

Black Students and the U.S. Anti-Apartheid Movements on Campus, 1976-1985

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Abstract: This essay discusses the Black student anti-apartheid activism on campus from 1976 to 1985, and emphasizes the importance of HBCU's as early incubators for anti-apartheid activism. It highlights the transnational interconnectedness of African Americans and Africans, referencing African America's long-standing solidarity with African liberation movements, and suggests this coalition and its results are indicative of the power of previous generations of Black radicalism expressed in Civil Rights, Black Power, and anti-colonialism movements.

Keywords: Howard University, student publications, higher education, apartheid South Africa, United States, student movements, Black thought

Only days after the 1976 Soweto Uprising, editors of the Howard University student newspaper *The Hilltop* interrupted the summer recess with a public announcement: “Riots Erupt in Azania: Nationalists Sing God Bless Africa (Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika).”¹ Within days, thirty concerned local groups held a press conference at Howard and formed the June 16th Coalition, announcing a protest at the South African Embassy on June 26, 1976. Four-hundred people representing various African liberation organizations turned out alongside some Howard University students, faculty, and community members.² Over the summer, the Howard University Student Association (HUSA) joined the growing Coalition, which had amassed the support of 50 local and national organizations by September and held a rally in Malcolm X Park to commemorate the Soweto Uprisings. At the rally, students advocated for the total isolation of South Africa and chanted “push apartheid into the sea” and “expel South Africa from the UN.” Rally-goers listened to African American political leaders, like Representative John Conyers and DC Councilman Douglas Moore, condemn the murders. Surprisingly, conservative Howard University President James Cheek urged a swift change in U.S. foreign policy in light of the police killings. The *HUSA Herald*, celebrated the rare unification of Howard University members in a headline that read “D.C. community condemns S. Africa.”³

Farther south, Black students at the Atlanta University Center (AUC) also marched for majority rule in “Azania” following the Soweto Uprising. The African Liberation Support Committee (ALSC) Georgia branch and the Revolutionary Student Brigade enlisted student groups from Georgia State and the AUC—a consortium of neighboring Black colleges including

¹ Pinkston 1976.

² *Washington Post* 1976 cited in George Derek Musgrove's ERSI Story Map, <http://bit.ly/DCBlackPower>.

³ Moorland Spingarn Research Center (hereafter MSRC) 1976.

Spelman, Morehouse, Morris Brown, and Atlanta University.⁴ Beginning at Morris Brown College, students marched through Black neighborhoods chanting anti-apartheid slogans and called attention to “the brutal treatment of the Soweto students.”⁵ Students pushed the Black Legislative Caucus of the Georgia General Assembly to develop a resolution for a boycott of the South African Krugerrand.⁶ Atlanta students also took cues from national civil rights organizations and their campaigns against apartheid. The NAACP and SCLC anti-Davis Cup demonstrations in Nashville that year augmented students’ apartheid awareness.⁷ Watching Atlanta-based civil rights leaders whom they knew chant “Freedom Yes! Apartheid No! The Davis Cup Has Got To Go!” helped students understand that a tennis match, a bank, or a university could be venues for gutting apartheid complicity.⁸

Following historian Jelani Favors’ theorization, Black colleges were the “seedbeds” of early anti-apartheid activism due to the staying power of previous generations of Black radicalism expressed in Civil Rights, Black Power, and anti-colonialism, all fought for by many HBCU alumni.⁹ African America’s long-standing solidarity with African liberation movements between the 1930s and the 1970s revealed that the transnational interconnectedness of Black freedom struggles withstood Cold War divides. Black college students advanced this tradition through their anti-apartheid action before, and especially after the Soweto Uprisings.

African American and Black South African student exiles were the backbone of the U.S. student movement against apartheid as its early initiators and consciousness-raisers following the Black Consciousness uprisings of 1976 in South Africa. Their testimonies and organizing propelled the militant and uncompromising formations that the student divestment movement inhabited throughout the decade. African students were the vanguard of a post-1968 generation of political activism in both the U.S. and South Africa and brought Black Consciousness to the U.S. anti-apartheid movement, offering a departure from the ANC’s dominance in international politics. This article explores both African and African American students’ role in radicalizing white U.S. students and building the robust student divestment movement that swept more than 100 colleges and universities across the country in the mid-1980s.

The Origins of the Student Anti-Apartheid Movement at Black Colleges and Universities

Students at Black colleges responded to Soweto swiftly because they had an established infrastructure for fighting racism and colonialism. Alumni networks, African academic centers, and proximity to Civil Rights and Black Power organizations made Black colleges important centers of early coordinated student action. These iconic universities attracted scholars, liberators, and movement leaders from the Continent. Long-standing Black student traditions of African liberation support,

⁴ Spelman University Archives (hereafter SUA) n.d.

⁵ United Nations 1978: 8.

⁶ United Nations 1978: 9.

⁷ NAACP advocacy against segregationist/apartheid South Africa.

⁸ SUA ND.

⁹ Jelani Favors conceptualizes HBCUs as “seedbeds” of Black liberation activism in Favors 2019.

Black Power protest, and Pan-African organizing provided a rich activist past for linking anti-apartheid to previous generations of Black radical organizing globally and locally. At Howard and other HBCUs, anti-apartheid was coterminous with African liberation activism.¹⁰

Local and regional traditions of African liberation organizing encircled Howard since the 1950s. Black Power institutions were foundational for building anti-apartheid in the nation’s capital. Drum Bookstore and the Center for Black Education promoted a “study-work collective model of organization” where Black folks “could read [themselves] into an international consciousness.”¹¹ The radical teachings of Howard University professor Nathan Hare and Federal City College professor C.L.R. James supported these institutions and Black students’ attendant participation.

