

ABSTRACT

BELVIN, BRENT H. Malcolm X Liberation University: An Experiment in Independent Black Education. (Under the direction of Linda McMurry-Edwards.)

The purpose of the research undertaken has been to examine the origins, mission, and ultimate demise of Malcolm X Liberation University (MXLU) from 1969-1973 in Durham and Greensboro, North Carolina. MXLU is placed within the larger context of the Black Power movement of the late 1960s and one of its offshoots: the creation of the Black University. The origins of MXLU lay in the takeover of the administration building at Duke University in an effort to force Duke to address grievances held by African-American students. The perceived failure of Duke to respond to the student concerns prompted the development of MXLU, with controversial local activist Howard Fuller emerging as the guiding force of the new school. In its brief history, MXLU operated under a cloud of mystery and suspicion, largely due to a conscious decision to keep the separatist school's operations a secret from the white media. Without two grants from the Episcopal Diocese of North Carolina totaling \$45,000, MXLU may never have opened its doors. Those grants, however, rocked the North Carolina diocese to its core, and made attaining future funds a difficult task for MXLU. Surviving documents from individuals involved with MXLU relate a story of a school with an innovative approach to education for African-Americans, but constantly struggling merely to stay afloat. Financial problems do not tell the complete story, however.

A failure to cultivate relations with North Carolina's historically black college and universities (HBCUs), a lack of support from civil rights organizations, Howard Fuller's and MXLU's recurring problems with the white press, and internal factions within MXLU itself all contributed to the ultimate demise of MXLU as a viable institution of higher learning. MXLU's legacy can be clearly seen in the explosion of African-American studies programs in the nation's colleges and universities, as well as in the renewed debate over the value of integration in America's flawed public education system.

**MALCOLM X LIBERATION UNIVERSITY:
AN EXPERIMENT IN INDEPENDENT BLACK EDUCATION**

by
BRENT H. BELVIN

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HISTORY

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About The Author

The author was born in 1968 in Orangeburg, South Carolina, and grew up in Columbia, S.C. He earned a B.A. in History and Political Science from Duke University in 1990. For the past ten years, he has taught U.S. History, Civics, and Psychology at Hillside High School in Durham, North Carolina. He currently resides with his daughter, Ellie, and two dogs, Harold and Chester, in Durham.

Table of Contents

	Page
Introduction	1
Chapter One: The Larger Context	3
Chapter Two: From Duke To MXLU	21
Chapter Three: Howard Fuller: The Force Behind MXLU	40
Chapter Four: The Practical Matter Of Starting A University	46
Chapter Five: The Financial Breakthrough	53
Chapter Six: The Doors Finally Open	64
Chapter Seven: Emerging Problems	72
Chapter Eight: Speculation and Final Thoughts	78
Bibliography	86

Malcolm X Liberation University: An Experiment in Independent Black Education

Introduction:

On 25 October 1969, a crowd of several hundred African-Americans gathered outside a formerly abandoned warehouse in Durham, North Carolina, to witness the launching of Malcolm X Liberation University. Local bands, dancers, and singers entertained the crowd, and the tantalizing smells of barbecue grills wafted over the scene. While the occasion was decidedly festive, the assembly had a much larger, more important purpose. “It has become evident that the existing educational system does not respond to the needs of the black community,” A. J. Howard Clement III, a local community activist and current Durham city councilman, told his receptive audience. “It does not provide an ideological or a practical method for meeting the physical, social, psychological, economic, and cultural needs of all black people.”¹

In the eyes of its founders, MXLU represented an alternative to what they perceived as the institutionalized racism of the American educational system. The school would build on the concept of self-determination and the need to understand the connection between the struggle of blacks in America and the entire Pan-African struggle. “I view MXLU as a center into which will flow the best thinking of black people

¹ A. J. H. Clement, III, “Malcolm X Liberation University Dedication Ceremony,” 25 October 1969 cassette recording, Nathaniel White Tape Collection, housed at the Hayti Heritage Center, Durham, North Carolina. All further references to tape recordings from this collection will be noted using the abbreviation NWTTC. The tapes in this collection are not numbered and are very loosely catalogued, so those who wish to listen to these recordings must rely solely on the tape labels, or be patient enough to listen to hours of the tape for the appropriate reference.

and out of which will flow the agenda and leadership for the liberation of our people,” said Nathan Garrett, director of the Foundation for Community Development, a Durham-based advocacy group for African-Americans. “Malcolm X Liberation University must be black in every detail, but in our thinking, we must embrace the problems of all mankind, for I firmly believe that the black agenda is the agenda for the salvation of the world.”²

From its inception in October 1969, to its demise after three years of operation, MXLU’s brief history is shrouded in mystery. During the summer of 1969, the local press in Durham began running stories about this new institution that was set to open in the fall. The stories are incredibly vague, however. The founders of MXLU completely shut out the white media from the planning stages. Just adopting the name of the controversial slain civil rights leader Malcolm X provoked suspicion in the white community, as well as among conservative blacks. What would the school’s agenda be? Who were its leaders? Where would the students be coming from? From what sources would the school derive the funds it needed to operate?

After just one year of operation in Durham, the school abruptly moved its headquarters fifty miles west to Greensboro. Two years following its move to Greensboro, the school appears to simply fade from existence. More than thirty years later, an attempt to piece together the story of MXLU’s history, about which very little has been written, will invariably run into some major gaps and roadblocks. This thesis does not pretend to answer all questions that may arise concerning MXLU, but enough primary evidence remains to form some reasonable conclusions about why this experiment in independent black education ultimately failed.

² Nathan Garrett, “Malcolm X Liberation University Dedication Ceremonies,” NWTC.

Chapter One

The Larger Context

Amidst the urban uprisings of the 1960s, the nation's predominately white universities and colleges began making concerted efforts to recruit more African-American students. By the spring of 1969, record numbers of black students had been admitted to white schools. Instead of simply being grateful for admittance, however, many black students felt alienated and staged strikes or took over buildings to express their determination to revolutionize campuses. Their demands for "Black Studies" programs, a more Afrocentric curriculum, and even separate accommodations on campus left many educators bewildered and traumatized. "Black Studies" proponents insisted upon a new definition of America and its institutions from a black perspective, and questioned scholarship that primarily praised Western culture and its impact on "lesser" cultures.³

An extension of the black studies crusade was the call for a true Black University. Such an institution would attempt to break with the pattern of white dominance and control over black education in the domains of curricula, accreditation, staffing and administration, and governance. It would represent a clear break with the old Booker T. Washington idea that black students should be prepared to live in a world defined and controlled by whites, and play roles deemed "constructive" by white society. The Black University would research and analyze the development and maintenance of the economic, political, and cultural imperialism of the Western world, especially as it

³ "Civil Rights Movement to Black Revolution," vol. III, Ebony Pictorial History of Black America (Chicago: Johnson Publishing CO.; Inc, 1971), 139.

affected non-white peoples. The purpose of study would be not to emulate the Western world, but to change it radically.⁴

These demands for “Black Studies” and a “Black University” did not arise in a vacuum, however. Such demands must be placed within the broader context of the civil rights movement as a whole, and the disillusionment of many African-Americans who believed that the hard-fought gains of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 had not resulted in fundamental change. Such disillusionment was especially profound within the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC).

SNCC could trace its genesis to the Greensboro sit-ins of 1960. Following this famous incident, a group of activists came together at Shaw University in Raleigh to form a separate community within the broader social struggle. They adopted Gandhian pacifist ideas as well as the Christian idealism of groups such as the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). Unlike such groups, however, SNCC chose to focus on political rights, not desegregation. Its philosophy gradually moved away from nonviolent direct action into a more secular radicalism.⁵

After the defeat of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP) in its attempt to unseat the all-white delegation at the Democratic National Convention in August 1964, SNCC began to look inward. Appealing for white liberal support and intervention from the federal government had not brought about fundamental social change. Many within SNCC began to question whether the organization should remain bound to the rhetoric of interracialism and nonviolent action, or should instead begin to

⁴ Civil Rights Movement to Black Revolution,” 141

⁵ Clayborne Carson, In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1981), 2.

build alternative institutions controlled by the poor and powerless. Even before Stokely Carmichael was elected SNCC chairman in May 1966, SNCC members had begun to address the need for black power and a new black consciousness, for racial separatism, and the creation of black-controlled institutions.⁶

This new separatist orientation, which would soon find a voice in the Black Power slogan, perhaps could have been deflected were it not for the momentous events throughout Freedom Summer in 1964 that reached a climax in Atlantic City during the Democratic convention. Freedom Summer activists faced threats, harassment, and actual violence throughout the campaign to register black voters in the Deep South—not only from white supremacist groups, but also from local residents and police. President Lyndon Baines Johnson and the Federal Bureau of Investigation seemed ambivalent at best and hostile at worst towards the MFDP, turning a blind eye when black activists were attacked and even killed. Citing the rejection of the MFDP delegation in Atlantic City as a pivotal moment, Carmichael wrote that “black people in Mississippi and throughout this country could not rely on their so-called allies (the Democratic Party). . . . These black people knew that they would have to search for and build new forms outside the Democratic Party.”⁷ Thus the door was opened for a revolutionary and nationalist element to step forward.

SNCC’s early efforts to register black voters in Alabama and Mississippi were designed to win political power for poor Southern blacks. Because black Americans were essentially propertyless in a country where property is valued above all, it was

⁶ Carson, 3.

⁷ Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America* (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), 96-97. See also Cheryl Greenberg, ed., *A Circle of Trust: Remembering SNCC* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1998), xv.

important first for blacks to gain political power first, then move on to more economic goals. Only with power could blacks make changes that could truly impact their daily lives.⁸ “Black Power will mean that if a Negro is elected sheriff, he can end police brutality,” wrote Carmichael in Black Power. “If a black man is elected tax assessor, he can collect and channel funds for the building of better roads and schools serving black people.”⁹ In areas like Lowndes County, Alabama, where blacks were a majority, Black Power meant control. In places where blacks were a minority, it meant proper representation and sharing of control.

The slogan Black Power, however, was not publicly introduced until the “Meredith March” in the summer of 1966. James Meredith, the first African-American to integrate the University of Mississippi, hoped that by walking across the state, he would spark the courage needed by thousands of Mississippi blacks to get out and vote. Meredith was shot on the second day, however, barely ten miles into the march. Black leaders—Carmichael, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., CORE’s Floyd McKissick, the NAACP’s Roy Wilkins, Whitney Young of the Urban League—rushed to his hospital bed and vowed to continue the march. Indeed, the march did continue, but it developed into something quite different from what Meredith had envisioned.¹⁰

During a speech in the town of Greenwood, Carmichael whipped up the crowd with the following statement: “The only way we gonna’ stop them white men from whuppin’ us is to take over. We been saying freedom for six years and we ain’t got

⁸ Stokeley Carmichael, “What We Want,” New York Review of Books 7 (22 September 1966), 5-8.

⁹ Carmichael and Hamilton, 45.

¹⁰ Benjamin Muse, The American Negro Revolution: From Nonviolence to Black Power (1963-1967) (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1968), 236-237.

nothin'. What we gonna' start saying now is black power."¹¹ The phrase "black power" had been used by other blacks before—author Richard Wright, actor/activist Paul Robeson, Harlem political leaders Jesse Gray and Adam Clayton Powell to name a few.¹² Carmichael himself had used the slogan before in Lowndes County, but now newspapers and TV cameras were there to record the crowds' echo: "Black Power!" Almost overnight, it became the protest cry of the young, militant wing of the civil rights movement.

For a few weeks after the Meredith march, Black Power drew more attention than miniskirts or LSD or draft card burners. Editors, columnists and TV pundits talked and wrote about it. Sociologists and psychologists delved into its meaning. Every civil rights leader and every politician felt compelled to offer an opinion. Although much of the press coverage was negative, former SNCC program director Courtland Cox believed that the media actually did SNCC a favor. At the same time that it was warning the white establishment about the particular "dangers" of Black Power, the media were also alerting the black community about an opportunity for a better definition of self and a greater sense of political and economic organization.¹³

SNCC competed with other black political leaders and organizations to provide the definitive statement of Black Power as a goal and political strategy. Carmichael's ambiguity allowed his followers and his opponents to attribute their own meanings to the phrase. Carmichael himself contributed to misconceptions through vague implications of racial retribution, although he rarely explicitly called for violence. Dr. King viewed Black Power as an "unfortunate choice of words" that would weaken public support for

¹¹ Bradford Chambers, ed. Chronicles of Black Protest (New York: New American Library, 1968), 125.

¹² Carson, 208-211.

¹³ Greenberg, 163.

the overall movement. Although King acknowledged his nonviolent approach was losing the support of black audiences, he believed Black Power would confuse white allies, isolate the black community, and give racist whites an excuse to justify their prejudice.¹⁴

Several major black leaders focused on the implication of anti-white violence. Wilkins of the NAACP hoped to reassure his white supporters by distinguishing SNCC from the rest of the civil rights movement. At the annual NAACP convention in July 1966, Wilkins said, “No matter how endlessly they try to explain it, the term ‘Black Power’ means anti-white power. . . . The quick, uncritical, and highly emotional adoption of the slogan [by] some segments of a beleaguered people can mean in the end only black death.” Vice President Hubert Humphrey, addressing the same convention a day later, declared, “We must reject calls for racism whether they come from a throat that is white or one that is black.”¹⁵

Nevertheless, Black Power provoked a positive response among thousands of blacks across the nation. James Forman, who served as SNCC’s executive secretary from 1961-1966, believed the spread of Black Power was due to the fact that the problems of blacks in both the North and South were becoming very similar. Blacks in the South had won newly established political rights, but they were being undermined by whites in many ways. Meanwhile, the fundamentals of racism—poor housing, inferior education, lack of jobs, poor health care—remained virtually unchanged throughout all of Black America.¹⁶

¹⁴ Carson, 210.

¹⁵ Carson, 219-220.

¹⁶ James Forman, High Tide of Black Resistance (Seattle, Washington: Open Hand Publishing, Inc., 1994), 130.

The Black Power upsurge can definitely be credited with fostering a greater sense of pride, confidence, and racial identity among blacks. The mythology of Black Power met head on with the mythology of White Power; it did not say white was not beautiful, but it did say black was also beautiful. It gave blackness a positive connotation because it focused on the needs of black people as they themselves perceived those needs.¹⁷ Carmichael described in an often-reprinted essay titled “What We Want,” how as a child, he would go see Tarzan movies and cheer for Tarzan to beat up the black natives. “I was saying, ‘Kill me.’ . . . Today, I want the chief to beat the hell out of Tarzan and send him back to Europe.” This need for psychological equality is why SNCC believed that blacks could convey the revolutionary idea that black people are able to do things themselves.¹⁸

In a separate essay titled “Toward Black Liberation,” Carmichael wrote that racist assumptions of white superiority are so deeply ingrained in the structure of society and so much a part of the nation’s subconscious that people take it for granted and often don’t recognize it. Thus, it was not a stretch to say that the black community in the U.S. was a victim of white imperialism and colonial exploitation. To correct the pattern of economic exploitation, political impotence, and job and education discrimination would require major, lasting changes in ingrained social patterns and basic power relationships. Now that the overt symbols of white superiority had been destroyed, it was time for blacks to look beyond to the issue of collective power.¹⁹

¹⁷ Cameron Wells Byrd, “Black Power, Black Youth, The City’s Rebellion,” address given at Christ United Church of Christ, Detroit, 1965 (?), Duke University Pamphlet Collection.

¹⁸ Carmichael, “What We Want,” 7.

¹⁹ Carmichael, “Towards Black Liberation,” The Massachusetts Review (September 1966), reprinted in Stokeley Speaks, ed. Ethel N. Minor (New York: Vintage Books, 1971), 36.

