living in Mississippi's Quitman County. And, the student government sent some 90 students to Newark, New Jersey, to help





the mayoral race of Kenneth Gibson. Sam Wallace, Gary Ayers, Michael Harris, Pamela Preston and a whole host of others conceived of the X-Party in that year.

The X-Party is significant in that its founders consisted of the most politically active, if not astute, students at Howard. They were veterans of the various demonstrations of the past and now sought to institutionalize and consolidate their gains. Thus, this entire slate ran for all the elective offices at Howard and won practically everything. They had run on a community involvement program called "The D.C. Project." In the process, they had convinced each Howard student to pay an additional \$10 in student activities fee so that enough funds would be available to implement the ambitious project. The students voted in favor of the proposal. As a result, the Howard University Student Association (HUSA) had at its disposal some \$150,000 with which to help the poor in the community. So far, so good.

Suddenly, in the midst of all of the jubilation and excitement at Howard, four students at Kent State University in Ohio were killed on May 4, 1970; less than two weeks later, on May 15, 1970, two Black students were killed in a hail of police gunfire at Mississippi's Jackson State College. At this point, all hell broke loose. The question around campus was: What was the newly elected student government going to do? Equally important, what was the university's new president going to do? The requested "honeymoon" period was over, and the stage was set for confrontation. Dr. Cheek agreed to student demands that the remainder of the regular school year be canceled, that final examinations be taken by those who wanted, all others to receive "P" (passing grade) and that in lieu of regular classes Black liberation survival courses be held in order to address to issues of Black survival. Moreover, Dr. Cheek sent an urgent telegram to President Nixon, and eventually served on the President's Commission on Campus Unrest. What had promised to be a

stern test of the mettle of the new president saw him instead emerging as a hero. Later, a conference was held on campus which brought together student leaders from most predominantly Black schools in the country. A few resolutions were passed, and the conference ended prior to the Commencement exercises. Howard had avoided a crisis.

The stage of the revolution, then, was off to a promising start. Unfortunately, it was short-lived. During the summer of 1970, the massive task of organizing the \$150,000 D.C. Project and collating and disseminating the recommendations produced by the Black survival courses had to be completed. Further, Homecoming festivities for the upcoming school year had to be organized. It was here that the administration of HUSA President Michael Harris stumbled badly. The recommendations from the Black survival courses were never disseminated, at least not on the scale which had been promised. The D.C. Project on the whole was undercut by ego-trips and downright ineptitude, although several components were highly successful; the fight over the money became so intense that little headway was made. (A mini version of the D.C. Project continues to this day).

The 1970-71 school year was hardly underway before the Homecoming activities were hit with a scandal. Reportedly, between \$8,000 and \$10,000 was missing without a trace. Soon after, the chairman of Homecoming, Joel Mungo, pulled up on campus in a canary yellow sports Jaguar. No one knows for sure whether Mungo appropriated some of the missing funds for personal use; it has never been proven. Wherever the money went, HUSA was the ultimate loser, as its credibility took a precipitous plunge from which it has yet to recover. Pearl Stewart, the *Hilltop* editor during this period, was at her satirical best in denouncing HUSA.

In November 1970, 86 students went to Alabama to campaign for Dr. John Cashin who was running against Governor George Wallace. Their travel expenses

were taken care of by the student government. The Viet Nam war was still raging; massive demonstrations became the order of the day. And HUSA, searching mightily for an issue that could unite the student body, once again chose the war to rally against. Various marches and rallies were held on campus and around the city, but the inherent suspicion of the white student leaders in the anti-war movement clouded the effectiveness of this device. Soon the school year came to an end. Ronald Daly, a native of Guyana, was elected president of HUSA, becoming the first foreign student to hold such an elective position on campus.

Fall, 1971, opened with a bang. State troopers and National Guardsmen, under the orders of then Governor Nelson Rockefeller of New York, stormed the Attica State Prison—some 32 prisoners and nine of the 32 guards who had been held as hostages in a cell block were killed during the assault. To be sure, there was moral outrage, but Howard students had traditionally studied the first semester and demonstrated in the second semester, so the timing of the Attica assault was out of sync with the Howard cycle.