Since 1972, yearly African Liberation Day demonstrations held in Washington, D.C. have attracted scores of Black students to African Liberation Support Committee (ALSC) events.¹² Pan-Africanist organizers Owusu Sadaukai and Amiri Baraka led the organization and focused on national grassroots mobilization against white minority rule, the repeal of the Byrd amendment, and boycotts of Gulf Oil. In 1974, ALSC sponsored a conference at Howard named “Which Way Forward in Building the Pan-African United Front,” scheduled just a few months before the Sixth Pan-African Conference in Dar Es Salaam. The cry for Pan-African unity drew 10,000 people for the African Liberation Day march through the Capitol. Over time, however, ALSC unity dissolved. A few months later, the ALSC split into Marxist and cultural nationalist factions, impeding unity among Black radicals.¹³ Despite factionalism, organizers continued African Liberation Day and in 1977, Black politicians, academics, students, and D.C. community members turned out in masses to condemn the Soweto massacre.¹⁴

Ultimately, ALSC’s decline corresponded with the emergence of a Black congressional movement and Charles Diggs’ ascent to Chairman in 1969 of the House Subcommittee on Africa. The Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) advocated Africa policy through legislation between 1971 and 1988, while a young charismatic African American lawyer from Harvard, Randall Robinson, formed TransAfrica in 1976 to advocate for African policy through African American-led lobbying.¹⁵

Pan-Africanism lived on in local organizing. Silvia Hill, an African American activist who coordinated the 1974 Sixth Pan-African Congress (6PAC) in Dar Es Salaam returned home to “work against colonialism...based on the investment in this congress and the agenda of the national liberation struggle.” After 6PAC, Hill launched the Southern Africa News Collective (SANC) in Washington, D.C. which grew into the Southern Africa Support Project (SASP) by 1978.¹⁶ Hill focused on “building people-to-people ties.”¹⁷ With the help of Norfolk State graduate Joseph Jordan, SASP activists organized focus groups, educational campaigns, and demonstrations against U.S. southern Africa policy. Church organizations, youth, and university students were

¹⁰ see: Anderson 2014.

¹¹ Interview with Geri Augusto, “study-work.”

¹² see Rickford 2017: Chapter 7; see also Benson 2012: Chapter 7.

¹³ Minter et al. 2008: 127.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid: 133; Also, see: Ronald Williams forthcoming institutional biography of TransAfrica called *Black Embassy*; and Benjamin Talton 2019.

¹⁶ Minter et al. 2008: 167; Myers 2019.

¹⁷ Interview transcript, Sylvia Hill interview with William Minter, 12 August 2004, Washington, DC, AAA.

the crux of SASP's grassroots support. Former SANC member Sandra Rattley ensured SASP programming reached Howard students in her role as a news director for Howard radio station WHUR-FM.¹⁸ Howard students owed much to this political environment that grew what activists called a "Washington Lobby" within a decade.

The influence of Pan-Africanism also lived on in Howard's Organization of African Students (OAS). The OAS championed South African liberation and led early campus actions in the 1970s. OAS was closely aligned with the All-African Revolutionary People's Party (A-ARPP), a revolutionary Pan-African political party outlined in Kwame Nkrumah's *Handbook of Revolutionary Warfare*. Kwame Ture began "organizing the basis for the All-African People's Revolutionary Party among our people in the diaspora," and founded the first A-ARPP branch at Howard upon his return from the revolutionary worlds of Cuba, China, Vietnam, Guinea, and Tanzania in 1968.¹⁹ The A-ARPP situated itself in a lineage of Pan-Africanism that spanned the century from the First Pan-African Congress of 1900 through the All-African People's Conference in 1958, honoring the tradition's founders like Sylvester Williams, W.E.B. Du Bois, and South African Native National Congress leader John Tengo Javabu through Kwame Nkrumah and Sekou Touré. The Party offered international political organization and unity in the struggle for "the total liberation and unification of Africa under scientific socialism." The "revolutionary intelligentsia, especially college students" were the target cadre of party-building activity.²⁰ In 1972, the U.S. A-ARPP launched "work-study circles" for prospective members, a party-building practice later adopted by recruits in Canada, the Caribbean islands, and on the African continent.²¹ As the A-ARPP grew a North American base, organizers fought to nationalize African Liberation Day, launched an All-African Women's Revolutionary Union, planned to build a health facility in Guinea that held Miriam Makeba's name, and hosted Party guests like Touré at Howard.²² Over ten years, Ture organized around his conviction that "students are the spark" (one accentuated by the Soweto Uprisings) and introduced "over one-half million students" to the A-ARPP, many of them were students attending Black colleges.²³

Black Colleges as Important Centers for Student Anti-Apartheid Activism

Under the A-ARPP and Ture's tutelage, Howard OAS took a hard line against political leaders, including African heads of state, that negotiated with the white minority regimes.²⁴ OAS boycotted the Class of 1977 Commencement speaker, Liberian President William Tolbert. Tolbert's "open door" foreign policy, embrace of Kissinger's shuttle diplomacy, willingness to negotiate with South African Prime Minister John Vorster, and strike deals with multinational corporations "that plunder

¹⁸ Minter et al. 2008: 191.

¹⁹ Wideman, Thelwell, Ture, and Carmichael: 623.

²⁰ All-African People's Revolutionary Party 1982/1983 (1).

²¹ All-African People's Revolutionary Party 1982/1983 (1).

²² Ibid.

²³ All-African People's Revolutionary Party 1982/1983 (2).