On the subject of integration, Carmichael was not ambiguous at all. For whites, he argued that integration meant that a few blacks “make it.” However, when blacks left their communities in favor of the white world, it sapped those communities of knowledge and leadership potential. Tokens were no longer of value to the black masses, just “meaningless showpieces for a conscience-soothed white society.”²⁰ Integration was based completely on acceptance of fact that in order to obtain decent housing and education, blacks must move into white neighborhoods and send their children to white schools. Automatically, this assumption reinforces the notion that whites are superior, and does not solve the problems of the ghetto or the rural South. In short, as long as integration was a one-way street, it was irrelevant.²¹

Black Power advocates created numerous organizations of various sizes, of varying degrees of stability, with different and often conflicting ideological perspectives. This diversity of expression contributed to the movement’s rapid expansion. The decentralized, segmented nature of Black Power allowed for innovation and adaptation to change, and facilitated the penetration of the movement into a wide variety of sociocultural niches.²² One such niche was education.

The beginnings of widespread campus unrest are often dated from confrontations over free speech at the University of California, Berkeley, in 1964. Soon afterwards, though, the scope of student concern expanded to issues such as nuclear testing, problems of the poor, the arms race, and the Vietnam War. Student activists of this era were decidedly anti-institutional and profoundly anti-authoritarian, possessing a

²⁰ Carmichael and Hamilton, 53.

²¹ Carmichael, “What We Want,” 6.

²² Luther P. Gerlach and Virginia H. Hine, “The Social Organization of a Movement of Revolutionary Change: Case Study, Black Power,” in *Afro-American Anthropology: Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Norman E. Whitten, Jr. and John F. Szwed (New York: Free Press, 1970), 397-400.

strong dislike for centralized, unilateral, coercive decision-making. Once student demonstrators learned that powerful universities could be immobilized by expressive acts such as boycotts, sit-ins and the “liberation” of administration buildings, they had unlocked, through militant self-expression, the secret to student power.²³

Black collegians were not insensitive to these developments. They too were questioning traditional values, testing the assumed authority of institutional elites, and seeking a personal and group identity that would square well with their developing values. Indeed, black students’ involvement in campus protests was far out of proportion to their numbers. In 1968-69, black students took leadership roles in 57 percent of all campus protests, yet accounted for less than six percent of the nation’s total college enrollment.²⁴

One plausible explanation for this disproportionate representation is that the urban rebellions of the mid-1960s in Watts, Detroit, and numerous northeastern cities served as a catalyst to black student protest. The “long, hot summers” of violence in northern ghettos promoted national debate on the nature of discrimination and on the institutional basis of racism. From 1964-1970, the number of blacks enrolled in colleges doubled, and with those larger numbers, it became possible to envision institutional change. During the early 1960s, the goals of black college students involved in the southern sit-ins, Freedom Rides, and voter registration efforts were recognition and enforcement of the constitutional guarantees provided by the Fourteenth and Fifteenth

²³ Richard Flacks, “The Liberated Generation: An Exploration of the Roots of Student Protest,” Journal of Social Issues, 23 (July 1967): 52, 56-58.

²⁴ “Student Strikes: 1968-69,” Black Scholar 1 (January-February 1970): 65-68.

Amendments. By 1968, it became apparent that students no longer had to leave campus to stage a protest.²⁵

During the Black Power era, administrators at white universities were charged with quelling societal unrest through the recruitment of “non-traditional” students. The hope was that in bringing in large numbers of inner-city blacks to white campuses, this would instill in young blacks a greater acceptance of the prevailing social system. An expanded black bourgeoisie would have an active, vested interest in its benefits and would then serve as a stabilizing force among the urban masses.²⁶ Those hopes were most certainly dashed, however, as college presidents began reading through lists of demands presented to them by angry black students.

The protestors’ vision of black student power ranged from open admissions for minority group applicants to required sensitivity training for white sorority and fraternity officers, from the hiring of black doctors for the infirmary to increasing the availability of black-oriented food and cosmetics in the student union shops. Above all, though, black students recognized the need to have a say in defining the nature of their education. If knowledge was power, then universities were battlegrounds upon which key societal power relationships were decided. For student protestors, greater control over their learning environment was vital to the larger struggle for self-definition and power.

To the committed black campus activist, one might justifiably attend a white university to obtain technical training or to learn the jargon of a specific discipline as a “second language.” But larger goals always had to remain uppermost in the student’s

²⁵ William H. Exum, *Paradoxes of Protest: Black Student Activism in a White University* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1985), 3. See also Harry Edwards, *Black Students* (New York: Free Press, 1970), 61.

²⁶ James Turner, “Black Nationalism,” in *Topics in Afro-American Studies*, ed. Henry J. Richards (Buffalo: Black Academy Press, 1971), 70-71.

mind. By attending a white university, African-Americans would gain a better understanding of majoritarian institutions. This knowledge could then be used in the cause of black liberation—to subvert the American institutional infrastructure and thereby lessen resistance to the broader Black Power quest.²⁷

At historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs), members of the militant youth culture harshly criticized their schools as elitist and as repositories of middle-class mores. The HBCU's "Negro" orientation was determined to be outmoded and in need of drastic alteration. It produced black people who sought to escape reality by pretending they were white, who longed to be accepted—at any cost—by white society. Upon graduation, they would be content to fulfill roles already defined for them by white society.²⁸ According to student activists, this process of middle-class acculturation no longer made any sense. Even white youth were rejecting the values forwarded by their schools, so why should black students remain passive and unquestioning?

On both black and white campuses, the central coordinating mechanism for Black Power protests was the black student union. Greatly influenced by the writings of Malcolm X, members of these groups were devoted to both political activism and the promotion of black cultural expression. They remembered their fallen leader by prominently displaying his picture on dormitory walls, spray painting his name on buildings, and even renaming "occupied" campus facilities in his honor. Like Malcolm, these students conceptualized their struggle as part of a broad Third World liberation

²⁷ S.E. Anderson, "Toward Racial Relevancy: Militancy and Black Students," Negro Digest 16 (September 1967): 13, 16; Nathan Hare, "The Struggle of Black Students," Journal of Afro-American Issue 1 (Fall 1972): 123.

²⁸ Max Stanford, "Revolutionary Nationalism and the Afroamerican Student," Liberator 5 (January 1965): 13.

movement. They, too, were colonized—unwillingly indoctrinated into an alien value system by their educational institutions.²⁹

To give concrete form to their beliefs and to encourage solidarity, black students fought for separate facilities in which to conduct alternative educational and cultural activities. Black living, dining, and meeting areas were justified on the grounds that African-American students could pursue and develop a greater appreciation of their own culture if they were not constantly confronted with an intrusive and self-conscious white presence. Denying charges of reverse racism, black students said all they wanted was a place to get together by themselves to form a mutually supportive peer group and create an environment that would provide relief from the pressures of university life.³⁰ Many student activists also believed that this type of atmosphere could be found only within a neighboring black community. Their lists of demands to administrators often included projects to aid off-campus residents. This was done so that the rhetoric of black unity could be demonstrated and made relevant in “real world” situations.³¹

Since one of their chief roles in the Black Power revolution was to help transform American higher education, black student activists had to make sure that their classroom instruction promoted institutional reform. To this end, they actively lobbied for the creation of Black Studies departments and programs. Black Studies was thought to be capable of striking a telling blow at the intellectual and cultural underpinnings of American racism. Whites would no longer control the context of black intellectual expression by defining the activities and experiences of white westerners as the

²⁹ Michele Russell, “Erased, Debased, and Encased: The Dynamics of African Educational Colonization in America,” *College English* 31 (April 1970): 673-74.

³⁰ “Black is Beautiful—and Belligerent,” *Time*, 24 January 1969, 43.

³¹ Earl Anthony, *The Time of the Furnaces: A Case Study of Black Student Revolt* (New York: Dial, 1971), 82.

universal yardstick of human experience. A new frame of reference would be offered to black youth, in which blacks themselves would determine both the ends and ultimate beneficiaries of their college education.³²

The process of implementing change in a university's curriculum, however, traditionally moves at a snail's pace. Student activists who demanded immediate action invariably butted heads with administrations not accustomed to students dictating change. The political climate in 1968, following the successful "law and order" campaign of Richard Nixon, also meant that white college presidents in particular were reluctant to be seen as giving in too readily to black student demands. As a result, the implementation phase of Black Studies programs created numerous misunderstandings and mutual ill will. College presidents who were concerned that the new departments would be highly politicized and doctrinaire were not relieved to hear sociologist Nathan Hare, appointed chair of San Francisco State's pioneering Black Studies department in 1968, declare that a "black-studies program which is not revolutionary and nationalistic is, accordingly, quite profoundly irrelevant."³³ They certainly did not breathe any easier after reading that students at Cornell were hoping to gain approval of a new course, Physical Education 300C, "Theory and Practice in the Use of Small Arms and Hand-to-Hand Combat." Their worst beliefs were also likely confirmed when they noted the curriculum proposal prepared by the Black Students' Alliance at State University of New York at Albany, which listed as a requirement, ". . . sufficient mastery of either Akido, Karate, Kung Fu, Judo, Riflery, or Stick Fighting."³⁴

³² Andrew Billingsley, "The Black Presence in American Higher Education," in What Black Educators Are Saying, ed. Nathan Wright, Jr. (New York: Hawthorn, 1970), 126, 146.

³³ Nathan Hare, "The Case for Separatism: 'Black Perspective,'" Newsweek, 10 February 1969, 56.

³⁴ Theodore Draper, The Rediscovery of Black Nationalism, (New York: Viking, 1970), 153.

For their part, campus militants suspected that the basic administrative response to their demands would be a patronizing tokenism—hiring a few, powerless untenured instructors and adding a title or two to the reading lists of courses in existing departments. They referred to these dead-end jobs as “assistant niggerships.”³⁵ In order to lessen the possibility of disappointment, they inflated their demands far beyond the academic world’s accustomed boundaries.

The first principle they sought to establish was that the Black Studies departments should be black-controlled and autonomous. While white academics presented themselves as experts in the field, their studies seemed biased and misleading to black activists. Of those available to teach in the new departments, white faculty would be an instant anachronism, and the least likely to gain a respectful hearing. Therefore, most teachers in the programs would necessarily be black. Moreover, according to Nathan Hare, “The primary reluctance to admit white professors to the Black Studies program . . . is the tendency for whites, because of their recent socio-historical conditioning, to be inclined to take over whenever they take part in black enterprises.”³⁶

A second principle was that not even all blacks with earned doctorates would be considered for professorships. Formal educational credentials were for the moment less important than commitment to the principles of the movement.³⁷ Third, it was felt that black control of the educational environment had to extend to the racial mix of the courses themselves. White students either had to be excluded from Black Studies

³⁵ Billingsley, 141.

³⁶ Nathan Hare, “Questions and Answers About Black Studies,” in *Modern Black Nationalism: From Marcus Garvey to Louis Farrakhan*, ed. William L. Van Deburg (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 169.

³⁷ Hare, “Case for Separatism,” 56.

classes or taught in separate sections. The presence of whites, even in small numbers, was said to have a stifling effect on black creativity. With white students present, black instructors would avoid introducing controversial topics. Fearing misinterpretation, black students would be inhibited from expressing themselves in an open and honest fashion. In any case, white students were thought to be either so guilt-ridden or so ill-informed about black life and culture that far too much valuable class time would be spent introducing them to subjects about which blacks already had considerable first-hand knowledge.³⁸ By the same token, white students would not be denied access to Black Studies programs at all colleges. "The black condition does not exist in a vacuum," proclaimed San Francisco State's Hare. "We cannot solve the problems of the black race without solving the problems of the society which produced and sustains the predicament of blacks. At the same time as we transform the black community, through course-related community activities, white students duplicating this work in their communities . . . may operate to transform the white community and thus a racist American society."³⁹

Finally, the programs had to be grounded in Black Power ideology. Black Studies were not to remain impartial in the educational arena. The mission was to provide young people with a distinct ideological perspective on world affairs. If such training should be interpreted as "political," so be it. According to Black Studies proponents, a truthful observer would admit that American higher education never had

³⁸ Catharine R. Stimpson, "Black Culture/White Teacher," *Change* 2 (May-June 1970): 36.

³⁹ Hare, "Questions and Answers About Black Studies," 167.

been value-free. As a servant of the power structure, the modern university worked to keep the oppressed in their place, to maintain the current power base of society.⁴⁰

As the debate over Black Studies spread to campuses across America in the late 1960s, it became obvious that the final products of the curriculum workshops and dean's meetings were going to please very few people. A dramatic solution was proposed: creation of a true Black University. Supporters of this new concept argued that ultimately, whether on white or black campuses, advocates of Black Studies were forced to go through bureaucratic channels for their plans to have any hope of reaching fruition. As a result, Black Studies were destined to remain under some degree of external control and could not realistically hope to serve as a catalyst for institutional reform. In the Black University, things would be different.⁴¹

Ideally, the Black University would be tuition-free—funded initially by the federal government, a state legislature, or through private foundations. Room and board costs would be defrayed through work-study programs designed to involve students in the local black community. Centralized on-campus housing would encourage a spirit of unity among the student body and between students and faculty. Organized in this manner, the new institution was certain to become a mecca for “together” black professors.⁴²

For those who believed that a Black University rightfully belonged to the people, there was no more salient notion than that it should involve the total black community in

⁴⁰ Hare, “What Should Be the Role of Afro-American Education in the Undergraduate Curriculum?” Liberal Education 55 (March 1969): 42, 49.

⁴¹ Anthony, 82.

⁴² Gerald A. McWorter, “Struggle, Ideology and the Black University,” Liberator 8 (September 1968): 9.

its educational program. It should be a “communiversity.”⁴³ Grass roots supporters would be repaid through programs designed to expand functional literacy, to upgrade the skills of the underemployed, and to promote black consciousness through cultural enrichment. In utilizing their resources to broaden the educational horizons of the urban poor, these alternative educational structures would be encouraging a bootstraps effort to rebuild black America.⁴⁴

This paper will offer Malcolm X Liberation University in Durham, North Carolina, as a case study in the development of the Black University. Its origins in black student protests at Duke University and its grounding in Black Power ideology place it squarely at the forefront of the late-1960s push for alternative educational institutions for African-Americans. It was not unique, however. Believers in the notion that “the college *is* the community” pointed with pride to the development of institutions such as Malcolm X College of Chicago; Medgar Evers College, a branch of the City University of New York; the Federal City College of Washington, D.C.; and Nairobi College in East Palo Alto, California. Although not all schools of this type were autonomous, most were conceptualized as academic centers for “nation-building.”⁴⁵

Again and again, as white universities and traditional black colleges experienced student protests (and subsequent curriculum revisions), the concept of a Black University was modified to meet local circumstances. It existed on street corners, in narcotic and alcohol treatment facilities, within liberation schools like Durham’s MXLU, and at the meetings of community theater and political action groups. The Black

⁴³ “The Communiversity: An Alternative Independent System,” Negro Digest 19 (March 1970): 24-29, 72-74.

⁴⁴ Nathan Wright, Jr., Black Power and Urban Unrest: Creative Possibilities (New York: Hawthorn, 1967), 32-38.

⁴⁵ “Monument to Blackness,” Newsweek, 2 August 1971, 46-47.

University could be seen in embryo at Cornell's Africana Studies and Research Center, at San Diego's Third College, and on the campus of a re-energized, post-1968 Howard University.⁴⁶ If a basic part of this Black Power institution's mission was to challenge the prevailing Euro-American world view while helping young people develop a better appreciation of their own culture, it could be said that the Black University existed wherever black people played a major role in determining educational policy.

⁴⁶ Edgar F. Beckham, "What We Mean By 'The Black University,'" College Board Review (Spring 1969): 14; Alex Poinsett, "The Metamorphosis of Howard University," Ebony 27 (December 1971): 110-122.