The soccer team, under Coach Lincoln Phillips, won the 1971 National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) soccer championship in Miami, becoming the first team from a predominantly Black institution to win such a trophy. (After the jubilation, NCAA took the title from Howard because of alleged recruiting irregularities). The high point on the political barometer came in the winter of 1972 when delegates were being selected for the National Black Political Convention to be held in Gary, Indiana, in March of that year.

At the Ward I delegate selection election which was held in the Adams Morgan Elementary School, an unprecedented coalition of Howard students submerged their petty differences and captured all four seats—to the surprise and sorrow of the duly assembled various "grass roots" organizations. Howard had long been the

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whipping boy of these organizations; had been forced to agonize under staggering verbal abuse from the head of the Black United Front at that time, the Rev. Douglas Moore. There were cries of fraud and great gnashing of teeth. But Howard later relinquished two of the four seats to a coalition of community organizations. It was significant that most student leaders, but a vociferous few, cast aside their differences to work toward a common goal. (It is noteworthy that the vociferous few were to usurp the leadership in the years to follow and preside over the dismantling of HUSA, foment unrest and confusion in the ranks of the student body, traumatize the campus into blissful apathy, organize revolution for-the-hell-of-it and from fanciful delusions of revolutionary grandeur.) This, then, signalled the climax of Howard's revolution of the 1960s, a revolution whose origin dated back to 1967, the time when General Lewis Hershey, then director of the now-defunct Selective Service, came to speak at Howard and was disrupted in Cramton Auditorium by some students. Meanwhile, 90 students had been sent South by the student government to assist in the gubernatorial campaign of Fayette (Mississippi) Mayor Charles Evers.

The 1972-73 academic year was marked by increasingly vituperative bombasts directed at Dr. Cheek, primarily, and at his administration secondarily. Also, in this year, the student movement at Howard began its steep demise. The administration of HUSA President Charles Hall was marked by budget freezes and resignations, as had been the case with his predecessor, Ronald Daly. Homecoming that year was soured by numerous deaths and crime on campus. It was the period in which Rastafarians (from Jamaica) came to Howard, the year in which two students were killed by state troopers at Louisiana's Southern University, in Baton Rouge. Moreover, it was the year in which arsonists burned down temporary Building B—presumably to awaken Howard to the tragedy at Southern

After graduation that year, most of those politically active students moved on either to graduate school or other concerns, and the Howard revolution began to regress in earnest. The HUSA constitution was rewritten, and for a semester the student government had no president. Finally, in the second semester of the 1973-74 school year, Larry Newell was elected HUSA president.

Toward the latter part of 1974, Victor Eugene Bryant became president of HUSA, the first law student to hold such an elective office. But Bryant's administration was characterized by intense infighting which undercut the vitality of his once promising administration. Former HUSA President Michael Harris (1970-71), former *Hilltop* editor, Larry Coleman (1972-73), were on his staff, but the indecisiveness of Bryant made him susceptible to attacks by campus opponents. At any event, the handwriting was on the wall; this vainglorious effort to resurrect constructive student involvement at Howard was doomed by the opposition of the Undergraduate Student Association and the Liberal Arts Student Council to efforts undertaken by HUSA. The biggest failure of Bryant's administration was its inability to have enacted a new HUSA constitution—which several student organizations had collaborated on all summer. This failure, then, invited the entry of the February First Movement (FFM), an organization devoted to the class struggle analysis proffered by Imamu Amiri Baraka and imbued with a vision of disruption and mass demonstrations as being the panacea for the various crises which they saw as threats.

The February First Movement was composed of latter day Howard activists who had not been involved in the Howard movement of 1968-72. Moreover, the organization was composed of an interlocking directorate of members of the executive counsels of the Liberal Arts Student Council, whose president was Hisani Mweuse (Marsha Lilly), and the Undergraduate Student Association, whose co-

ordinator was Donald Issac, a transfer student from the Washington Technical Institute. These two organizations had not only undermined HUSA, but also were the galvanizing agents behind a mass demonstration in April 1975—a demonstration which pitted the students against the university administration's effort to raise tuition. The workers of FFM were drawn from the ranks of freshman students who knew nothing of the history of protest at Howard or the dynamics under which it operated, upper classmen who had laid dormant during their matriculation at Howard, and student refugees from various community organizations who somehow saw Howard as the villain.