²⁴ All-African People's Revolutionary Party 1977.

the resources of toiling masses in South Africa” disqualified him from the honor.²⁵

On October 15, 1976, HUSA organized a city demonstration against U.S. foreign policy in South Africa. Hundreds of Black students from D.C.-area universities including Howard, Federal City College, American University, and the University of Maryland swamped the State Department building. Students dropped off position papers and a wreath of red flowers for government officials “to give credit where credit is due,” said HUSA President Luther Brown.²⁶ The flowers symbolized African blood. In 1976, HUSA and OAS students, following the leadership of a South African student activist named Jeff Baqwa, indicted government officials for the death and turmoil that U.S. policies perpetuated in South Africa.

Baqwa hailed from South Africa’s Natal region and became involved in the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) through the South African Students Organization (SASO). In 1974, Baqwa fled to escape his banning order, and like other Black Consciousness exiles, he slipped into Botswana and made his way to the United States to serve the BCM’s external operation. The BCM deployed Baqwa to inform the international community about the development of the internal resistance from exile. Baqwa assumed this role at an incalculable risk. His predecessor Abram Tiro, leader of the South African Student Movement, was assassinated in a parcel bombing just before Baqwa fled. Baqwa identified as an “Azanian” and his Washington appeal echoed the BCM’s determination to wage a “Vietnam-style war” to reclaim the land of southern Africa. Baqwa and the OAS advocated that the U.S. government abandon its “puppet” regimes in Africa.²⁷ Together, they called for “people’s power, the people defined as workers, peasants, women and students.”²⁸

African students and activists like Baqwa had long contributed to the cultural and intellectual dimensions of the beloved “Mecca.”²⁹ Transatlantic student activism reverberated through both Black societies, causing them mutually to shape each other. Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee activist and Howard alumnus Charles Cobb Jr. explained, “They [African students] were talking about their situation, and they knew what we were talking about and we knew what they were talking about, and there was something to share there.”³⁰ Encounters with African liberators and scholars brought Black American students active in the Civil Rights Movement to Pan-Africanism.

²⁵ Jones 1976.

²⁶ Rouson 1976.

²⁷ Rolle 1976.

²⁸ Rouson 1976.

²⁹ Former Howard student and writer Ta-Nehisi Coates theorized Howard’s public sphere as a distinct learning environment that celebrated the myriad internationalisms and ontologies of its diverse Black students. His meditation on three aspects of student life – the Mecca, Howard University, and the Yard – is useful for constructing the context of activism at Howard. Coates’ theorization of Howard as the “Mecca” played on its colloquial nickname as “the Black Mecca,” the center of Black education in American, but it also alluded to a composite image of diverse student profiles paying homage to the multiple backgrounds, talents, beliefs that shaped the campus environment. The “Yard” was linked to this conceptualization of Mecca, in that it was the physical space where fellowship, debate, conference, and hanging out took place. Howard University (HU) run by liberal and conservative stood in contrast to the vivacious cultural and political, and oftentimes, radical terrain of the Mecca.

³⁰ Cobb Jr. 2008: 100.

Visiting South African freedom fighters also augmented the struggle's visibility through Howard's African Studies and Research Program. Formed in 1953, the Program was the first to grant doctoral degrees in African Studies in the United States.³¹ By the 1970s, UC Berkeley graduate Adowa Dunn Morton transformed the Research Program into a think tank and published reports and essays on liberation in Africa, African history, and African American and African solidarity. One seminar, "The Cutting Edges of South Africa Issues," hosted the Black People's Convention (BPC) and SASO activist Ranwedzi Nengwekhulu and editor of *The World* newspaper Percy Qoboza. Though BCM members did not always agree with the position of Black editors back home, the Program brought the two arms of the BCM together to convey the status of South African liberation.³²

Dunn-Morton convened South African activists who connected the struggle against apartheid to ones against domestic racism in the United States. A conference, "Afro-American Interrelationships with Southern Africa," attracted students, professors, and D.C. community members to discuss African and Afro-American solidarity. SASO activist in exile Nyameko (Barney) Pityana outlined the extent to which Black Power activists Kwame Turé and Malcolm X "shook the very roots of complacency in the hearts and mind of the Black student sitting in a tribal 'bush' college in S.A."³³ Pityana's presentation situated "Afro-Americanism" in a "global perspective" and argued that theirs was the "common plight of our brothers in some other continents."³⁴ Their contemporaneous and interrelated efforts to win self-determination, develop an internationalist identity, and revive repressed African cultures underscored how "the struggle [was] one."³⁵

As a center of African and Afro-diaspora knowledge production, Howard events brought together multiple wings of the developing U.S. anti-apartheid struggle. In the spring of 1977, the National Black Political Assembly and the Commission for Racial Justice in the United Church of Christ held a national conference on the struggles in southern Africa and the Black American response at Howard. South African activists, Pan-Africanists, and local anti-apartheid activists flocked to Washington, D.C. from around the nation to participate.³⁶

Motlalepula Chabaku, a South African activist and Visiting Lecturer at Greensboro, North Carolina's Bennett College brought a feminist perspective to the conference. Born on the outskirts of Johannesburg in 1933, Chabaku joined the ANC Women's League as a young adult and worked alongside Lillian Ngoyi and Albertina Sisulu.³⁷ They led the 1956 Women's March in Pretoria and brought out 20,000 multiracial supporters for the anti-pass demonstration.³⁸ Constant surveillance, Treason Trials, the Sharpeville Massacre and the Soweto Uprising prodded Chabaku to leave South Africa with her daughter, Mamolemo, in 1976. A longtime member of the Anglican Church, self-taught Chabaku earned a scholarship to attend Lancaster Theological Seminary in Pennsylvania.³⁹

³¹ Sabella Abidde and Olayiwola Abegunrin.

³² Bulletin 1977.

³³ Pityana 1979.

³⁴ Ibid.: 7.

³⁵ Ibid.: 16.

³⁶ *The Hilltop* 1977 (1): 3.

³⁷ Pamela E. Brooks.

³⁸ Together with Helen Joseph, Rahima Moussa, and Sophia De Bruyn, Chabaku helped lead the march.