Chapter Two

From Duke To MXLU

In the summer of 1968, black students at Duke University participated in an internship program in which they worked to combat the ravages of poverty in Durham's poorer black communities. When these students returned to Duke in the fall of 1968, they joined with other students involved in earlier labor organizing with the mostly black non-academic workers on campus. Together they began to confront the limits of traditional education in grappling with racial inequality. To these students, "racial liberals" showed little interest in addressing black student academic and campus needs, as well as those of the African-American community at large. At Duke, which did not desegregate at the undergraduate level until 1964, black students were neither encouraged to assimilate nor offered a cultural network by the university. Rather, merely having black students at Duke appeared enough. These issues would peak amid the battle for Black Studies at Duke in late 1968 and 1969.⁴⁷

Known as the "Harvard of the South," Duke's academic standing and growing cosmopolitan outlook had long challenged the notion of the South as an intellectual and cultural backwater. Despite comparisons to Harvard, however, Duke still yearned to transcend its regional standing and stature. Once a campus exclusively for the sons and daughters of the state's most privileged families, by 1968 North Carolinians comprised only one-quarter of Duke's student population. Of the remainder, fifty percent were non-Southerners. All fifty states were represented, as well as many

⁴⁷ Chuck Hopkins, "Malcolm X Liberation University, "Malcolm X Liberation University," Negro Digest (March 1970): 70; Proposal for MXLU, June 20, 1969, to Board of Directors of the Foundation for Community Development, 2, Folder 903, from the North Carolina Fund Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill.

foreign nations. The university advertised its newfound multiculturalism to its prospective students, particularly in its 1969 promotional literature, hailing "diversity as one of its greatest assets."⁴⁸ For the undergraduate population, which included 101 black students out of an enrollment of approximately 5,000, becoming national in the late 1960s also meant diversifying Duke's racial composition.⁴⁹

Black students at white colleges often were more successful than their counterparts at historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) in their crusade for "Black Studies." By 1969, more than 140 universities—including Harvard, Yale, and Princeton—had announced plans to develop Black Studies programs. Fourteen white Southern colleges had even taken the plunge.⁵⁰ Duke, however, was not among them.

While Duke relied heavily upon diversity to enhance its national reputation, black student concerns for a more purposeful education remained a neglected issue of the administration. For two-and-a-half years, the Afro-American Society (AAS), a campus organization comprised of black students, had conveyed their numerous grievances. These grievances, however, were largely ignored. It was not that Duke President Douglas Knight and the administration failed to resolve any issues of the AAS, but that the administration, which increasingly basked in its national recognition, was falling short of the expectations of its black students.

Following Knight's appointment, many anticipated, as one student put it, that there would be a renaissance on campus similar to what was occurring in Washington.

⁴⁸ "Opportunities Beyond the Classroom," in Information for Prospective Students (Durham, NC: Duke University, 1970).

⁴⁹ The Duke Board of Trustees voted to desegregate the graduate and professional schools on March 8, 1961, whereupon four black graduate students gained admittance. See Don Yannella, "Race Relations at Duke University and the Allen Building Takeover" (Honors thesis, Duke University, 1985), 1-3.

⁵⁰ "Civil Rights Movement to Black Revolution," 140.

Knight, a young northern liberal who took the Duke post on the eve of President John F. Kennedy's assassination in 1963, was frequently compared to JFK. During Knight's early administration, the removal of "colored" signs and the admission of blacks into the undergraduate college in 1964 denoted visible progress. Yet this auspicious beginning and Knight's "liberal credentials" were increasingly compromised by financial reliance on alumni and the lack of "moral courage . . . essential" in challenging trustees opposed to social reform. As Professor Samuel DuBois Cook, the university's first African-American hire in 1966, remembered:

Dr. Hollowell, who was chairman [of political science] went to Dr. Knight and told him he wanted to keep me. Dr. Knight said, 'Oh, no' . . . He said two or three things had hurt fundraising, had hurt him. One was my coming here, a black professor. He and Dr. Hollowell had a big thing. He said, 'No, we can't keep him.' And Dr. Hollowell said, as he told me, 'Well, you tell him. I'm not going to tell someone that we don't want him when we do.' . . . Of course, Dr. Knight forgot about it, [and] terminated his opposition at some point.⁵¹

Such acquiescence to the university's powerful conservative tradition foreshadowed the administration's handling of black studies. Knight's response, in particular, was indicative of administrators who were at least as preoccupied with financial receipts as improving conditions for black students.

The growing sense of racial consciousness developing among black students at Duke was certainly not unique. In 1965, as SNCC began to abandon nonviolence as its guiding philosophy and embrace Black Power, militancy began to emerge on campuses around the country. Students at San Francisco State University developed a "black" curriculum and began establishing relationships with the local black community. In 1968, at Howard University in Washington, D.C., student protests were accompanied by lists of demands presented to the administration. Those demands included the right to protest, withdrawal of certain faculty members,

⁵¹ Yannella, 6.

increased student autonomy, more interaction between the university and the surrounding community, and the implementation of courses addressing black history and liberation.⁵²

Amidst this backdrop, student unrest at Duke began to reach a boiling point in 1968. Following the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., in April, Duke students responded with a peaceful protest on campus while much of the rest of the country erupted in violence. At the conclusion of the protest, 450 black and white students marched to the home of President Knight with a list of demands. They wanted Knight to sign an advertisement in Durham newspapers calling for a day of mourning in the city; resign his membership in the segregated Hope Valley Country Club; support efforts to increase the minimum wage of the university's non-academic workers; and appoint a cross-campus committee to make recommendations concerning collective bargaining and union recognition for the non-academic workers.

Knight seemed sympathetic to the demands, but would not back them, asserting that he lacked the power to dictate university policy. Students then began a silent vigil on the university's main quadrangle on West Campus; four days later, the ranks of protestors had swelled from 200 to 1,400. Black non-academic employees then called a strike, citing Duke's failure to recognize their union, Local 77. Support for the protest and strike flowed in from across the country, including a sympathetic telegram from Democratic presidential candidate Senator Robert

⁵² William L. Van Deburg, *New Day in Babylon: The Black Power Movement and American Culture, 1965-1975*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 68-69; See also Daniel Murphy, "The Creation of Malcolm X Liberation University and the Black Power Tradition in North Carolina," paper written for History 498, Professor Linda McMurry, North Carolina State University, date unknown, 8.

Kennedy. The protest halted when Duke agreed to a wage increase for non-academic employees, but the question of collective bargaining rights was not resolved. The students continued their support for the strike, though, by boycotting the campus cafeterias.⁵³

Impetus for what would later become MXLU also came from within Durham's black community. Since 1964, the Foundation for Community Development had been attempting to organize the black community in Durham. Operation Breakthrough, a community action agency, was created to give Durham's poor blacks a unified voice in the city's decision-making processes. In addition, neighborhood councils brought the community together to press for changes in the local environment. Such groups won small victories in improved street lighting and road signs, but failed to win more substantive results from the city against absentee landlords. In response, the black community began to be more militant in their demands. Petitions evolved into pickets, and pickets morphed into mass marches and meetings. This increasingly militant tone mirrored changing attitudes on Duke's campus, leading to a desire for the students and the community to begin working together. One result was the aforementioned summer internship program in 1968, in which Duke students gained firsthand experience in community action and organizing.⁵⁴

It was against this backdrop that black students at Duke returned to campus in the fall of 1968. They quickly concluded that the education they were receiving was an

⁵³ Van Deburg, 68-69; See also Allan Kornberg and Joel Smith, "It Ain't Over Yet": Activism in a Southern University," in *Black Power and Student Rebellion*, eds. James McEvoy and Abraham Miller (Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1969), 104-105.

⁵⁴ "Proposal for Malcolm X Liberation University," June 20, 1969, NCF papers.

education in name only, and that the curriculum and faculty at Duke were not preparing them to enter a racist society. In October, the AAS asked Duke to back up its self-professed belief in equality by meeting several demands:

- 1) publicly supporting a selective buying campaign in downtown Durham designed to obtain reforms in housing, welfare, legal protection, and recreation
- 2) contracting a significant portion of Duke's business to black-owned businesses
- 3) hiring an African-American to recruit potential black students
- 4) hiring an African-American faculty advisor for black students
- 5) establishing a meaningful Afro-American Studies program⁵⁵

Duke made some token concessions—such as hiring a black barber, granting office space to the AAS, instituting a summer remedial program for incoming students, and agreeing to no longer play “Dixie” at university functions—but refused to yield any measure of self-determination to the students. The matter of a Black Studies program, the AAS's number one priority, proved most divisive. Knight pointed out that recommendations for such a program “will require careful study before we can determine the best solution to the problem.” The AAS described Knight's actions as “stalling tactics . . . just an attempt to make us ease up the pressure.”⁵⁶

In November 1968, the university appointed a faculty committee to research development of an Afro-American curriculum. With no voice in selecting the committee's membership, though, the students felt this represented a transparent attempt by Duke to give the appearance of change. The issue simmered until January 1969, when fifteen percent of Duke's black freshmen flunked out. The students concluded that the failures resulted not from any inherent inferiority of the freshman—

⁵⁵ “Background Information of the Malcolm X Liberation University,” March 1969, photocopied, from the personal papers of Dr. Cleveland Sellers, Jr., housed at the Avery Institute at the College of Charleston, Charleston, South Carolina. Dr. Sellers served on the Council of Elders for MXLU, and the internal documents, memos, position papers, and financial statements that he saved are relied on heavily throughout this paper. Any reference to Dr. Sellers' collection will hereafter be noted by the abbreviation *CSP*.

⁵⁶ Elizabeth Tornquist, “The Explosion at Duke,” North Carolina Anvil, 15 February 1969, 6. See also Duke Chronicle, 4 February 1969.

they had met Duke's entrance requirements—but from institutionalized racism found on Duke's campus. Because the problems of being black at a white university magnified the already tough adjustments any freshman faces, the black freshman at Duke faced a nearly-impossible task.⁵⁷

Even more frustrating for the Duke students was seeing the Black Student Movement at the University of North Carolina in neighboring Chapel Hill experience a small measure of success. The BSM convinced a curriculum committee to study the implementation of Black Studies, based on a list of twenty-three grievances submitted to the UNC administration on 11 December 1968. Their grievances were addressed point-by-point in a 19-page reply by late January. Moreover, student demands spurred major concessions from the administration, including a new ombudsman for future racial disputes, a promise of substantial black student increase, and proposed admissions and summer programs to aid at-risk students.⁵⁸

After months of delay, black students at Duke concluded that decisive action was necessary. From February 6-11, dubbed Black Is Beautiful Week, students staged a conference to heighten black self-awareness and stimulate all Duke students to action on racial problems. Participants included such nationally known activists such as Fannie Lou Hamer, the tragic heroine of the 1964 Democratic Party national convention; comedian Dick Gregory; soul singer James Brown; and future Atlanta mayor Maynard Jackson. The personal contact with these activists served as a catalyst for the black students. On February 12, accompanied by Gregory, the students showed up on President Knight's doorstep. Knight invited them in and they discussed for more than

⁵⁷ "Background Information on the Malcolm X Liberation University," March 1969, *CSP*.

⁵⁸ Yannella, 14.

two hours the implementation of a black studies program. The next day, with little firmly resolved—except the student's temporary pacification—Knight departed for a two-week visit to New York, ironically to seek funds from the Ford Foundation for a Black Studies program.⁵⁹

In order to dramatize the extent and urgency of the problems at Duke and demonstrate their willingness to take any action necessary, the following morning the students took over the Allen Building, site of Duke's administrative offices and student records. Hoping to garner fair print and electronic coverage, the students had earlier contacted four or five sympathetic white reporters from Duke's leading student newspaper, the Chronicle. After being sworn to secrecy, Chronicle reporters disseminated the AAS's press release, given to them a day earlier, to the national media. "We seized the building because we have been negotiating with the Duke administration and faculty concerning different issues that affect black students for two-and-a-half years," read the statement. "We have no meaningful results. We have exhausted all the so-called proper channels."⁶⁰

The students threatened to burn all the university's files containing student records unless their demands were met. In addition to the original demands back in October, they added the following:

- 1) the reinstatement of the black students who had failed the previous semester
- 2) an increase in the black student population to equal twenty-nine percent by 1973
- 3) an end to "police harassment" of black students
- 4) an end to the grading system for black students
- 5) the earmarking of fees for a Negro student union
- 6) self-determination of working conditions by non-academic employees at Duke

⁵⁹ Kornberg and Smith, 107.

⁶⁰ "Background Information on the Malcolm X Liberation University," March 1969, *CSP*. For the complete list of student demands, see Tornquist, Anvil, 15 February 1969, 1, 6.

Around mid-morning, the students hung a sign outside an Allen Building window that read "Malcolm X Liberation Front." The name had actually been thought up a year prior during a sit-in in Knight's office, where black students declared his office Malcolm X Liberation University, because it was around Malcolm's birthday. They then renamed the building MXLU to stress the educational function and motive of their protest. During the takeover, student activists each read copies of Malcolm X Speaks and the Autobiography of Malcolm X.⁶¹

Contacted on the morning of the takeover, Knight announced from New York that the university refused to accede to any student demands. Knight directed students to vacate Allen or otherwise face suspension and trespassing charges. Back at Duke, barricaded students released the list of their demands to a group called the Student Liberation Front, a coalition of white leftist groups, which copied and mass-distributed the list to student and faculty members gathered on the main quadrangle. "[T]heir struggle is your struggle," Chronicle associate editor and SLF member Mark Pinsky declared to approximately 350 students, faculty members and administrators on hand. With support from faculty advisors, the SLF announced the temporary formation of Freedom Schools or Sympathy Schools.

At 2:30 p.m., an estimated five hundred concerned students and faculty assembled in Duke Chapel. There they discussed various ways to help, including transporting students who wished to participate from North Carolina Central University, an HBCU also located in Durham. They also discussed whether to occupy another

⁶¹ Kara Miles Turner, "Malcolm X Liberation University: Institution Building During the Black Power Era," graduate seminar paper written for History 310s, Professor Raymond Gavins, Duke University, 3 May 1993. See also Yannella, 26-33, 35.

segment of Allen to establish physical solidarity, and how best to ensure long-term passage of the thirteen student demands. Meanwhile, conservative student groups like the Young Americans for Freedom threatened to recapture the Allen Building through direct confrontation with the protestors. Others played "Dixie" and waved Confederate flags, both of which had emerged from relative obscurity in the 1950s to become symbols of white resistance to desegregation.⁶²

At 4:05 p.m., with Knight back in Durham to deal with the crisis, an emergency faculty meeting was convened on Duke's East Campus. As the meeting focused on the President's ultimatum to student militants and the more immediate possibility of violence, the faculty's marginality became evident. Alarmed by Knight's implied use of force, one professor offered a motion that the faculty request the President to "suspend the force of the statement until after deliberations of this faculty meeting have been completed." Several faculty quickly seconded the motion. Knight implacably refused. After evading questions about whether the police had been called, Knight finally responded: "You knew that If your research or your office were in that building, you would have been concerned, too." Knight's callous disregard for black Duke students astonished even the most dispassionate faculty members.⁶³

Many on the faculty grumbled that the East Campus emergency meeting was merely a diversionary strategy to keep them away from imminent police action on West Campus. Not to be outwitted, twenty of them promptly scurried to the doorways of Allen "to put their bodies on the line." Sharing this view, Charles Tanford of the Physiology Department blasted the rubber-stamp role of the faculty gathering. The real decisions

⁶² Yannella, 45.

⁶³ Yannella, 51.

had "all been made without the involvement of the faculty." The majority of the faculty, however, either stayed silent or supportive of the administration. Knight thanked the faithful professoriate and reminded them that Duke "succeeds only if it has the loyal support of its faculty."⁶⁴

After ten hours, the students peacefully ended the occupation. Trouble ensued, however, when 120 uniformed Durham City Police, State Highway patrolmen, and Durham Police Reserve officers began to attempt to break up the crowd of two to three thousand sympathizers, white and black, who had gathered outside the Allen Building. After securing the building, the police responded to the insults and projectiles hurled in their direction by lobbing tear gas canisters into the crowd. In the ninety-minute melee that resulted, five police officers and twenty students suffered injuries requiring medical attention. Unwittingly, the police converted some unlikely allies to the Black Studies cause. When the police finally left, the "reasonable, privileged, obedient white students of Duke University were stunned."⁶⁵

The hard-line position taken by Knight spurred a backlash among students. Between fifteen and twenty percent of students boycotted class the following day in a show of solidarity with black students.⁶⁶ Duke faculty and instructors organized free university courses to discuss the takeover. The Free Academic Senate, a group of fifty predominantly young Duke instructors, was formed in response to the horror of "what has happened and the unresponsiveness of present structures." The real problems were not "rednecks and grits," but trustees and administrators, history Professor

⁶⁴ Yannella, 50-51.