The 1975-76 school year was highlighted by the election of the first Greek to the HUSA presidency since before the days of 1967. But Earl Ferguson, a member of the Omega Psi Phi fraternity, fared no better than his predecessors with the FFM. Indeed, in November 1975, yet another demonstration and occupation of the Administration Building was attempted—the rationale being a rumored tuition increase for the second semester. Not only was Ferguson not consulted by the FFM, but he too was lambasted by it as being part of the establishment.

But the demonstration failed, because the student body was utterly uninformed as to its purpose. Indeed, no member of FFM would be identified as being affiliated with the leadership of the demonstration, and during the occupation of the Administration Building none were on hand to negotiate with the officials of the university. In the wee hours of the night, only a handful of confused students were seen occupying the lobby of the building. In the final analysis, an organization which had initiated a demonstration based upon a rumor retreated into obscurity when the student body discovered the fraud which had been perpetrated.

### III. The Revelation

This then is Howard in 1976. HUSA is still without a viable constitution. The majority



of the students are highly suspicious of demonstrations. There is a genuine lack of direction, and students are beginning to splinter into all directions.

Beyond Howard, forces are gathering which could give rise to the birth of a new revolution, a renaissance. The events in Southern Africa—especially Angola—augur the re-ordering of African relationships with the outside world. The Presidential race, the Bicentennial celebration, the revelations about the lawlessness of agencies like the CIA, FBI and NSA, and the discovery of world-wide corporate corruptions do much to accentuate these gathering forces.

Black students at Howard and elsewhere in the country must, however, become aware of the fact that the affirmative action crutches which once opened doors will invariably be snatched away.

One revelation, then, is that although forces beyond the realm of man may offer to the Black student the world to manage as he/she sees fit, unless Black students have prepared themselves to receive it even this divine gift will revert to those who have the skills to receive it.

Another revelation which must be imbibed is that the revolution did not start with the '60s but rather dates back to the arrival of Black people on this continent. And, contrary to the popular impression at Howard, student protest and concern for African liberation predates the civil rights movement of the '60s. In 1957, the late Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, first Prime Minister of Ghana, was awarded the honorary Doctor of Laws degree from Howard. Rayford Logan, author of *Howard University, The First Hundred Years 1867-1967* and professor at the university since 1938, served as secretary and interpreter at the Second, Third and Fourth Pan African Congresses in 1921, 1923, and 1924, respectively. Also participants at these conferences were Howard scholars, E. Franklin Frazier, and William Stuart Nelson.

In the civil rights circle, the Howard

professor James M. Nabrit (Howard president 1960-69) founded the first course in civil rights in the nation in 1938, under the administration of President Mordecai Johnson. The great constitutional cases in which this premiere advocate was of record not only shook the foundation of Jim Crow, but enjoy a continuing vitality to this day. Although space will not permit an in-depth enumeration of each case with which graduates or professors of the School of Law were associated, it shall suffice to say that Howard was somewhere implicated in practically every civil rights case ever argued before the Supreme Court since the turn of the century.

The revolution, then, at Howard is not of recent invention, rather these latest developments are but the most current manifestations of a phenomenon which dates back to the founding of the university. And it is not likely that this Howard heritage of struggle and resistance against racism and economic exploitation will end. But the challenge which confronts the present and future students of Howard, and indeed the Class of 1976, is to apply their skills and instincts to the battle for equality in such a way as to be prepared to assume the mantle of leadership when inevitably it befalls them. This revelation, then, is that the revolution continues in spite of all that has been done and all that has been said.

The ultimate revelation is, in addition to whatever other avenues Blacks pursue, of cardinal importance to our ultimate freedom is the acquisition of wealth. A people who are dependent upon the largesse of others for their very livelihood are a people who can never be free. It is written: "For he that hath, to him shall be given; and he that hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he hath." St. Mark 4:25.

Cognizant of the fact that the complexities and inner sanctuaries of Howard are multiple, inexhaustible, no attempt has been offered herein other than to paint an

porary and historically contextual images as perceived by the author during his seven-year matriculation. □

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