³⁹ Lowery 1981.

Chabaku was acutely aware of the many vectors of discrimination that she encountered as a poor Black girl surviving under apartheid. Her intersectional experiences fostered her conviction that “feminist issues must be dealt with concurrently” alongside the fight against racism. Chabaku used her divinity training to advocate for patriotism and women’s solidarity from the pulpit.⁴⁰

Chabaku focused on new connections that the divestment movement had missed. In addition to highlighting U.S. corporate complicity in big oil, tech, and foodstuffs industries, Chabaku critiqued the Cabbage Patch Doll company which manufactured white dolls for American consumers using exploited Black women’s labor.⁴¹ In teaching “the African-ness of the Gospel,” Chabaku developed critical perspectives on violence in the liberation struggle, a debate that haunted well-funded anti-apartheid organizations. She promoted strategies of “counter-violence” and “counter-survival” as just responses to the violence of the regime. Her perspective aligned with those of the BCM and ANC’s militant wings.⁴² At Howard, Chabaku spoke on behalf of the United Ministries, a U.S. organization that united Christian student movements across Protestant denominations nationally since 1964.⁴³ The organization represented churches that were ardent anti-apartheid advocates such as the United Church of Christ and the Episcopal Church.⁴⁴ In the early 1970s, both filed shareholder actions against corporate behavior in southern Africa, but had not yet taken the step to condone armed struggle.⁴⁵

Black politicians also accelerated students’ South Africa awareness by making U.S. connections. At Howard’s Homecoming, Georgia Senator Andrew Young “drew cheers from the audience when he spoke of the fight for majority rule in South Africa and how it affects quality of life for Black people here.”⁴⁶ Assistant Secretary of Education Mary Frances Berry urged Howard students to “take up the struggle for human rights whether the violations occurred in Soweto or Wilmington, NC.”⁴⁷ Berry’s allusion to trials of the Wilmington Ten referred to the conviction on arson charges of wrongfully accused African American high-school students. Howard students and Black Americans across the country regarded the anti-Black bias of the criminal justice system with anger, fear, and sadness. Civil Rights organizations defended the Ten because they were political prisoners, targeted for their anti-racist activism. Berry’s analogy drugged up images of transnational oppression, policing, and incarceration. Parallels between the Wilmington Ten and the SASO 9 further elevated the interconnectedness of the struggle and created inroads for fighting white supremacy domestically through internationalist organizing.⁴⁸

At HBCUs, substantial divestment stakes loomed because the colleges and universities accepted significant donations from the same South Africa-tainted companies that they invested

⁴⁰ Motlalepula Chabaku “SOUTHERN AFRICA: Going up the Mountain” printed in Robin Morgan’s *Sisterhood is Global: The International Women’s Movement Anthology*.

⁴¹ Adams 1985.

⁴² Morgan 1996.

⁴³ UMHE archive at Yale.

⁴⁴ Both organized grassroots campaigns: The Episcopal Churchpeople for A Free Southern Africa and the UCC had US and South Africa branches that organized students.

⁴⁵ Larson 2020.

⁴⁶ “Right On the Campus” Jan – December 1977.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Janke 2015.

in. Howard *Hilltop* writer Regina Lightfoot exposed Howard's apartheid connection through these corporate gifts. As of 1977, 24.2% of Howard's annual income came from corporate donations, 90% of which came from sixteen companies with South African subsidiaries. In other words, these companies were responsible for one out of five dollars that flowed through the Howard University system. Lightfoot lamented that divestment was an issue of morals over survival.⁴⁹

Funding disparities between well-endowed predominantly white institutions and underfunded HBCUs revealed the structural inequality in U.S. higher education. While PWIs relied on a model of alumni donation to support operation costs and expansion, corporate philanthropy replaced a significant portion of this funding source at HBCUs. As students' attention to stock investments rose, the problem of corporate donations ultimately fell out of their conception of corporate withdrawal and later divestment. The threat of survival, pressures of further financial precarity, and the weight of institutional racism left this issue largely unexamined.

Students at the Atlanta University Center (AUC) took a different course of action to challenge corporate philanthropy. Atlanta University student Kojo Owusu led the charge against the Ford and the Rockefeller Foundations' "BLOOD MONEY." In addition to being co-conspirators in African worker exploitation, foundations compromised the integrity of HBCUs from curriculum to policy.⁵⁰ University practices served the interests of white foundations rather than "our own people's education and liberation."⁵¹ Owusu poignantly asked, "can you kill a group of people and save their lives at the same time?"⁵² Tracing the flow of capital between U.S. corporations, South African apartheid, and U.S. philanthropy, students came to identify the linkages between structural oppression domestically and abroad. In this regard, AUC students' first call for divestment demanded that corporations replace their South African operations with U.S. firms that paid Black workers a decent wage.⁵³ Students aligned divestment to their larger goal of building Black institutions that served Black communities.⁵⁴

As Howard students and workers were turning the school into a national forum for fighting apartheid complicity, the Board of Trustees announced new guidelines for its South African investments and adopted the Sullivan Principles in 1978. The decision disappointed the *Hilltop* student-editors who complained, "Howard Must Do More." *Hilltop* staff demanded that administrators forego profits from the "denial of human rights to all people, whether they be in the United States, Caribbean or Iran."⁵⁵ To students, the university was a "sell-out," having betrayed political traditions that previously made Howard "an international school and symbol for the world's people who seek justice and an end to oppression."⁵⁶ Professors and one Howard administrator echoed the student sentiments that the Board should divest rather than implement "weak and jive gestures."⁵⁷ *Hilltop* students pointed to the failure of the Principles: "The issue is not trying to make slavery/

⁴⁹ Lightfoot 1978.

⁵⁰ Owusu 1977.