⁶⁵ Roger Jolley and Cornelia Olive, "25 Injured in Clash of Students and Police After Black Seizure of Duke Campus," Durham Morning Herald, 14 February 1969, A-1. See also Elizabeth Tornquist, "Duke's Lost Opportunities," North Carolina Anvil, 22 February 1969, 6.

⁶⁶ According to the Duke News Bureau, attendance was close to normal. See Yannella, 66.

Thomas Rainey angrily declared. From Rainey's perspective fellow faculty members were equally culpable. Too many professors at the emergency meeting had eagerly "sold out to the corporate structure," granting Knight carte blanche "to bring the pigs down on us." In another display of cross-racial solidarity, two hundred Chapel Hill students conducted a 45-minute sit-in. Perhaps in the rarest sight of all, 125 UNC students traveled to Duke and marched, chanting, "UNC supports Duke."⁶⁷

Nevertheless, Knight stood firm. He insisted that the Allen takeover be viewed within a broader context. Rebellions on the campuses of Columbia, Berkeley, and Wisconsin limited "our freedom to respond to militant students," he declared. "In turn, other campuses are concerned about what happens at Duke." Many whites feared the violence of 1968 and the escalating demands for Black Power. Campus protest brought on unintended pecuniary consequences, too. According to the University Secretary, Duke lost hundreds of thousands of dollars from actual donors, if not millions in potential pledges, following the silent vigil in the wake of Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination. In response to the vigil, alumni participation in the university's fundraising campaign declined by thirty-two percent. A more restrained response to the Allen takeover portended devastating financial consequences for the university.⁶⁸

Knight's decision was shaped by personal and career considerations. Knight was influenced by advisors to North Carolina Governor Robert Scott, who warned Duke's president that if the University gave in, within twenty-four hours demands would

⁶⁷ Yannella, 65, 67. See also *Chronicle*, 14 February 1969 and Joel Buckley and Tom Fisher, "The Police Move In, The Riot Is On," *North Carolina Anvil*, 15 February 1969, 5.

⁶⁸ Yannella, 68.

appear on other campuses.⁶⁹ Perhaps as weighty a consideration, Knight feared that if Durham police had not been mobilized, Duke trustees surely would have fired him. Fearing exacerbating existing campus tensions while stressing a tough-on-militants public image, Knight rescinded an earlier agreement to speak to the student body.

Several days after the takeover, an interracial throng of nearly one thousand supporters of Black Studies appeared in the president's front yard. For three hours that night, Knight, a local black activist named Howard Fuller, black student leaders, and the newly formed Kerckhoff Faculty Committee on Student Concerns worked on a plan until a substantive agreement was reached. By morning, a press conference was held announcing Duke as the first major southern university to initiate a Black Studies program. Crisis in Durham had been averted, aside from an ostensibly minor quibble: the issue of control of the program and curriculum.⁷⁰

The students agreed to sit down with the faculty committee at a retreat on March 1-2 to jointly plan an Afro-American Studies Program. Knight gave a verbal promise that the students would be given a "meaningful" role in preparing any curriculum. At the retreat, however, members of the faculty committee came in with an Afro-American Studies program that had been prepared without the participation of the students. The students believed "participation" meant not merely consultation, but a share in the decision-making. Instead, they were asked to have faith in the decisions made by the faculty committee. Differences also arose over the makeup of the committee which would supervise the hiring of faculty and outline course. The students wanted a fifty-fifty

⁶⁹ Governor Scott would later congratulate Knight for setting a successful precedent for future actions in similar situations on other campuses. See Yannella, 68.

⁷⁰ Yannella, 68. See also Chronicle, 17 February 1969.

split (five students, five faculty members) on the ten-person committee, but the faculty rejected that suggestion, countering with a five-faculty, three-student split.

Reaching an apparent impasse, six days later more than fifty percent of the black student body threatened to withdraw from Duke. At a rally in Baldwin Auditorium on Duke's East Campus, the students picked up some support from Durham's black community. Howard Clement, chairman of the Black Solidarity Committee for Community Improvement, proclaimed, "The night after the occupation of Allen Building, a newsman said, 'One of the greatest fears is that the tension at Duke will spill over into the highly organized black community of Durham.' Brothers, it has. We pledge our full support to the Afro-American Society. We are not behind you, we're with you."⁷¹ The same evening, at a torchlight march to St. Joseph's African Methodist Episcopal Church, Howard Fuller talked about students' desire to form a new university which would "provide a framework within which black education can become relevant to the needs of the black community." The name settled upon by black students, Fuller said, was Malcolm X Liberation University.⁷²

The students insisted that their desire to found a Black University was not a publicity stunt, but a serious attempt to provide black students with a first-rate, practical education, which they were not getting at Duke. MXLU would move beyond education for the sake of a degree and address the specific needs of the black student. The Duke students contacted Nathan Garrett of the Foundation for Community Development, who decided the students' concerns were so important that he assigned Fuller to spend the vast majority of his time coordinating MXLU's development. The FCD board voted a

⁷¹ Elizabeth Tornquist, "Will Duke Do It Again!" *North Carolina Anvil*, 8 March 1969, 10.

⁷² "Background Information on the Malcolm X Liberation University," March 1969, CSP. See also MXLU brochure in North Carolina Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

small grant to help MXLU get started, and the ball was rolling. AAS members, Fuller, and Garrett called a press conference by week's end to discuss formally the opening of MXLU. They hinted, however, that the school's opening might be delayed, with students returning to Duke if a compromise agreement with the faculty council was reached.⁷³

Despite forty-two students' verbal resolve to withdraw, only one-third actually did so. Blacks were understandably reluctant to leave Duke. The thought of leaving a prestigious university doomed more than a few campus movements. Student militants on other campuses, like those participating in the building takeover at the University of Chicago, for example, had been unmoved by police threats. But Chicago students obsequiously vacated the campus building at the suggestion of expulsion by administrators. Collateral promises by non-academic employees of work stoppages and other displays of solidarity if students continued their protests were also not enough. By the start of class the following Monday morning, all but two of the black students returned.⁷⁴ In late March, 48 of the black students went on trial for violation of the Duke "pickets and protest policy" for occupying the Allen Building. All were found guilty and placed on probation for one year rather than being expelled, seemingly dooming MXLU from attracting the very students to whom it was theoretically going to cater.⁷⁵

⁷³ "History: Malcolm X Liberation University," date and author unknown, photocopied, CSP. See also Elizabeth Tornquist, "The Blacks and Duke," North Carolina Anvil, 15 March 1969, 12.

⁷⁴ Non-academic employees at Duke were apparently disappointed at the vacillation of black Duke students, who often encouraged workers to "stay off your job," and "take a chance on losing your livelihood," but were not willing themselves to continue the withdrawal. See Fuller interview, in Radish, 28 July-10 August 1969, housed in the Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University.

⁷⁵ Elizabeth Tornquist, "Malcolm X Univ. Future Doubtful," North Carolina Anvil, March 22, 1969, 11-12.

Nevertheless, throughout the spring of 1969, MXLU offered weekly supplementary classes at Your Thing Own Theater for Duke and North Carolina Central students, as well as high school students and interested persons from the community. There they studied African history, principles of community organizing, works by and about Malcolm X, and the Ki-Swahili language. Throughout the summer, there were resource development meetings, planning MXLU's future with black students at other colleges—even while making the most of Duke's resources.⁷⁶

Keeping an agreement following the Allen occupation, the Duke administration sponsored a two-day retreat late in the spring semester. Both sides invited consultants to further explore the question of Black Studies at Duke. The AAS brought in consultants from Federal City College, who themselves were organizing the Center for Black Education, a Washington, D.C.-based black institution of higher learning which was to be free from external control. The weekend retreat fortified students' alliances with Federal City officials James Garrett, Charlie Cobb, and other founders of the Center for Black Education, which ultimately emerged, in spirit, as the northernmost branch of MXLU. A major methodological difference between a traditional western education and a pan-African one was obvious, school founders argued: universities like Duke prepared students to participate in post-colonial oppression, while such counter-institutions as the Center for Black Education and MXLU designed a pedagogy for black liberation.⁷⁷

White leftists harbored too many reservations to be effective, Fuller told incoming black freshmen during a counter-orientation weekend sponsored by Duke's

⁷⁶ Howard L. Fuller, interview by Devin Fergus, Dec. 14, 1998, Milwaukee, unrecorded interview, notes in possession of author.

⁷⁷ Federal City College was later renamed University of District of Columbia. See Hopkins, 41, 44-48.

predominantly white Student Liberation Front. To be sure, Fuller elaborated in confidence to an Anvil reporter, “I trust some white individuals up to a point . . . and [believe in] a classless society where all men are equal and color is no longer important except as it plays a part in a man’s sense of identity.”⁷⁸ But white radicals’ anxiety over institutional reprisal or state persecution made them less than a revolutionary cadre, he added. Black student hesitancy in the aftermath of the Allen takeover, however, clearly belied the notion of trepidation among white students only. As Fuller himself acknowledged following Allen: “White students became necessary . . . because . . . black students vacillated.”⁷⁹

As the summer months waned, so did the possibilities of creating a mutually acceptable black studies program. A satisfactory resolution, which would preclude MXLU’s opening, withered rapidly under the inertia of Duke’s supervisory committee. It conducted only three meetings during the spring term and summer in the aftermath of Allen. With such apparent indolence from the predominantly faculty task force, few were surprised, following the unveiling of the committee’s Black Studies program just days before the 1969-1970 academic year was set to begin, that the AAS resoundingly rejected the newfangled curriculum.

We cannot “recognize what exists [at Duke] as a black studies program,” Adrenee Glover read from a prepared statement released by the AAS. Glover continued by listing the group’s sundry disappointments with Duke’s newest course of study. There was not one black instructor. There was no director. There was no budget. Only one new course, African-American Literature, was introduced. “[M]ost of

⁷⁸ “Howard Fuller’s Vision,” North Carolina Anvil, July 27, 1969, 4.

⁷⁹ Fuller interview, Radish, 1969.

all, Glover added, “there is no black control.” As an interdisciplinary program, these courses—including the curriculum content, selection of faculty, and course descriptions—persisted under the direction of the established departments of English, sociology, and history.⁸⁰

As the supervisory committee languished throughout the spring and summer of 1969, MXLU was transformed from a curriculum corollary of Duke to a freestanding institution. Although the supervisory group assembled only three times in the span of nearly six months, Fuller and black students convened countless meetings with school organizers, theoreticians, and activists in the state and across the nation. In contrast to Duke’s ad hoc committee, which was bogged down with perfunctory exercises like re-naming courses, alternative school organizers secured new classroom spaces, recruited students, and expanded its course of instruction to include non-traditional western studies like martial arts. The institutional sloth of Duke validated MXLU organizer’s existing apprehensions about Duke’s sincerity to Black Studies and accentuated the importance of black control over the discipline.

In short, a confluence of forces propelled Duke from a final vestige of Jim Crow higher education to the first major university in the South to announce a Black Studies program. Yet racial liberals, particularly Duke administrators, fundamentally misinterpreted the resolve of black students, and the importance of a scholarly methodology and apparatus—one which did not treat Black Studies as a functionally isolating academic pursuit. Rather than participate, as they saw it, in a program “controlled by the perpetrators of our oppression,” black students opted for a pedagogy

⁸⁰ Durham Morning Herald, October 3, 1969, photocopy from CSP.

that cultivated the knowledge and skills relevant for black liberation. In other words, students would begin enrolling at Malcolm X Liberation University.⁸¹

⁸¹ The nationalist ideology of pan-Africanism provided an empowering psychological lens to view themselves as something more than American minorities. “One thing that white people have to understand is they are in a minority of the world. When black people view themselves as part of something more than within the continental U.S., then you get a different slant on things,” Fuller explained in a Durham broadcast. “If black people continue to look at themselves as American, and aren’t going to look at themselves as Africans as black people, they’re not going to see they’re part of a larger thing [than] this country. . . . We in the U.S. are only part of [revolution], we are not a movement in and of ourselves.” Students attending black and white universities needed to place local struggles in a broader international context—a Pan-African one. Howard Fuller: first of two-part interview on “Where Is Black Studies Going in North Carolina: Discussing the Status of Education in Black America,” moderated by Buie Shuell, October 24, 1969, *NWTC*.

Chapter Three

Howard Fuller: The Force Behind MXLU

Howard Fuller was no stranger to the Durham community, getting involved in numerous social and political issues throughout the mid- and late 1960s. Fuller first came to Durham in 1965 to work for Operation Breakthrough, an anti-poverty agency, as director of a neighborhood youth center. He was just twenty-four years old, a year out of Western Reserve University in Cleveland, where he had earned a master's degree in social work. Prior to that, as an undergraduate, he was the only African-American at Carroll College in Wisconsin. For Fuller, his job in Durham was a return to the South that he had left when he was six years old to move with his family from Shreveport, Louisiana, to Milwaukee.⁸²

Fuller first became the center of controversy in North Carolina in 1966 when he and several other employees of Operation Breakthrough were accused of using federal government cars to transport voters to the polls on Election Day. Fuller successfully weathered that controversy to go on to become the director of training for the North Carolina Fund and then director of training for the Foundation of Community Development, another anti-poverty agency. The four years he spent in the state prior to resigning from FCD to devote his attention to MXLU were exhausting and frustrating. His work took him to such places as Hillsborough to help black high school students protest school policy; the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill to aid black food service workers; and Belmont Abbey College to advise black students who had presented a list of demands to the school administration. During the takeover of the

⁸² Howard Fuller, interview with author, 28 June 2000, notes in author's possession.

Allen Building at Duke, he was the only person the barricaded students allowed inside during the standoff.⁸³ “I’ve spent four years working with poor blacks in this state,” he told a reporter in December 1969. “I’ve been to city councils and to welfare boards. I’ve been everywhere you’re supposed to go. It just doesn’t work for black people. To keep hoping it will work is to be naïve. . . . Sooner or later the black people have to realize that blacks and whites are about different things. In a society that has proven it has no concern for your dignity and worth . . . you’re butting your head against the wall” to continue to believe that the American Dream can work.⁸⁴

Interestingly, Fuller willingly admits to being an integrationist when he first returned to North Carolina. “I had fuzzy ideas then about integration, the American Dream and all that,” he remembered. “I was telling the black people to organize within the system.” He believed in nonviolent tactics, sit-ins, peaceful marches, and other methods of demonstrations which characterized the beginning of the civil rights movement. During his four years back in North Carolina, though, his message changed as he became attracted to Black Power. “I guess it began with the [Meredith] march in Mississippi and Stokeley Carmichael’s speeches,” he said. “The concept just began to hit me.”⁸⁵

At least a year before MXLU was a gleam in the eye of students at Duke, Fuller had established himself as a firm opponent of integration. In a November 1968 meeting of the Durham Human Relations Committee, Fuller made himself perfectly clear. “I see the control of schools and their curricula as being more important than the integration of

⁸³ Fuller, interview with author.

⁸⁴ Wayne Hurder, “Howard Fuller: Controversial But He Wants to Be ‘Flexible,’” News and Observer, 14 December 1969, IV:3

⁸⁵ Fuller, interview with author.

many schools. . . . I'm not an integrationist. It's beautiful to me if my daughter does not have to go to school with any white kids. The reason we have fought for integration up to this point is we have said, 'If my child can go to school with a white child, then I know my child is going to get a better education.'" Fuller questioned black parents who pushed for integration about whether they thought their kids would be able to participate in the student council in white schools, become cheerleaders, or join clubs that met in homes where blacks were not welcome. The biggest problem, Fuller asserted, was that communities found it impossible to run two separate school systems. When money got distributed, it went to white schools first.⁸⁶

Fuller believed *Brown v. Board of Education* represented a first step, but that the particular strain of liberalism from which it emanated had two flaws. First, it assumed the system was essentially just, and that blacks could find remedies within it. Second, *Brown* implied that if separate was unequal, then there could not be excellent black schools. This suggested that blacks' problems could only be solved by assimilation. Fuller's answer to the first flaw was to reject current American society; his answer to the second was to get involved in the founding of MXLU.⁸⁷

Given Fuller's feelings about integration, it should not come as a shock that he sympathized with the black students at Duke. That he would emerge as the spokesman and prime force behind MXLU seems only natural. Actually getting MXLU off the ground, from a mere idea to reality, would be a mammoth undertaking. Fuller needed both moral and financial support, and he needed it from more than one segment of the Durham community. His audience dictated his approach. When speaking before poor

⁸⁶ Howard Fuller, "Meeting of the Durham Human Relations Committee," November 1968, cassette recording, NWTC.

⁸⁷ Tom Bamberger, "The Education of Howard Fuller," Milwaukee Magazine, July 1988, 58.

blacks whose moral support he needed, Fuller spoke the language of the masses. When asking for financial support from the prosperous African-American business community in Durham, or in speeches before mixed-race audiences, Fuller toned down the rhetoric and flashed his intellect.⁸⁸

On 6 July 1969, Fuller spoke before a mass meeting of the United Organization for Community Improvement. By this time, MXLU was well into the planning stages and hoping to open its doors in the fall. It became obvious early in his speech that this would be no “polite” lecture. Before beginning, Fuller asked reporters from the Durham Morning Herald to leave, a request that met with thunderous applause from the audience. When he spied a reporter trying to observe through a window, Fuller would not start until the man had been physically removed. “I think it’s time you stopped buying that thing. . . . I didn’t come here tonight to speak to white people through the newspapers.” Fuller warmed the audience up by invoking the 350 years of dehumanization and oppression African-Americans had faced in American history. Then, with the crowd hanging on his every word, he began to build his case for MXLU.⁸⁹

“[The white man] uses the educational system to glamorize himself,” Fuller said. “All he does is tell us lies about history, lies about what our people have contributed to this country. There’s a reason why our kids don’t have any black heroes to look up to; they don’t hear about none. Ain’t gon’ hear about none. And we’re sitting back on our

⁸⁸ Fortunately, several of Fuller’s speeches have been preserved on cassette tape, and the force and power of his words can still be felt.

⁸⁹ Howard Fuller, “Mass Meeting of the United Organization for Community Improvement,” 6 July 1969, cassette recording, NWTC.

porches talkin' 'bout how nice things are. It's time that some of us do a little bit of studying. The white man has used education to kill our minds."⁹⁰

Fuller then turned his attention to the proponents of integration. At the time, the city of Durham had two public high schools: Durham High, traditionally the white school; and Hillside High, the pride of the black community. Noting that "white flight" had occurred in other communities in the South that had tried to integrate, Fuller predicted the same trend would happen in Durham:

A lot of y'all are sitting around waiting for integration," he said. "Hillside ain't gonna' be integrated. How is Hillside High School going to be integrated? No white folk going to send no white kid to Hillside. And while you're worried about Hillside being integrated, all the white folks in the next ten years are going to move out of the county, and Durham High's going to be all black. And all you integrationists are going to be looking around wondering what to do. What you better do is get control of the things that we've got and make the kind of schools we need for our kids. . . . We're already separated. The problem is we're separated with no power. I'm talking about putting some power into that separation."⁹¹

Fuller acknowledged that the black community in Durham had some white friends, but if those "friends" did not like the direction the black community was taking with MXLU, then they could not be considered friends any longer. He thanked those who had gone to the city council to speak on his behalf and tell the council that he was not the demon the media and others made him out to be. But he urged his supporters not to speak for him anymore. "I am whatever I need to be whenever I need to be it," he said. "I don't care what they write about me. I don't care what cartoons they draw. I don't care if they think I'm violent. I don't care if they know that I own a rifle. The only thing I care about is you. . . . You don't have to interpret me to them. Don't beg no

⁹⁰ Fuller, "Mass Meeting of the United Organization for Community Improvement," 6 July 1969, NWTC.

⁹¹ Fuller, "Mass Meeting of the United Organization for Community Improvement," 6 July 1969, NWTC. Fuller's remarks about "white flight" outside the city into Durham County would become reality. The current Hillside High School, where the author has taught for ten years, has a white population of less than five percent.

white folk to accept me because I don't want to be accepted. I don't want them to like me. I don't want them to even have anything to do with me."⁹²

Fuller certainly knew how to electrify an audience, but his approach raises serious questions. Could Fuller afford to shut out the white community, or even worse, antagonize it? Even more importantly, Fuller would need financial backing from somewhere. The black business community in Durham enjoyed a level of prosperity matched by very few African-American communities in the country, but it had been a hard-won prosperity. "The problem is not a lack of money in this town," noted Fuller. "The problem is the reaction of some of us who have the money." Any blacks who disagreed with him he classified as enemies. "You can interpret me to white folk anyway that you want to because I classify you as one of them. So therefore, what you think means nothing to me."⁹³ While such language must have appealed greatly to his supporters, one can also surmise it raised more than a few eyebrows and likely lost him some support in both the white and black communities. Had Fuller stuck a fatal blow even before MXLU opened its doors?

⁹² Fuller, "Mass Meeting of the United Organization for Community Improvement," 6 July 1969, NWTC.

⁹³ Fuller, "Mass Meeting of the United Organization for Community Improvement," 6 July 1969, NWTC.

Chapter Four

The Practical Matter of Starting A University

Howard Fuller realized talking about the need for a Black University could only go so far. While his speeches attracted most of the attention, Fuller was working quietly behind the scenes in an effort to recruit faculty and gain both moral and financial support. In a 10 April 1969 letter to the faculty of universities and colleges in Durham, Raleigh, Winston-Salem, Greensboro, and Charlotte, Fuller discussed the problems black students had in relating various academic disciplines and their total college experience to the societal problems of race and poverty. Part of the problem, he suggested, was the built-in resistance to change found among some college administrators and faculty. The creation of MXLU represented an opportunity to experiment with ways of solving this problem and also of testing whether an educational process in which students and faculty share equally was feasible. MXLU might be the best way of developing a new cadre of black leaders. Finally, Fuller set up a conference in each city requesting input on solutions to the problems involved in the school's start-up.⁹⁴

On May 2-4, participants from those initial meetings on college campuses headed to the tiny North Carolina town of Bricks for a work retreat to pool ideas. The results of the sessions at Bricks served as the base for the continued development of MXLU. There the first linkage to the worldwide Pan-African liberation struggle appears. "We are oppressed because we are Black," reads a fact sheet internally distributed to

⁹⁴ Howard Fuller, to Faculty of North Carolina Universities and Colleges, 10 April 1969, CSP.

participants. "Our community is not determined by geography, but it is a matter of the Black community being wherever Black people are within this world." The participants at Bricks set up an interim committee charged with making decisions necessary to open the university in September. This committee would screen faculty, who were called "resource people"; recruit and screen the first students; decide upon an appropriate curriculum; obtain a charter as an educational institution from the State Department in North Carolina; and "make any other 'nuts and bolts' decisions necessary to put the university in operation."⁹⁵ Fuller received the title "Head Nigger In Charge (HNIC)."⁹⁶

Assisting Fuller was a temporary task force comprised of Charles (Chuck) Hopkins, formerly head of AAS at Duke; Duke student Bertie Howard; and Faye Edwards, a program consultant from Cornell University. Members of the interim committee included Cleveland Sellers, an instructor at Cornell; student activist Nelson Johnson from North Carolina A&T; and additional students from North Carolina Central, Howard, and Cornell. The committee determined that "any black person who accepted the goals and objectives of MXLU" would be eligible for admission. A high school diploma was not a prerequisite. Prospective students must submit an application, and then be interviewed by the screening committee. Tuition was set at the minimum of three hundred dollars, with financial aid available. Students who could pay more would be encouraged to do so. In their proposal, the interim committee outlined five goals and objectives:

⁹⁵ Malcolm X Liberation University Fact Sheet," 10 May 1969, author unknown, CSP. On 6 June 1969, MXLU's planners obtained a charter from the state of North Carolina. The "articles of incorporation" are part of State Department files and can be viewed in Raleigh. The author viewed a photocopy from the Sellers papers.

⁹⁶ "It's a cultural expression to say that I'm 'it,' that the buck stops here," explained Fuller to a white reporter. "And rather than get hung up with 'chancellor,' we felt it would be very hip to do it in the true nature of the black people, so I'm the head nigger in charge." See Wayne Hurder, "Operation of Malcolm X U. Outlined by Howard Fuller," News and Observer, 10 October 1969, 32.

1) [T]o respond to the needs of the black community . . . provide an ideological [and] practical methodology for meeting the physical, social, psychological, economical, and cultural needs of black people.

2) To analyze existing political systems and institutions of colonizing societies, and how they relate to and influence black people, 'this effort must be built around the concept of self-determination and undying love amongst black people.'

3) To 'develop a total understanding of the relationship between black people in this country and the whole Pan-African liberation struggle. We are oppressed because we are black and our community is not determined by geography, but it is a matter of the black community being wherever black people are within this world.' The university therefore sought to establish a 'Black Revolutionary Ideology' and 'positive self-awareness for black people.'

4) The university was to be a real alternative for those 'seeking liberation from the misconception of an institutionalized racist education.'

5) Finally, 'the accreditation of the university will be granted by the black community.'

Staff would be known as "Resource People" in order "to remove the connotation of teacher," said Fuller.⁹⁷

James Garrett spearheaded the development of the school's ideology and curriculum. Both of these came from position papers that had been developed by Garrett for the Black Studies Program at Federal City College in Washington, D.C. The structure, ideology, and content of MXLU came out of that program. Even though twelve people were elected to the interim committee, only seven participated on a regular basis to help decide policy and procedure. Most procedural questions therefore devolved to the task force, headed by Fuller. The task force developed publicity materials and applications, interviewed prospective students and "resource people," acquired a physical facility, and obtained a charter.⁹⁸ The interim committee served until December 1969, when it was dissolved and a permanent governing board called the Council of Elders was appointed.⁹⁹

The planners of MXLU anticipated that there would be criticism of their efforts, that any new black institution would be judged by the yardstick of existing white

⁹⁷ "Proposal for Malcolm X Liberation University," 20 June 1969, from the NCF Fund Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

⁹⁸ "History: Malcolm X Liberation University," date and author unknown, photocopy, *CSP*.

⁹⁹ "Proposal for MXLU," brochure, Spring 1970, author unknown, *CSP*.

institutions. The more innovative MXLU chose to be, the more intensive the criticism would be. "Different" would imply "inferior." They even predicted the specific forms the criticism would take, and countered each critique of MXLU with a rebuke of their own:

- 1) "It's not Duke." But why drop out if only to form a carbon copy?
- 2) "It's not accredited." Accreditation simply acknowledges quality, which MXLU will possess regardless of whether or not the school is accredited.
- 3) "It's reverse segregation." MXLU would be open to all who desire an education which would prepare them to work with groups of black persons. Because black students are more committed to the cause of solving the problems of being black in America, the student body would be mostly black.¹⁰⁰

Fuller and the students worked to counter criticism by securing the volunteer services of a top-flight faculty. They envisioned a faculty that combined expertise in the form of Ph.D's with the practical know-how of some individuals who might have only grade-school educations. The nature of a course would dictate the qualities required of the instructor. The task force also set two rules in the hopes of ensuring that students enrolled with serious intentions: 1) compulsory class attendance; and 2) taking a full course load. The original core courses were to be: Afro-American History, Afro-American Political Science, The Role of the Black Church in the Black Revolution, The Study of the Black Community, Introductory Swahili, Mechanics of Journalism, and Speech Dynamics. The latter two courses reflected the founders' belief that black-produced newspapers and pamphlets, as well as public speaking, constituted important educational techniques for the black community in general. Initially, classes would be held in the offices of the FCD until a physical facility could be acquired. Faculty time and building space would be donated. Money for materials would come from tuition, gifts from individuals, and foundation grants.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ "Background Information of the Malcolm X Liberation University." March 1969, *CSP*.

¹⁰¹ "Background Information of the Malcolm X Liberation University." March 1969, *CSP*.

Minutes from a May 25 meeting at the home of James Garrett, however, reveal that the interim committee abandoned the notion of a volunteer faculty quite early. Several black professors reneged when their names appeared in the Durham Morning Herald in association with MXLU. The initial faculty also apparently included some sympathetic white professors from Duke, but their involvement ended soon when they received a hostile reaction from black students. Money concerns dominated this meeting, foreshadowing a recurrent problem in the school's brief history. MXLU needed money desperately to pay for faculty, books, and scholarships. The founders needed to know for certain who was on staff by July or August if they hoped to open in the fall.¹⁰² A financial proposal dated June 5 projected an initial operating budget for thirty students at \$378,375, of which only \$38,000 was allocated for non-recurring expenses like beds, dressers, bookcases, and classroom alterations. The bulk of the budget (\$163,000) would be spent on educational personnel, including twelve "resource people" at an annual salary of \$10,000 each. An additional \$23,000 would hire three cooks, a custodian, and a part-time business manager. In its proposal, MXLU asked major donors to think in terms of \$30,000 to \$50,000 to be used in the top-priority area of hiring additional faculty.¹⁰³

The next documentation of MXLU's development comes from a "Progress Report" dated 17 July 1969. At this point, MXLU could positively report it had received sixty-five applications—mostly from North Carolina, but also from such locales as Boston, Atlanta, Little Rock, and even Puerto Rico. The Task Force had even had the chance to interview some of the applicants. The school's finances, however, remained

¹⁰² "Agenda For Interim Committee Meeting: Malcolm X Liberation University," minutes from meeting held 25 May 1969, handwritten, CSP.

¹⁰³ "Proposal for Malcolm X Liberation University," 5 June 1969, photocopy, CSP.

a huge concern. The treasury contained a mere \$850, obtained from individual donations, an unspecified community corporation, and the Interreligious Foundation for Community Organization. The progress report optimistically stated that MXLU was being seriously considered for large grants by six major organizations, including the Special Projects Division of the national Episcopal Church, the Black Caucus of the Unitarian-Universalist Church, and the National Presbyterian Church. The potential grants ranged in amounts from \$2,500 to \$50,000.¹⁰⁴

MXLU made attempts at generating publicity by contacting major black newspapers and periodicals throughout the country. The Task Force placed public service announcements on black radio stations in Boston, Washington, and throughout North Carolina. They also began printing public relations brochures for distribution throughout the county. Although a building still had not been secured to serve as the school's academic center, MXLU had leased one frame house with six rooms to serve as a cooperative living unit for students and staff, and had made arrangements with a number of black families to open their homes to supplement the living facilities.¹⁰⁵

Finally, in September 1969, MLXU acquired a building at 426-428 East Pettigrew Street that would serve as the school's home. The building, an abandoned warehouse, would be the center of all academic activity, containing administrative offices, a library, and labs. The exterior of the building was painted in red, green, and black—the colors of the Pan-African flag. Pettigrew Street was once the site of most of Durham's main African-American businesses, including a hotel, a movie theater, a "dime store," and a weekly newspaper. The street served as the main thoroughfare into and out of the

¹⁰⁴ "Progress Report on Malcolm X Liberation University," 17 July 1969, photocopy, *CSP*.

¹⁰⁵ "Progress Report on Malcolm X Liberation University," 17 July 1969, photocopy, *CSP*.

Hayti area, the largest and most prominent African-American community in Durham. By 1969, however, Hayti was at the heart of the city's urban renewal efforts, and many of the businesses had been moved out of the area. A large segment of Pettigrew Street had been closed to allow passage of the East-West Expressway (now called the Durham Freeway), and nearly all the buildings, including the warehouse now serving as MXLU's home, were slated to be torn down within the next three or four years.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶ Walter Jackson, "Malcolm X U. Taking Shape," Durham Morning Herald, 27 September 1969, B-1.