⁵¹ Owusu 1976.

⁵² Owusu 1977 (1).

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Owusu 1976 (1).

⁵⁵ *The Hilltop* 1978 (3): 4.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Jett 1978.

apartheid a little better but to eliminate it.”⁵⁸ Their critique had important overtones for the class of Black administrators and political leaders who embraced a liberal anti-apartheid posture.

The students took their frustrations to the street that year making Rhodesian Prime Minister Ian Smith’s visit to the United States in October 1978 a flashpoint. In Washington, D.C., Howard students and TransAfrica, an African American foreign policy lobby led by Randall Robinson, set the tone for a national anti-Smith demonstration. Hundreds of students marched through the city to register their outrage at the Prime Minister’s visit to the Capitol. Student turnout amplified TransAfrica and the Southern Africa News Collective organizers who felt that the Carter Administration was duplicitous for dealing with Smith, an “international criminal.”⁵⁹ City-wide demonstrations offered students an alternative avenue for attacking the “internal settlement” and white minority regimes broadly. Joint petitioning and federal government lobbying facilitated collaboration between Howard students and national organizations. The demonstration drew 500 protesters and stirred popular opposition to Smith’s arrival. Throughout the country, 500 protesters opposed Smith’s arrival in Atlanta, “over 1000 in New York, and 2,000 in Los Angeles.”⁶⁰

The Howard Committee Against Racism (H-CAR) extended the efforts of the OAS and transformed disparate campus talks, demonstrations, and events into a coordinated campaign against Howard’s Sullivan Principles. H-CAR was linked to the national Committee Against Racism (CAR), a multi-racial organization of workers, students, and families founded in 1973 to fight white supremacist groups like the Ku Klux Klan.⁶¹ CAR led campaigns that targeted apartheid through boycotts of McGraw Hill books, demonstrations at banks, and anti-Krugerrand campaigns.⁶² In 1977, H-CAR demanded that Howard sell investments in Chase, Gulf Oil, Singer, General Motors and dozen other companies, conceptualizing them as neo-imperial foreign agents akin to state-sponsored US-interventions. Also, H-CAR hoped to “limit the ability of U.S. imperialism to carry out military desires in southern Africa” by attacking campus ROTC programs.⁶³

H-CAR unfurled a class critique that ran contrary to the anti-apartheid liberalism exemplified in the Sullivan Principles. They “conclude[d] that the Sullivan Principles were advanced by the capitalist class [so] that universities and other institutions could appear to respond to the demands of students and others without having to change their ways in the slightest.”⁶⁴ H-CAR’s accusation reflected the sentiments of broader student majorities and activists. HUSA student editors concurred that the Principles were “window-dressings to cover up the viciousness of the apartheid system.”⁶⁵ “Howard remains complicit in apartheid, that it profits from apartheid, and it supports apartheid.”⁶⁶ The specter of Howard’s problematic investments continued to lurk behind the frontlines of anti-apartheid agitation in the city. Despite ongoing efforts by OAS, HUSA, *Hilltop* editors, and H-CAR to force university withdrawal, students brought attention to a stunning fact:

⁵⁸ *The Hilltop* 1978.

⁵⁹ Calhoun 1978.

⁶⁰ Press Release 1978.

⁶¹ Moore, Tracy, and Kelley 2020.

⁶² Leaflet 1978.

⁶³ Pamphlet “The Howard Connection: South Africa.”

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *The Hilltop* 1978.

⁶⁶ Pamphlet “The Howard Connection: South Africa.”

“No Black Universities, major or minor, have partially or fully divested any investments in South Africa.”⁶⁷

However, the backlash from Black communities, students, and anti-apartheid organizations was so effective that Rev. Leon Sullivan backtracked on the Principles, a retreat that unfolded within a decade but began in 1981.⁶⁸ Sullivan’s rebuke of his own Principles, however, did not prevent both universities and corporations from continuing to use them as the divestment standard. As these standards continued so did the movement cultivated by Black students. Black students’ leadership became infectious and began to spread beyond Black colleges.⁶⁹

While Black college students demonstrated throughout Washington, D.C. and Atlanta, white and Black students in university towns targeted their institutions, local business districts, and regional legislatures. Campus teach-ins, films, and South African speakers raised consciousness about the injustice of apartheid and inspired U.S. students to scrutinize South Africa connections at all levels. Building on intermittent efforts to examine university ties before Soweto often led by Black South Africans or African American students, white students fixated on the issue in 1977.⁷⁰ By 1979, the American Committee on Africa (ACOA), the largest and most influential U.S. anti-apartheid organization, assumed an unofficial role as the student movement’s national organizer.

Black Student Anti-Apartheid Leadership and 1980s Divestment Wave

Black South African students’ leadership in the U.S. student anti-apartheid movement became more apparent during the campus divestment movement’s second wave between 1985 and 1987. In 1985, organized South African students “who happened to be physically away from the heat” reminded American students that “the survival of the Black nation is at stake” as they directed the student movement from Howard.⁷¹ The South African Student Committee (SASCO) comprised “exile and non-exile students” and broadcasted the “ritual of slaughter” in South Africa that was worsening under the media blackout.⁷² SASCO students reprinted articles from South Africa’s Black-run media and the internal resistance. These were messages that internal press agencies, like the *Sowetoan*, could not have circulated. Though far from home, the African students joined the struggle with their “compatriots” declaring, “it is our historical mission and revolutionary obligation to take our rightful place besides the workers and students in our motherland.”⁷³

SASCO member Tau Morwe implored Americans to be wary of the South African government “puppets” who attempt to sway progressive audiences into thinking that investment was an economic and politically liberalizing lever. They noted that in the “chorus of voices in support of our people,” some were “off key.”⁷⁴ Politicians like New York Mayor Edward Koch, “a man who

⁶⁷ Anum and Randolph 1980.