Chapter Five

The Financial Breakthrough

Though MXLU emerged in response to the crisis at Duke and because of a desire to internationalize the black struggle, MXLU's early physical development came about through varying kinds of support. Donations arrived from across the country. Local blacks also donated money, resources, and time. Novice carpenters painted signs, laid bricks, leveled the cement floors, and lowered ceilings. Two houses in the community were secured for MXLU students to live in. In the school's first year, Fuller personally raised approximately \$60,000 for internal organizing from numerous speaking engagements and donations.¹⁰⁷ Nationally, the Federation of Pan-African Institutions, the World Council of Churches, the Program to Combat Black Racism, Cummins Engine Foundation, and the Inter-religious Foundation for Community Development were listed as sponsors. However, it was a grant totaling \$45,000 from the Episcopal Church that comprised the largest and most controversial funding during MXLU's first year.¹⁰⁸

Since 1967, the General Convention Special Program (GCSP) of the National Episcopal Church had authorized a voluntary fundraising effort to aid black economic development. The proceeds were to go to an ecumenical organization of black churchmen under controls specified by the Episcopal Church. The funds would then be passed on to other African-American groups for economic development. The

¹⁰⁷ While there was no cafeteria, school officials worked out agreements with restaurateurs along Pettigrew Street. Housing remained a significant early problem, though. Administrators attempted to squelch persistent rumors that citizens were reluctant to rent to MXLU students. Proposal for MXLU, 1972-73, 15, *CSP*; Judy Mathe Foley, "Diary of a Grant," *The Episcopalian* (July 1970): 17.

¹⁰⁸ Proposal for MXLU, 1972-73, 15, *CSP*.

Convention's move drew fire from many within the Church who feared such funding was tantamount to meeting the demands of James Forman's Black Economic Development Conference. Forman, formerly the leader of the Congress on Racial Equality (CORE), had written the Black Manifesto, demanding \$500 million in "reparations" to blacks from white churches because of their role in perpetuating slavery. Forman had recently presented his document to an awestruck crowd at Riverside Church in New York City. While Forman did receive some funds, his main success lay primarily in initiating a national debate amongst churches concerning their responsibility for their past positions on slavery.¹⁰⁹

Every diocese of the National Episcopal Church was encouraged to create community development programs to assist in urban areas. In cooperation, Bishop Thomas A. Fraser of the Episcopal Diocese of North Carolina appointed the Urban Advisory Committee in February 1969, composed of twelve Episcopalian laymen—eight African-Americans and four whites. Seven members of the committee were communicants of Saint Titus Episcopal, a predominantly black church in Durham. Fraser selected Reverend E. Nathaniel Porter, an African-American vicar of Saint Titus, as group director. On October 13, Fraser announced that the national church had approved two grants totaling \$45,000 for MXLU. In July the school had been given a \$15,000 emergency grant to support its establishment, with a further payment of \$30,000 awarded once the school was operational. The grants came from the church's \$9 million Urban Crisis Program, created in 1967. "One of the goals of our national church's urban crisis program is to help the poor and disenfranchised gain social,

¹⁰⁹ Wayne Hurder, "Episcopal Money Reported Helping Malcolm X School," News and Observer, 12 October 1969, 1.

political, and economic power in order to have an effective voice in decisions which affect their own lives," said Fraser. The Diocese of North Carolina reviewed the grant request for the national church, and after study, found MXLU "quite appropriate for funding."¹¹⁰

The two grants were clearly a life-saver for MXLU, without which the school's opening would have been delayed, or perhaps never occurred. Within the North Carolina diocese, however, the grants created a furor. Local members of the church questioned why they had not been consulted in the decision-making process. In protest some churches allowed members to designate their annual pledges for local use rather than being channeled into national church funds. Although the grants amounted to only 0.5% of the Urban Crisis Fund's budget, some clergy suggested they "could result in the church's bankruptcy." Most of the controversy involved the long-range purposes of MXLU. Church members nodded in approval when Fuller spoke of training young blacks to fill leadership roles in the black community, but were not quite as enthusiastic about funding MXLU when Fuller talked about training students to eventually set up an independent Africa.¹¹¹ Opposition to the grant also found strong expression among those favoring racial desegregation, who had problems supporting an institution that would be exclusively black in faculty, student body, and curriculum content. A Durham Morning Herald editorial quoted an anonymous layman who said, "It would seem intelligent people once committed to an integrated society would not be swayed to give

¹¹⁰ "Malcolm X School To Get \$45,000," Durham Morning Herald, 14 October 1969, A-1; Mason P. Thomas, Jr., "Urban Crisis Body Lists '70 Goals," The Churchman (February 1970): 6.

¹¹¹ Ed Martin, "Effect of Episcopal Meet on Grant Dispute Unknown," Durham Morning Herald, 22 October 1969, A-1, 12.

their money to an organization devoted to separatism and the 'Amos 'n Andyism' of a solidly black community."¹¹²

While the grants came from the Urban Crisis Fund, those questioning the outlay of funds to MXLU wondered what contribution the school would make towards solving the problems of the cities. Another concern was the name of the school itself, which identified it with the Black Muslim movement and thus that sect's repudiation of Christianity. Reverend Thomas Thrasher of Chapel Hill said of the grant, "In all my ministry, I have not seen as much anger and distress of people of goodwill as I have seen in the past few days." Of Fuller and Malcolm X he commented, "It would not have been easy to find two names more calculated to raise the hackles of the white community than these two names." Many Christians felt that any ministry of a Christian organization, while not limited to service to Christians, should be carried on in the name of Christ. Otherwise, the church would become no more than a secular agency and miss its divinely commissioned purpose.¹¹³

Another fear of many Episcopalians concerned the possibility that MXLU was related to communism or would foster the ideology, as well as teach violence. In a country reeling from Cold War geopolitics and the internally divisive Vietnam War, those fears were very real, or at least a good way to discredit civil rights activities. Fuller commented on these suspicions, as well as his own personal philosophy, in a question-and-answer session at the Church of the Good Shepard in Raleigh on November 2. "No, we do not teach violence," said Fuller. "I don't think it's necessary. But we do not intend to let anybody spit on us or beat us. . . . If you're going to require us to be

¹¹² "Church Aid To Black University," Durham Morning Herald, 24 October 1969, A-4.

¹¹³ "Church Aid To Black University," Durham Morning Herald, 24 October 1969, A-4. See also The Chapel Hill Weekly, 22 October 1969.

nonviolent, then you'll have to require your (white) people to be nonviolent." Fuller added that the aims of MXLU clashed with the ideals of communism and socialism, and he wanted no part of the "racism" in those two ideologies. As to whether he was Christian: "I don't think that's any of your business. Whomever I believe in is my own personal thing."¹¹⁴

While one would not have expected Fuller to have fallen to his hands and knees to proclaim his gratitude to the Episcopal Church, his remarks to his curious and skeptical audience certainly jeopardized any future support he would get from his prime benefactor. At the same time, the internal dissension surfacing within the North Carolina diocese as a result of MXLU revealed the underpinnings of a philosophical split among conservatives, moderates, and liberals within the church throughout 1969 and 1970.

Wishing to express displeasure with general GCSP policy during the state Diocesan Convention in 1969, conservatives advocated discontinuing future funds to the National Church until diocesan needs were satisfied. The traditional base of conservatives, numbering about 119 delegates, also objected to greater participation of youth and blacks in parish and diocesan decision-making. There were clearly fewer clergymen counted amongst conservatives than any other faction, however. Holding the balance of power, moderates totaled 53 delegates. They generally aligned with conservatives in opposing greater youth and black inclusion in decision-making, but rejected shrinking budgeted support for the National Church program. The more democratic liberal contingent backed greater black and youth input, in addition to

¹¹⁴ "Malcolm X University Aims Told," Durham Morning Herald, 3 November 1969, B-1.

reaching National Church financial goals. Among the 152 votes cast favoring the liberal agenda was presiding Bishop Fraser.¹¹⁵

Fraser had visible support among blacks, and a sympathetic core of intellectuals, clergymen, and youth. UNC professor and Episcopal delegate Mason Thomas displayed the responsive proclivities of hard-core liberals, particularly academics, who admired Howard Fuller as "champion of the oppressed." Most North Carolina congregants, however, regarded contributions to black liberation-centered projects like MXLU, and especially the much-despised Fuller, illustrative of diocesan and the national church's disconnect from the dissonant wishes of devout lifetime Episcopalians who were dedicated to the church, but who loathed black radicals like Fuller.¹¹⁶

In contrast to Fraser, other Southern Episcopalians rejected similar projects. South Carolina's presiding bishop, for example, publicly refused to approve a GCSP grant intended for the Hilton Head community. Other clergy in Texas and Virginia had registered a formal rebuke in a resolution denouncing the national church's capitulation to the "black-jacking of funds" for Black Manifesto.¹¹⁷ Southern bishops in Alabama, Florida, and Georgia, following a September national executive national conference, voiced a similar collective displeasure with the North Carolina's diocese's approval of the MXLU grant.¹¹⁸

Dissent arose in the North Carolina piedmont as well. Four churches, two in Raleigh and two in Greensboro, shared their abhorrence of the grant. The Reverend

¹¹⁵ Sarah M. Lemmon, "Liberal-Conservative Showdown Averted at Diocesan Convention," The Churchman (April 1970): 12; "Report of the Episcopal Young Churchmen," Convention Journal of the Protestant Episcopal Church in North Carolina (1969): 149.

¹¹⁶ Harold T. Parker, A History of St. Philip's Episcopal Church, 1878-1994 (Durham, North Carolina: The Church, 1996), 216.

¹¹⁷ Van Deburg, New Day in Babylon, 246, 295.

¹¹⁸ Foley, 18.

George Hale of St. Timothy's Episcopal Church in Raleigh expressed this sentiment bluntly: "I violently object to the grant. I don't see any sense in Christians giving money to a non-Christian so-called university. . . . It's foolish to give money to militants to destroy Christian society."¹¹⁹ In spite of escalating reproof, Bishop Fraser defended his decision to support the national church and urban advisory committee's award. "In my opinion," he unrepentantly expressed in a letter to concerned clergy, senior wardens, and members of the Diocesan Council, "we have observed the democratic process."¹²⁰

This challenge was, by far, the most difficult of the outspoken 55-year-old pastor's ministerial career. For more than a decade, Fraser had been an unremitting integrationist, refusing to acquiesce to congregational separatist will, despite constant risk of negative pledges from disgruntled churchgoers. "[W]e will be led by the cross . . . we will not be coerced by the dollar," a defiant Fraser was fond of saying. His previous racial liberalism, however, made the MXLU grant more difficult to sell to the conservative general laity. Fraser undoubtedly would have been more persuasive if he had believed in the project himself. But unconvinced of the school's socially redeeming merits, Fraser lamented the alternative school's mission and what he considered Fuller's resignation to black isolationism.¹²¹

Though he had never met or spoken with Fuller, the bishop believed the controversial activist was an archetypal young black nationalist: educated, frustrated, visionary, and angry as a result of his experience with the white power structure.¹²² Nor had Fraser once visited the university he described as an "unrealistic experiment in

¹¹⁹ "Grant Stirs Up Episcopalians," News and Observer, 22 October 1969, 2.

¹²⁰ Foley, 18.

¹²¹ Foley, 24.

¹²² "1970 Address of the Bishop," 74, in archives of the Episcopal Diocese of North Carolina, Raleigh.

education" with a dubious future. Fraser's allegiance to the national church and his commitment to Porter and the urban advisory committee, however, overshadowed his personal ambivalence toward Fuller and MXLU. Ever trenchant "[h]ostile press and television reports" made his job extremely difficult, he confessed to The Episcopalian. But, "I will stand by Nat Porter and the Urban Crisis Committee's stance."¹²³

At times, Fraser almost appeared stunned that the modest grant elicited such vitriol from the laity and public at large. "[I]n all honesty . . . much of the noise about Malcolm X Liberation University is all out of proportion to the size of the grant, the school, and its possible influence."¹²⁴ Other clergy, like Chapel Hill's Thrasher, were equally mystified that a disproportionately nominal award--\$45,000 out of a budget of \$14 million—could bring the state chapter to the brink of withdrawing from the national church.¹²⁵

Fraser hoped, if anything, that the grant afforded a chance for parishioners to interrogate their personal racial, class, and religious myopia. "The Malcolm X University grant has done the diocese a Christian service," he admonished at his annual address in January 1970. He continued:

It has caused us to look at ourselves and what we have not done to solve race relations and to reconcile differences between people. . . . [A]re we more concerned with background, money, and social position? Is the Gospel of Jesus Christ our constitution and by-laws or are we governed by what is comfortable and compatible to our own little in-group? . . . [A]re we dying on the vine as a result of a parasitical existence on a tradition of which we boast but of which we are ill-informed? If the Malcolm X Liberation University grant accomplishes nothing else but force us to face honestly these questions, it will be worth ten times the anguish it has caused us.¹²⁶

¹²³ Foley, 24.

¹²⁴ 1970 Address of the Bishop, 75.

¹²⁵ "N.C. Episcopalians May Quit U.S. Group," News and Observer 22 January 1970.

¹²⁶ 1970 Address of the Bishop, 75.

If church members were so aggressively opposed to black separatism, Fraser dared them in a public letter, then they must show corresponding vigor in eradicating white separatism in parishes and other private institutions.¹²⁷

Pressure from Fraser transformed latent resentment against liberals who were "running and ruining" the church into a mushrooming of open rancor.¹²⁸ WRAL-TV editorialized that Bishop Fraser, the central diocese, and liberal church hierarchy banked "on the probability that citizens more conservative than he . . . will 'go along' rather than rock the boat with dissent."¹²⁹ Nothing could have been further from the truth.

Statewide, 50 out of the 138 parishes failed to reach their annual contribution quota.¹³⁰ North Carolina's diocese sustained reductions in 1969 church proceeds of \$70,000 in the aftermath of the MXLU grant. Fraser had never witnessed statewide financial retribution like this—at least not in his advocacy of racial desegregation. At one point, the diocese reduced its support to the annual church budget by thirty-eight percent. Fraser informed national church officials that congregational financial backlash rendered it impossible to propose a budget for the upcoming year, because so many pledges were either conditional, reduced, or withdrawn altogether.¹³¹ At Saint Phillips

¹²⁷ Foley, 76.

¹²⁸ Parker, 211.

¹²⁹ Foley, 18. Any editorial from WRAL-TV concerning MXLU should have been treated as suspect. Future arch-conservative Senator Jesse Helms, in his capacity as executive vice president of Capital Broadcasting, had expressly forbidden the showing of any film clips of Howard Fuller on a WRAL-TV newscast regardless of its news value or quality. He likewise forbade the use of any direct quotes of Fuller's. See "Reviewing the North Carolina Press," Radish, 14 August-14 September 1969, 8, housed in the Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University.

¹³⁰ Parker, 211.

¹³¹ Foley, 26; Parker, 211; News and Observer, 22 January 1970.

Church, within two blocks and in full view of MXLU, pledges dropped \$13,000 following the grant award.¹³²

Sharp disinvestment by white laity had palpable and immediate consequences. Vestries trimmed spending wherever possible. "Withholding the dollar from the church is the beginning of the end of spiritual life," a financially desperate Fraser pleaded to conventioners in Salisbury. "What good are we if we become white sepulchers?"¹³³ Fraser's appeal was to no avail; programmatic casualties were inevitable. The National and Diocesan Program Fund, as well as other social programs, were either eliminated or eviscerated beyond recognition. Convention delegates voted to cease funding overseas missionary projects in India and in Victoria, Nyanza, in Africa.¹³⁴

Fraser, it seemed, was experiencing the same crisis that would ultimately befall MXLU organizers: funding. Fraser reported in January 1970 that the North Carolina diocese was facing a crisis. Citing dwindling pledges because of the denomination's grant to MXLU, Fraser reported the diocese was \$164,525 short of meeting the church's program budget, and might have to withdraw support from the national organization.¹³⁵ Such news would not bode well for MXLU in its constant struggle to stay afloat financially. The southern liberal bishop who was popular for saying, "[W]e will be led by the cross . . . we will not be coerced by the dollar," understood the practical realities and succumbed to popular communicant conservatism. An accommodating Fraser acceded to demands for more local control for future screening requests, and backed off on aiding the United Organization for Community Improvement—a grant he had

¹³² Parker, 211.

¹³³ Foley, 26.

¹³⁴ The Chuchman (April 1970): 12; Foley, 26.

¹³⁵ "MXLU Grant Causes Financial Crisis For Diocese," Durham Sun, 19 January 1970, A-1. More than 138 parishes failed to meet their quotas.

enthusiastically endorsed little more than a year earlier. The once-brash bishop declined to canvass votes for greater black and youth participation for the upcoming diocesan convention. It was his responsibility, Fraser would later say, to keep “good faith and credibility” with local members.¹³⁶ This meant understanding the pragmatic limits—and financial costs—of southern liberalism. In short, for establishment liberalism, supporting freestanding black studies and insurgent Pan-African programs like Malcolm X Liberation University came at too high a cost.

¹³⁶ Minutes of the Meeting of the Diocesan Council, 23-24 November 1969; Fraser to Rectors and Wardens, 25 November 1970; both located at Episcopal Diocese of North Carolina, Raleigh.

Chapter Six

The Doors Finally Open

The students finally began to arrive in Durham on Sunday, 12 October, for a week of orientation. From 21-26 October, the Student Organization for Black Unity held a national conference at North Carolina Central University, located just a mile away from MXLU. The conference was designed to coincide with the official opening day ceremonies held on October 25 outside the school's headquarters on Pettigrew Street. The first day of classes followed that Monday, 27 October. In a departure from MXLU's policy, the majority of the events during the Opening Week were open to the press.¹³⁷ Even the New York Times covered the ceremonies, highlighted by a keynote address by Malcolm X's widow, Betty Shabazz.

The students and staff at MXLU used the celebratory occasion of the opening ceremonies, and the attention that the event drew, to articulate to a curious Durham community why their school had come into existence. The school's newspaper, The African Warrior, published its first edition on the day of the opening ceremonies. The paper's lead editorial outlined MXLU's main purpose and reason for being.

The editors viewed American culture as the interaction of certain forces: capitalism, slavery, racism, and imperialism. If the American educational system was an expression of American culture then that education could only serve to perpetuate the dehumanization of blacks. While conceding that some blacks had received an "education" and had profited greatly from the material rewards of American society, the great majority had not. Therefore blacks could not realistically seek liberation by

¹³⁷ "Progress Report on MXLU," 15 November 1969, author unknown, photocopy, CSP.

participating in a process that originated from the historical sources of oppression. Thus there existed a demonstrated need for MXLU and other black-controlled educational systems.¹³⁸ “MXLU seeks to train Black people to ‘deal’ with the immediate and present realities necessary for survival in this country, and further seeks to lend expression to those technical, scientific, and socio-cultural tools which are necessary for the Independent African World,” wrote an author who called himself “Heshimu” in a separate article. “A concomitant aim of the school is to establish an independent Black University, completely controlled by Black people with education relevant to the Black Community. As a corollary, the school embraces the Pan-Africanist ideological base, stressing the primary importance of an independent and free African World, and the International unity of African peoples everywhere.”¹³⁹

The paper also revealed the school’s curriculum as of opening day. Course study would be divided into two sectors. The first area, broadly termed “Nation-Building,” would take ten months and would encompass an historical-cultural study of African people dealing with the following areas: Independent African Civilization, Slavery, Neo-Colonialism, Colonialism, and the Independent African World. Students would also be exposed to three languages—Swahili, French, and Spanish—and take courses in physical development. At the end of ten months, students, teachers, and staff would travel to Africa for two months. Upon their return, students would move into “Areas of Concentration,” where they would be given intense technical training in twelve basic vocations needed to create and sustain the “Black nation.” The twelve basic careers included food scientists, tailors, architects, engineers, medics, cadre leaders,

¹³⁸ “Why Malcolm X,” The African Warrior, 25 October 1969, 2, copy part of CSP.

¹³⁹ Heshimu, “Malcolm X U.: Then, Now, and Future,” The African Warrior, 25 October 1969, 1, CSP.

communications technicians, physical developers, teachers, black expressionists, administrators, and linguists. Training would last as long as it took to acquire proficiency in the chosen field, not to exceed ten months. Students would then be placed in internships in which they would work actively in the black community in specific areas involving technical skills, such as preparing food, providing clothing, and giving medical attention.¹⁴⁰

MXLU sought to develop a relationship among blacks that manifested itself in service to the black community. According to an unsigned position paper from late 1969, “blackness must change its emphasis from that which is seen, such as afros and dashikis, to that which is necessary, such as living and working with Black people to achieve our goal of liberation.” A black person trained for a particular profession must see himself as a member of a family whose interests supercede his own. A black doctor should work in black communities that most desperately need his talents. The goal should not be to accumulate wealth, but to serve the community. In return, the community would support him. The goal of one trip to Africa and other parts of the African diaspora (the Caribbean, Latin America) would be to establish and maintain real contact between Africans in America and throughout the world. For students at MXLU, physical exposure to other black populations would make study of black peoples more concrete, and reinforce the importance of techniques and principles used in the struggle for liberation.¹⁴¹

Once the pressure of actually opening the school’s doors had been removed, Fuller set about answering questions and alleviating some of the concerns and worries

¹⁴⁰ Heshimu, “Malcolm X U.: Then, Now, and Future,” 1.

¹⁴¹ “Position Paper for Malcolm X Liberation University,” author and date unknown, *CSP*.

that many in Durham's white community had about their new neighbor. The day before the dedication ceremonies, Fuller granted a radio interview to WRDU journalist Buie Shuell, in which he tackled several important issues.

"What we're trying to do here at Malcolm X Liberation University is to have an educational process that is totally controlled by black people," Fuller told Shuell. MXLU would have some relationship with HBCUs like North Carolina Central in Durham and Shaw University in Raleigh, but Fuller made it clear that while HBCUs may have had black administrators, their goals, philosophy, and methods had not been much different than those of white universities. Whenever blacks did not have complete control of curriculum, then someone else could decide what was relevant and what was not. When Shuell asked how it was possible to avoid some form of external control when MXLU had to rely on outside sources for funding, Fuller replied that the key was the school had not surrendered its basic philosophical idea. "There's no money that's absolutely free," conceded Fuller. "What we've attempted to do at MXLU is establish a black funding source. Now these black sources may at this moment be involved in the white world." Fuller's "black sources" would act as intermediaries; once they got the funds, then there would be no restrictions on their use. Fuller declined to reveal any of his sources, though, believing that publicity would scare some away from giving money.¹⁴²

Fuller bristled when Shuell brought up the criticism of MXLU's program as not academically sound. "Does that mean that courses must be taught by PH.D's?" asked

¹⁴² Howard Fuller, radio interview by Buie Shuell (recorded in studios of WRDU, Durham, North Carolina), 24 October 1969, cassette recording, NWTC.

Fuller. "How do we define who's academically qualified?"¹⁴³ Fuller's response echoed that of Nathan Hare, who had addressed the same issue at the Third International Conference on Black Power in Philadelphia in 1968:

The notion that 'academic soundness' would suffer is basically a racist apprehension, a feeling that any deviation on the part of blacks away from white norms and standards would dip downward. It also is based, perhaps, on the naïve notion that traditional education is value-free and, because it is based on the ideology of the existing political forces, is blessed with the 'end of ideology.' That is, emphatically, not the case. The whole need for Black Studies grows out of the current lack of true academic soundness of the educational system as we know it now.¹⁴⁴

Fuller also professed little concern that MXLU would not be accredited. "The school is an alternative," Fuller said. "If one wants the material benefits that a more traditional curriculum affords, then don't come. . . . If blacks are serious about self-determination and Black Power, then we've got to understand that the educational process is the primary determinant or primary giver of norms and values. . . . We're trying to pull people out of grade-competition, me-first, individualistic attitudes. It's important for the advancement of black people collectively, and it's in this spirit that MXLU is being founded."¹⁴⁵

Three weeks after classes began, an internal progress report circulated among MXLU officials, reporting that fifty-one students made up the school's total enrollment. MXLU provided living facilities on a co-op basis, with five individual housing units designed to accommodate up to fifteen students each. The school furnished the units, and also paid for the rent, utilities, and maintenance. Students who could financially afford to contribute on a monthly basis were asked to chip in. Two community restaurants prepared lunch and dinner for male students daily, while females were

¹⁴³ Fuller, radio interview by Buie Shuell, NWTC.

¹⁴⁴ Hare, "Questions and Answers About Black Studies," 166.

¹⁴⁵ Fuller, radio interview by Buie Shuell, NWTC.

expected to prepare all their meals. To save money, MXLU held the students responsible for housekeeping chores. Because students entered the school with varying skill levels, MXLU expected instructors to recommend and coordinate tutorial and remedial programs, as well as study and self-help sessions.¹⁴⁶

MXLU also began offering weekly evening community seminars to those in the African-American community who wanted to be exposed to MXLU subject matter, but who worked during the day and could not enroll in the school full-time. The school developed plans to open a day-care center in January 1970, feeling there was a need to reach pre-school children and provide them with not only fundamental academic skills, but also positive African social and cultural images. School leaders also optimistically mentioned the possibility of establishing a Black Education Center for high-schoolers.¹⁴⁷

As of 15 November 1969, financial records indicated MXLU only had around \$12,000 on hand. Monthly expenditures were running around \$9,000 because the school had to assume almost total responsibility for the majority of its students. Besides major contributions from the Episcopal Church and the Foundation for Community Development, MXLU had received a few small individual donations, as well as a Volkswagen bus from an unspecified donor. The overall financial situation was grave, leading to major efforts to raise money. Speaking engagements by Fuller were about

¹⁴⁶ "Progress Report on Malcolm X Liberation University," 15 November 1969, author unknown, photocopy, *CSP*.

¹⁴⁷ "Progress Report on Malcolm X Liberation University," 15 November 1969, author unknown, photocopy, *CSP*. A progress report dated February 20 indicated the Betty Shabazz Early Education Center had recently opened its doors to approximately 20 children ages three to five.

the only sure source of income.¹⁴⁸ A year-end financial statement listed only \$6,286 in total assets—only \$3,430 of which was liquid.¹⁴⁹

MXLU soldiered on, however. Because the school did not open its doors to journalists from the mostly white media, it is nearly impossible to ascertain what classes were like. Two surviving documents, though, provide some interesting insight into the school's code of conduct. Perhaps because of the appropriation of the name "Malcolm X," the school's leaders felt obliged to define what "self-defense" should mean to students and staff. "Ours is a struggle of self-determination for African People, and we must not allow our role in this struggle to be jeopardized by petty confrontations with the forces of oppression," read an internal memo distributed to MXLU students and staff. The MXLU family was asked not to engage in ill-fated acts of heroism that might endanger lives. "Calculated retreat can not be equated to cowardice. We must preserve ourselves in order to destroy the enemy. . . . [I]ndividual crackers and the incidents they attempt to provoke though intimidation are insignificant to the overall objective of our struggle." Students and staff were to refrain from name-calling, throwing rocks, petty theft, brandishing weapons, or any behaviors that might result in arrest or detention. Going to jail, however, was preferable to endangering one's own life or the life of others. The memo contained a list of names and phone numbers one could reference in case bail money or legal representation were needed.¹⁵⁰

An entity called the Indaba Council handled internal disciplinary procedures. The Council contained seven members chosen at random by the university community, with

¹⁴⁸ "Progress Report on Malcolm X Liberation University," 15 November 1969, author unknown, photocopy, *CSP*.

¹⁴⁹ "Balance Sheet: Malcolm X Liberation University," 31 December 1969, photocopy, *CSP*.

¹⁵⁰ "On The Question of Self-Defense," date and author unknown, photocopy, *CSP*.

everyone expected to serve at least one term during their time at MXLU. All details of Indaba Council meetings were kept confidential. Students were subject to being sent home after their first offense, without warning. Violations of university guidelines included: the use or possession of drugs or alcohol, stealing from “African people” and any sort of “intimate” relationship—romantic or platonic—with whites. Students were expected not to fight, curse, engage in promiscuity, or behave in any way that might shed negative light on MXLU. Perhaps most importantly, there would be no spreading of rumors or gossip about the university, and no unauthorized release of information about MXLU through non-official channels.¹⁵¹ If nothing else, MXLU was successful in keeping its operations secret. Such heightened caution, however, contributed much to the suspicion and distrust of MXLU felt by members of the white and even the larger black Durham community.

¹⁵¹ “Guidelines for the Indaba Council,” date and author unknown, photocopy, *CSP*.

Chapter Seven

Emerging Problems

The next progress report available for MXLU, dated 30 April 1970, contained the usual dismal financial data, but another figure indicated other signs of trouble unrelated to money. Enrollment at MXLU had dropped from fifty-two to twenty students. The following reasons were cited for the decline: a lack of commitment or seriousness; misconceptions about the purpose and program of the school; several expulsions for disciplinary reasons; and an inability to cope with the pressures of classwork and living conditions. Those twenty students who remained, according to the progress report, had “displayed the seriousness, emotional stability, and level of commitment necessary to function effectively at an institution such as MXLU.”¹⁵² Certainly turnover was to be expected in a brand-new institution embarking on a radical educational experiment, but a drop of more than sixty percent in a matter of months pointed to larger concerns.

The 30 April progress report continued to frame MXLU’s development in a positive light, however. The report claimed that the library was now equipped with enough printed resources to meet the academic needs of its students. The school also now had a language lab stocked with tape recordings, as well as a photographic dark room. The Visual Communications Department produced all of the school’s public relations materials—brochures, flyers, and posters—on the premises. Students were now grouped into two living units, one for each gender. Females no longer had to

¹⁵² “Progress Report of Malcolm X Liberation University,” 30 April 1970, photocopy, *CSP*.

prepare their own meals. For students from impoverished backgrounds, the school began a job placement program to help them with financial costs.¹⁵³

The school's emphasis on Pan-Africanism and liberation from colonial oppression was even stronger by the spring of 1970. "We are at war with the European," stated a spring 1970 proposal, "and our common plight dictates the efforts of African people everywhere toward freeing ourselves and developing the Motherland. To this end, MXLU has as its goal the creation of an educational process that is based upon a revolutionary ideology which projects self-awareness, disseminates necessary concepts and provides the technological know-how with which to engage in a struggle to develop a Nation."¹⁵⁴

The school's curriculum had also undergone a change. An MXLU education would now be three years, the last of which would be spent teaching at the school. The first year was devoted to "reordering of priorities, development of a Pan-Africanist perspectives, and de-colonization of the mind." The new curriculum had seven required areas (History, Development of Black Political Thought in the U.S., Language, Culture Expression, Speech, Physical Development, and a series of year-long seminars), with all courses to be taken concurrently. Regarding foreign language, the school's philosophy had changed, with a new feeling that only African languages could provide the impetus for African independence that was consistent with the ideology of the school. In addition to Swahili, Hausa and Yoruba were offered; one language was required, with another allowed as an elective. The second year would involve intensive training in one of five technical skill areas—Communication, Technology, Engineering,

¹⁵³ "Progress Report of Malcolm X Liberation University," 30 April 1970, *CSP*.

¹⁵⁴ "Proposal for MXLU," spring 1970, author unknown, brochure, *CSP*.

Food Science, Bio-Medicine, and Pre-School Education. Each skill area was designed to be “functional to African people in general and useful in the development of an independent African nation in particular.” Those who completed the three-year program would graduate with an ideology based on the concept of Pan-Africanism, and would be “prepared to contribute to African people in the U.S or on the Continent of Africa.”¹⁵⁵ One could interpret the overhaul of the curriculum as merely an adjustment to best fit the needs and abilities of MXLU’s students. Or one might surmise that the school’s leaders were having a hard time reaching true consensus about the school’s mission.