⁶⁸ Larson 202: 496 and 499. Levy 2020: 170-209.

⁶⁹ Larson 2020.

⁷⁰ Hall n.d.

⁷¹ MSRC 1985.

⁷² *SASCO Newsletter* 1985.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *SASCO Newsletter* 1985.

has disdain and disgust for our natural allies, the oppressed of this country and the dispossessed Palestinians” taught them that “not everybody who decries apartheid [who] is our friend and ally.”⁷⁵ Also among these were American performers who defied the cultural boycott. Since 1981, Black Consciousness activists implored Black audiences “to stand firm with us in isolating the Pretoria racist regime politically, economically, socially, and culturally” and to “continue this stand until the day we celebrate a liberated and democratic People’s Republic of Azania.”⁷⁶ HUSA “blacklist[ed]” African American performers who travelled to South Africa. They casted prominent artists in a poor light, made national audiences “analytical” about solidarity, and stirred fanbases to consider whether or not to support those artists at all. Internal resistance communications elevated by African students in the U.S. sharpened the dimensions of anti-apartheid solidarity a few years before Steven Van Zandt formed Artists United Against Apartheid.⁷⁷

Howard students followed their lead and rose to the forefront of the student movement’s increased militancy. Students sported red ribbons that symbolized the blood spilled by the “white minority settler-colonial regime” at rallies. HUSA leaders also broke ranks with non-violent South African activists, like Bishop Desmond Tutu, and called his appeal for peace “on the brink of being criminal.” In declaring, “DOWN WITH SOUTH AFRICA, LONG LIVE AZANIA” students tied themselves to the radical freedom dream of the Black Consciousness Movement.⁷⁸ These activists made an incisive and conditional solidarity claim that went beyond general support for change in South Africa. Rather, the Azanian vision aligned with the Black political traditions of Malcolm X, Marcus Garvey, and Patrice Lumumba, all Pan-African leaders that formed the basis of students’ political education and their call for armed struggle.

Howard students fed the outpouring of D.C. activism that inspired students as far as New York and Berkeley. Facing barriers in their university, Howard students demonstrated in the city, demarking their shift to focusing on U.S. investments rather than university ones. They joined the FSAM protests at the South African Embassy, well known for the arrests of high-profile movement leaders and musicians, like Coretta Scott King and Stevie Wonder.⁷⁹ One Howard student explained the importance of her arrest, “I think as a student it says a little bit more than just any other adult off the street. I think that if enough students show that they are really serious about this, it shows some type of hope for our future.”⁸⁰ Meanwhile, Howard students continued to point out university investments as an ongoing problem. Yet, their presence at the Embassy ensured that their energies went toward the anti-apartheid cause in one way or another.

Black college students and alumni’s Embassy action made up the backbone of the national stance against apartheid. A cadre of Howard-affiliated Black women activists — Karen Jefferson, Adwoa Dunn-Morton, and Clarissa Anderson — created the Howard Day Demonstration Committee in 1985, which organized students and faculty to picket at the Embassy.⁸¹ In the months leading up to ACOA’s National Week of Anti-Apartheid Action, hundreds of D.C.-area students

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ MSRC 1981.

⁷⁷ Freeman 2014; Weaver 2013.

⁷⁸ MSRC 1984 (2).

⁷⁹ Kelch 1985: front matter, 3.

⁸⁰ Kelch 1985: front matter, 3.

⁸¹ Office of the President 1985.

also marched against U.S. Africa policies and lent enthusiasm to Congresswoman Maxine Waters' legislation to divest worker pensions from South Africa.⁸²

While Black students propelled the divestment cause forward in Washington, D.C., Black and white students in New York City adopted militant tactics that provided "the spark to set the fire going."⁸³ Columbia University's Coalition for Free South Africa's (CFSA) Hamilton Hall blockade ignited the second wave of the Student Divestment Movement and radicalized the American public, as solidarity gestures for the students poured in from around the nation.

On April 4th, 1985 CFSA students chained the doors of Hamilton Hall shut and barricaded the building.⁸⁴ Sprawled out beyond the steps of Alexander Hamilton's statue, a group of three-hundred demonstrators formed a large semi-circle on the patio and obstructed the walkways that led to Columbia's central administrative building. The foyer of Hamilton Hall became the organizing hub for the divestment protests themselves. Columbia students, determined to end their institution's ties to South Africa through occupation, emerged as the leaders of the second wave of anti-apartheid campus activism.

At the blockade a gathering of protestors, "armed with banners and a megaphone," cheered, sang, and chanted "Apartheid Kills, Columbia Pays the Bills!"⁸⁵ The CFSA led the demonstration. Invigorated by the morning's speeches, where speakers called Apartheid "a policy of genocide" and highlighted Columbia's connection to racial violence, Tony Glover led students in the act of civil disobedience.⁸⁶ Numerous groups including Gay People at Columbia and the Black Law Students Association voiced their support for the blockade. Community organizations and workers also expressed solidarity with the protesters. Many supplied occupiers with food, drinks, sleeping bags and blankets.⁸⁷ Professors also supported the blockade. Visiting professor Amiri Baraka joined the demonstration.⁸⁸ Protesters rechristened the university building "Mandela Hall" and attracted national media attention as support poured in from other schools, communities, and national organizations. The Hamilton Hall blockade endured for twenty-one days, from National Divestment Day to National Anti-Apartheid Day on April 25, 1985, before the Coalition disbanded the protest.

Of the hundreds of students who participated in the blockade, a handful of radical students ensured its endurance. The group of seven initiated a hunger striketo convey the urgency of CFSA a few days before the blockade started.⁸⁹ Danisa Baloyi, Jose deSousa, Lorianne Harrison, Tony Glover, Tanaquil Jones, David Goldiner, and Laird Townsend used their strike to pressure the trustees into divestment talks.