The first public indication that MXLU might be struggling came in a Durham Sun article on 5 February 1970. Fuller had to cut his plans for a proposed first-year budget of \$500,000 to \$82,000 because that was all he had been able to obtain through grants. The possibility of getting any more money from the Episcopal Church appeared dim because of the furor the initial \$45,000 grants caused within the local diocese. Fuller no longer talked of MXLU as a permanent institution. “With the kind of institution we’re trying to develop and the kind of reaction it causes, one can’t get too optimistic and think in terms of ten years or fifteen years,” he said. “We’re being realistic and gearing ourselves to complete a three-year program.”¹⁵⁶

The spring 1970 proposal gave the first notice of an impending move, acknowledging the fate of the surrounding neighborhood and the school’s building itself as a part of urban renewal. The proposal framed the dilemma optimistically, however. As MXLU “continues to grow and expand,” the facilities on Pettigrew Street would become inadequate. Several places in North Carolina were being considered for

¹⁵⁵ “Proposal for MXLU,” spring 1970, *CSP*.

¹⁵⁶ Richard Daw, “MXLU Having Woes But Founder Not Giving Up,” Durham Sun, 5 February 1970, A-1.

relocation, although only Greensboro was mentioned specifically “due to its potential to provide facilities that meet our needs, and its level of community support and enthusiasm for the ideas of Malcolm X Liberation University.”¹⁵⁷ The rumored move became public knowledge in August 1970 when the Episcopal Church’s Urban Crisis Program in New York confirmed reports that MXLU would move its headquarters from Durham to Greensboro. A small continuing phase would remain in Durham, but the academic program would shift locales. A target date of 5 October was set for the first day of classes.¹⁵⁸

MXLU lasted for two years in Greensboro, but the same problems that plagued the school in Durham arose in the new location. Chief among these was finances. Minutes from a 25 September meeting of the Council of Elders described the financial status of the school as “very critical.” The school was spending about \$5,500 a month, and with the funds on hand, the Elders felt that MXLU could exist only until the end of October or early November. Not surprisingly, a major new fundraising effort was launched. The Federation of Pan-African Institutions planned to submit a proposal to the Cummins Engine Foundation which would give MXLU \$30,000-\$50,000. Two unidentified sisters from Cleveland consented to set up a national committee called Concerned Citizens for Black Education to help raise funds. They hoped to persuade Betty Shabazz and actor Ossie Davis to serve as co-chairpersons. Fundraising committees would initially be set up in ten cities: Los Angeles, San Francisco, Detroit, Houston, Washington D.C., New York, Pittsburgh, Chicago, and Atlanta. By early

¹⁵⁷ “Proposal for MXLU,” spring 1970, *CSP*.

¹⁵⁸ “Episcopal Unit Told of Move,” Durham Sun, 20 August 1970, A-1.

January 1971, MXLU hoped to raise \$170,000.¹⁵⁹ Based on the school's previous lack of success in raising money, these figures looked hopelessly optimistic. One elder, Rex Harris, said he felt black people in general were not ready to give their support to MXLU, and made the suggestion that more consideration be given to taking money from whomever they could get it. His suggestion either fell on deaf ears, or the discussion was not noted in the minutes.¹⁶⁰

In Greensboro, MXLU was located at 708 Asheboro Street in what is now a Masonic lodge. MXLU signed a two-year lease that was renewable for five years. The school in Greensboro boasted about sixty students, ages sixteen to twenty-two, ranging from third-year Ivy Leaguers to high school dropouts. The school also ran a farm outside Greensboro that brought in produce and generated some income. On Asheboro Street, the students built some of their own equipment, such as a darkroom. Donors supplied most of the books and furniture; teachers, as in Durham, got by on miniscule salaries.¹⁶¹

Very little documentation survives of MXLU's two years in Greensboro. A recruiting brochure for MXLU's third year of operation indicates the following courses of study: Agriculture, Bio-Medicine, Communications Technology, and three Engineering options—Construction, Electrical, and Mechanical.¹⁶² The school later tried to expand by buying the Sedalia campus of the financially troubled Palmer Memorial Institute, a black prep school founded by Charlotte Hawkins Brown in 1902. However, when a Palmer trustee resigned in protest and a bi-racial citizens group organized a petition

¹⁵⁹ "Minutes from Council of Elders Meeting," 25 September 1970, photocopy, *CSP*.

¹⁶⁰ "Minutes from Council of Elders Meeting," 25 September 1970, *CSP*.

¹⁶¹ "Born of Struggle, Built On Hope," *Greensboro News and Record*, 2 March 1988, A-6.

¹⁶² "Malcolm X Liberation University," recruiting brochure, October 1971, *CSP*.

drive opposing the sale to MXLU, the deal collapsed. The negative reaction stunned MXLU leaders, who realized they had not really addressed the question of whether MXLU was relevant to blacks in Greensboro. The school had not been directly involved in local community organizing activities.¹⁶³

Following the failed attempt to buy the Palmer campus, MXLU seemingly faded from public consciousness. Fuller, who had changed his name to Owusu Sadaukai, finally formally announced the end of MXLU on 28 June 1973, at a sparsely attended press conference in Greensboro. Fuller said that the school had accomplished its two main aims: to teach the history of black people and to offer technical training to blacks. He reminded his audience that even before the school had officially opened its doors, he had told people that MXLU would last only as long as it met the “needs of the people” and that he would not keep it going “just because it was our thing.”¹⁶⁴ MXLU’s short-lived existence thus had come to an anonymous conclusion, with neither the fanfare nor the controversy that surrounded its beginnings.

¹⁶³ “Born of Struggle, Built On Hope,” Greensboro News and Record, 2 March 1988, A-6.

¹⁶⁴ Ronald P. Topping, “Malcolm X Meets Goals and Closes,” Greensboro Daily News, 28 June 1973, D-1.

Chapter Eight

Speculation and Final Thoughts

Why did MXLU fail? The obvious answer to the question is fairly simple: Malcolm X Liberation University failed because it never got enough financial and moral support. That simplistic answer, however, leads to another more difficult question that this paper does not (and perhaps cannot) conclusively answer: Why did MXLU not get enough financial and moral support? Was the notion of “Independent Black Education” ahead of its time, or a misguided utopian experiment that overestimated the appeal of separatism and Pan-Africanism in the African-American community? Without the leadership of Howard Fuller, MXLU certainly would never have opened its doors in the first place, but did he dig the school’s grave by alienating his potential benefactors and supporters? The following is an attempt to analyze several other factors that may have influenced MXLU’s demise.

The first factor was the failure to develop a close relationship with HBCUs. No other state in the nation contains as many historically black colleges and universities as North Carolina. Perhaps Fuller made efforts behind the scenes to cultivate dialogue and share faculty and resources with North Carolina’s HBCUs, but his public statements could only serve to alienate potential allies. In the issue of the African Warrior that came out on the day of MXLU’s opening ceremonies, Fuller criticized schools like North Carolina Central and North Carolina A&T for “attempting to produce proper young Negro men and women . . . instilled with Puritan morality and allegiance to the European Capitalist philosophies of thrift and hard work.” HBCUs seemed more

concerned with “producing black folks made up in the image of white folks, Black folks dedicated to the notion of being a part of mainstream American society.”¹⁶⁵

Fuller wrote that the problem with black administrators was that they still measured the success of their schools by comparing them to white institutions. Black administrators often had the handicap of dealing with a board of trustees dominated by whites, or a financial situation supported primarily by liberal whites and conservative blacks. Thus the needs of black students and the black community in general became secondary. Fuller stressed to MXLU students that their school existed for them alone.¹⁶⁶

Fuller’s rhetoric was perfectly consistent with the prevailing opinion of others devoted to establishing Black Studies programs across the nation. At the Third International Black Power Conference in Philadelphia in 1968, Nathan Hare explained that, ideally, “Negro colleges” would play the role of devising a new black ideology and a new black ethics, providing models of scholarly excellence and inquiry into the problems of color. “But we do not believe in miracles,” lamented Hare. “The Negro college is glued to the mores of its missionary origins. It is located invariably in the South, cemented to the prevailing cake of conservatism, and less free politically even than the typical white college there. Rather than address itself seriously to the solution of the problems of academia, the Negro college has been more inclined to ape and compound white trivia and miseducation. We do not have any more time for dreams that already

¹⁶⁵ Howard Fuller, “Howard Fuller Raps On Black Educatio,” African Warrior, 25 October 1969, 2-3.

¹⁶⁶ Fuller, The African Warrior, 2-3

have been contaminated by the elements of nightmare. . . . [W]e cannot be anchored in excessive, time-consuming lamentation over decaying bodies.”¹⁶⁷

When Fuller attacked HBCUs in North Carolina, he risked not only alienating the African-American administrators of those schools, but also their thousands of successful graduates, many of whom belonged to the prosperous black business community in Durham. In an interview broadcast on UNC’s educational TV stations, Charles Lyons, Jr., the president of Fayetteville State University, said it was not necessary to teach African-Americans to be black before teaching them to be doctors, lawyers, and educators. Lyons said his institution and other HBCUs “must be cognizant of the fact that ‘black’ has been written out of the history books, but I don’t believe you have to go out and set up another institution to teach this.”¹⁶⁸

The second factor in MXLU’s failure was the lack of support from civil rights organizations. The state convention of the NAACP was held in Durham just two weeks before the scheduled opening of MXLU. In his keynote address, the president of the North Carolina chapter of the NAACP told civil rights leaders that “many black people have a vested interest in segregation and they want it to live. Some of them want it because they can’t compete in an integrated society because of their failures in many ways.” Alexander went on to say that racial isolation had never done anything but impede the progression of blacks. “I’m not going to debate on whether you should go to a Malcolm X University or to any other kind of university. But I’m saying to you that if you’re going to be a bookkeeper or an accountant, you had better go where you can

¹⁶⁷ Hare, “Questions and Answers About Black Studies,” 169.

¹⁶⁸ “Little Need Seen For Liberation Schools,” Durham Morning Herald, 30 September 1969, A-2.

learn to be a bookkeeper or an accountant. I want you to know that when you get out in this world, they're not going to ask you if you can speak Swahili or not."¹⁶⁹

The night after Alexander's comments, Fuller and a group of about twenty young blacks wearing Malcolm X sweatshirts showed up at the NAACP Freedom Tribute banquet. Fuller said the group's purpose was not to disrupt the proceedings, but simply to listen to the speeches. They left, though, when told they must pay ten dollars each for banquet tickets. Before leaving, Fuller got into a heated discussion with Alexander, during which he asked Alexander to refute his press statements from the day before so that people would not perceive that one group of blacks was criticizing another. Later, while addressing the banquet guests, Alexander said, "I have never in my life been as insulted as I was tonight. Attacks on the [NAACP] by a group of black militants are unwarranted."¹⁷⁰

Three weeks later, Whitney Young, the executive director of the generally conservative Urban League was in Durham to receive an award. When asked for his reaction to MXLU, Young said he had great respect for Fuller, but remained critical of the black separatist movement. "We must not mislead our young people," said Young. "We are playing for keeps. Swahili is an interesting language but we are not using it on IBM cards right now. Let's quit kidding white people that we're going to get on a boat and go back to Africa." Young added that he was only concerned that a university prepare people to "compete in the society in which they live." He continued, "If MXLU prepares people to compete in the mainstream, to get the substance of power, as well

¹⁶⁹ Walter Jackson, "Separatism In Blacks Is Assailed: State President of NAACP Hits Negro Movement," Durham Morning Herald, 11 October 1969, A-1.

¹⁷⁰ John Dore, "NAACP Bars Fuller, Group," Durham Morning Herald, 12 October 1969, A-5.

as the rhetoric of it, then I'm all for it. If it does not prepare people to do this, then I'm against it."¹⁷¹

While one would not expect the assimilationist goals of the NAACP and Urban League to jibe with the separatist objective of MXLU, the lack of any ties whatsoever with the civil rights organizations that would have had the most influence in Durham's conservative black business community clearly hurt MXLU.

A third factor was Fuller and MXLU's recurring problems with the press. On 9 October 1969, Fuller held a curbside press conference outside MXLU's building on Pettigrew Street. Twelve newsmen and cameramen showed up to ask Fuller questions. He took them on a brief tour of the facility, but not before telling them that this was the only occasion in which they would be permitted inside the building. "Universities—even private universities—are by their very nature public things," lamented Walter Jackson, an African-American reporter for the Durham Morning Herald. "By denying newsmen and other visitors access to the school, the leaders of MXLU are leaving themselves open to the charge that they are engaged in underhanded activity. . . . "[T]o deny legitimate visitors the privilege of entering the school building only tends to increase the suspicions of those who would cast aspersions on the school and its purposes." Fuller even denied entry to officials from the Episcopal Church when they were considering a second grant and wanted to visit MXLU to see what the first grants helped finance.¹⁷²

What little coverage MXLU got in the local press tended to take a negative tone. On 14 January 1970, the Durham Sun reported that at a fire at a house being used as a

¹⁷¹ Ed Martin, "Young Urges Black Power In Perspective," Durham Morning Herald, 31 October 1969, B-1, 3.

¹⁷² Walter Jackson, "Malcolm X Ready To Open: Nature of Its Program Still Unclear," Durham Morning Herald, 19 October 1969, D-12.

dorm for MXLU, two high-powered military rifles rescued from the blaze had been claimed by an MXLU representative. Firemen were warned to be careful because of ammunition in the house. Some ammunition exploded during the fire, and a suitcase containing five hundred rounds was found in a corner.¹⁷³ There is no record of this fire in the available documents on MXLU, and thus nothing to contradict the newspaper account. It seems highly unlikely, however, that MXLU students and staff were stockpiling weapons given the school's stance on self-defense discussed earlier. Such newspaper stories, though, could only heighten the suspicions of those who feared MXLU, and result in less support for the school.

A fourth factor involved was internal factions within MXLU itself. A July 1988 article in Milwaukee Magazine, published where Fuller lived until moving recently to Washington, D.C., hints that contradictions emerged within MXLU between Pan-Africanists who believed the struggle should continue internationally in Africa, and Nationalists who identified with America. Surprisingly, Fuller chose America. Pan-Africanism and even much of the civil rights movement in America saw the black struggle in terms of color; Fuller had the growing suspicion that class was the overriding issue. His thinking drew him deeper into black Marxist-oriented political groups, and farther away from MXLU. Without the full attention of its prime force and intellect, MXLU could not survive.¹⁷⁴ This explanation for MXLU's demise is intriguing, but unfortunately, there is nothing in the available records that addresses this issue.

More than thirty years after MXLU left Durham, virtually no trace of its existence remains, other than in the hearts and minds of those who participated in its creation and

¹⁷³ "Hardly A Way To Instill Confidence," Durham Sun, 14 January 1970, A-4.

¹⁷⁴ Tom Bamberger, "The Education of Howard Fuller," 59.

its short-lived history. If one judges MXLU by its fleeting, ephemeral presence in the history of central North Carolina, then invariably the school comes up short. But like any innovative undertaking, the fascination with rooting out the history of Malcolm X Liberation University lies in the notion that such an experiment could ever work in the first place.

For historical purposes, a study of MXLU provides a glimpse into Black Power ideology and the more militant, separatist stance that the civil rights movement took in the late 1960s. The development of the Black University represented just one facet of that militancy. The failure of MXLU, however, does not mean its legacy—or that of Black Power and the Black University—is tarnished or forgotten. Hundreds of colleges and universities, from Ivy League institutions to HBCUs, boast degree-awarding African-American studies programs. At the very least, the “Great White Man” version of American history is being challenged to a greater degree across the United States than it used to be.

Fifty years after *Brown v. Board of Education*, even the separatist goals of Black Power, as reflected in schools like MXLU, have not completely vanished. The lingering “achievement gap” on test scores and other standards of measurement between whites and minorities in the United States has led some to question the value of integration in the nation’s public schools. While some lament the fact that American schools are becoming *more*—not less—segregated than they were twenty years ago, others yearn for the return of the more “supportive” environment of neighborhood schools. If this means isolation from other races, so be it. Malcolm X Liberation University

represented just one strand in an American tradition of separatist movements; it was not the first, and it very likely will not be the last.

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