Black South African student protesters guided the CFSA's efforts. Baloyi and deSousa attended Columbia on foreign student visas. Baloyi studied linguistics and she planned to lead

⁸² *Washington Afro-American* 1985.

⁸³ Nessen 1985.

⁸⁴ *Columbia Spectator* 1985 (4): 1.

⁸⁵ *New York Times* 1985: A4.

⁸⁶ *Columbia Spectator* 1985 (4).

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*: 1.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ *Columbia Spectator* 1985 (1): 1.

the struggle at home after earning her graduate degree.⁹⁰ DeSousa was a graduate student from Pretoria studying biochemistry. Unlike the other students who fasted to varying degrees, deSousa and Baloyi committed to a “total indefinite fast” until Columbia divested.⁹¹ Their dedication was absolute: “I cannot disassociate the standpoint of the Senate and the trustees from the position of the South African regime,” explained Baloyi.⁹² DeSousa elaborated: “Apartheid to me is real, it’s not just a theory...I couldn’t be worse here dying in a hunger fast than I could be going back to a South Africa where nothing has changed.⁹³” For South African students divestment was a “life or death” issue. Their futures hinged on Columbia’s divestment decision. Chillingly, deSousa worried that without abolition, returning to the apartheid state meant, “I’ll end up with a bullet in me.”⁹⁴

Baloyi and deSousa were likely touched by the transformative Black Consciousness ideology that was pervasive when they grew up in South Africa. They would have been intimately familiar with the rebellions and mass-*conscientization* that grew from the Soweto Uprisings. In 1976, they were schoolchildren in their teens; de Sousa was thirteen and Baloyi was eighteen.⁹⁵ Baloyi called the Homelands policy “the worst of evils” that would denaturalize her. “Reform is not enough,” she advocated armed revolution.⁹⁶ Both took aim at the apartheid “system” as the nexus of capitalist and racist oppression. Baloyi charged, “The system must change completely.”⁹⁷ DeSousa similarly explained, “The system was designed to create a bunch of slaves. I was taught to become an element of the workforce...” and to act “inferior to white people.”⁹⁸ Baloyi felt that Columbia’s investments “economically exploit[s] black South Africans...it’s a direct insult.”⁹⁹

The hunger strike came at incredible mental and emotional cost to the strikers. The hunger nagged and made each day increasingly difficult. Laird Townsend explained, “It’s hell when other people are eating.” Another striker added, “It’s hard to concentrate—it’s hard to do your work.” By day eleven, many had stopped going to class and camped out in Malcolm X House where they became a source of strength for each other.¹⁰⁰ According to a physician, most were, “very ill...A lot of them when they stand up too quickly black out.” A father commented on his son’s dwindling physique, “I’m deeply concerned. He’s lost a lot of weight.”¹⁰¹ The physician warned that the effects of the hunger strike could be extreme; “They’ll use up their glycogen, then their fat storage, then they’ll start to degrade their muscles and other tissues.”¹⁰² On day fourteen, Harrison and deSousa were taken to the hospital and treated for dehydration.¹⁰³ Upon his release, deSousa

⁹⁰ *Columbia Spectator* 1985 (2).

⁹¹ *Columbia Spectator* 1985 (1).

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ *Columbia Spectator* 1985 (1).

⁹⁴ *Columbia Spectator* 1985 (3).

⁹⁵ *Columbia Spectator* 1985 (15); *New York Times* 1985.

⁹⁶ *Columbia Spectator* 1985 (2).

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ *Columbia Spectator* 1985 (13).

⁹⁹ *Columbia Spectator* 1985 (2).

¹⁰⁰ *Columbia Spectator* 1985 (5).

¹⁰¹ Murphy 1985 (2).

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ *New York Times* 1985.

returned to the blockade and collapsed again, finding himself at the hospital for the second time in a single day.¹⁰⁴

Columbia University President Michael Sovern let the students languish for fifteen days before he agreed to meet with them. The Americans led the meeting because the South Africans were too weak to attend. Baloyi's condition was so dire that she received glucose intravenously while her comrades met with the President.¹⁰⁵ The rest were not better off. The five fasters met with Sovern in front of St. Luke's Hospital for fear that they could need medical attention during the discussion. "It's rather unfortunate that we had to go to the lengths we had to get him to sit down with us," lamented Tanaquil Jones.¹⁰⁶ At the meeting, the strikers agreed to end the fast but not the blockade. Tony Glover explained that the decision was "so that we can keep this thing going...so that we will have enough strength to get arrested, if that's what it takes."¹⁰⁷

The hunger strike was the life force of the Hamilton Hall Blockade. "Danisa and Jose's participation has been a source of inspiration," a CFSA member recounted.¹⁰⁸ When the strikers became too weak to organize the protests outside of Hamilton Hall, other CFSA members had to fill in, expanding the movement's leadership.¹⁰⁹ Throughout the 15-day strike, fifty-six students and faculty fasted in solidarity with the core group that had refused solid food since March.¹¹⁰ The CFSA kept the strikers on the minds of the blockaders. They created signs that counted each day of the fast, a mechanism that visually reminded passerby and press corps of the seven's commitment to the cause. A CFSA member said, "they'll be examples for the rest of us how dedicated they are." The strikers even announced the end of their fast at the blockade, where they triumphantly consumed small bits of bread in front of cheering blockaders.¹¹¹

Student activists encountered considerable repercussions for their participation in divestment activities. Facing more than university discipline, Baloyi and deSouza became enemies of the South African state. Back home, the South African government accused deSouza of high treason and issued a warrant for his arrest. Police forces appeared at deSouza's family home in Pretoria and harassed and detained his relatives for days.¹¹² The South African government's surveillance over students studying abroad led deSouza and Baloyi to explore political asylum in the United States.

The CFSA's dissident action pushed the university to reexamine its investment policies after a nexus of distinguished groups sided with the blockaders. These included faculty, students, alumni, Columbia Support Staff, church members, parents, college students from other campuses, and anti-apartheid organizations. Columbia affiliates who supported the protesters bombarded President Sovern's office with correspondence to shift the stalemate on divestment. Students and their parents alone sent more than 700 letters that added divestment pressure.¹¹³ Within days,

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Murphy 1985 (1).

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ *Columbia Spectator* 1985 (5).

¹⁰⁹ Murphy 1985 (2).

¹¹⁰ *Columbia Spectator* 1985 (5).

¹¹¹ *Columbia Spectator* 1985 (7).

¹¹² *Columbia Spectator* 1985 (15) and (19).

¹¹³ RMBL 1985 (2).

two-hundred professors mobilized and formed the Columbia Faculty Against Apartheid. They scheduled teach-ins, refused to hold their classes in Hamilton Hall, and spoke out against Sovern’s refusal to meet the hunger strikers.¹¹⁴ As professors took measures to ensure that the participating students were not penalized for protest, students flooded Sovern’s office with CFSA petitions that demanded full divestment.¹¹⁵ The occupation drew Barnard students and Arts and Sciences, Law School, and Social Work graduate students. Pamphlets littered the campus that read, “Columbia law students and GSAS students support the blockade.”¹¹⁶ Almost instantly, campus leaders across the intercollegiate world expressed solidarity with their Columbia comrades. Brown University students sent more than three-hundred postcards to President Sovern that declared, “I wholeheartedly support the students’ call for the whole disinvestment of their university from South Africa.”¹¹⁷ In a similar gesture, forty SUNY students joined the blockade after seeing the protest on the evening news.¹¹⁸

Columbia employees, faculty, and support staff continued to risk their livelihoods to speak out against South Africa investments. Fifty-three tenured faculty members delivered their own petition asking “the Board of Trustees to consider a commitment to total divestment.”¹¹⁹ By the summer, faculty support grew larger; more than one-hundred professors signed a formal petition, requesting that the college withdraw from South Africa. At the same moment, Columbia Support Staff unionized under District 65 and used the labor victory to support divestment activities. The week after the Coalition disbanded the blockade, support staff applied more pressure and threatened to strike for not receiving “fair negotiations” regarding wages and healthcare.¹²⁰

Alumni influenced the campus divestment dialogue as well. Former students jammed up the Office of the President’s phone line with many callers supporting the students and divestiture. Sovern’s secretary categorized alumni opinions as either “pro-student” or “anti-student.”¹²¹ A group of 1968 Columbia alumni dusted off their protest gear and joined the blockade.¹²² Later one hundred alumni from the 1960s attended a blockade rally.¹²³ Three alumni even marched to President Sovern’s office and returned their degrees claiming, “The spirit in which these diplomas were bestowed is being violated.”¹²⁴ Alumni action indicated that the issue of university divestment had swelled far beyond the gates of College Walk.

Community members also mail-flooded Sovern’s office. Local church members and fifty Philadelphia high schoolers mailed letters supporting the Columbia students. Civil Rights leader Jesse Jackson and Bishop Desmond Tutu also endorsed the blockaders.¹²⁵ Harlem’s workers,

¹¹⁴ *Columbia Spectator* 1985 (15) and (8).

¹¹⁵ RMBL 1985 (1).

¹¹⁶ Pamphlet 1985.

¹¹⁷ Postcards 1985.

¹¹⁸ *Columbia Spectator* 1985 (9).

¹¹⁹ RMBL 1985 (6).

¹²⁰ RMBL 1985 (3).

¹²¹ RMBL 1985 (4).

¹²² Letters from Class of 1968 1985.

¹²³ *Columbia Spectator* 1985. (10).

¹²⁴ *Columbia Spectator* 1985 (11).

¹²⁵ *Columbia Spectator* 1985 (16) and (14).

churchgoers, high school students, African American community groups all ramped up the pressure bringing hundreds of demonstrators to the divestment rallies.¹²⁶ Southern Africa organizations including the UDF, the ANC, South West Africa People's Organization, U.N. Special Committee Against Apartheid, and TransAfrica issued public statements that cheered on CFSA blockaders.¹²⁷

Continuous blockades at Berkeley and Rutgers followed the CFSA's Hamilton Hall action. These blockades also depended on the leadership of Black students and were multiracial in composition. The disruptions extended the National Week of Action against Apartheid into a sustained month-long protest¹²⁸ that inspired students from across the nation took over more than one hundred campuses with sit-ins and blockades.¹²⁹ The occupations drew consistent media coverage from newspapers, radio shows, and TV programs, and became a public-relations problem. University administrators' hostile responses to student dissent became fodder for the press, and further enraged the students. By the end of the summer, numerous U.S. universities, including Columbia and the University of California, had adopted policies of divestment that made the student strikes of 1985 a success.¹³⁰

The organizing efforts of Howard and Columbia students across the first and second anti-apartheid waves on U.S. campuses reveals two strands of Black radicalism operative within anti-apartheid. The storied political traditions of Pan-Africanism joined the liberation politics of South African Black Consciousness and offered both a Black internationalist analysis and motivation for divestment organizing. Transformative action followed as Black students directed their energies to organizing within campus anti-apartheid groups, Black student collectives, and local and national organizations. The legacies of this movement, in which diasporic and continental Africans seeded anti-apartheid into U.S. higher education, lived on in subsequent student organizing at Howard and beyond.¹³¹ After they graduated, this cohort of young people applied their anti-apartheid experience to related global and local causes for decades afterwards.

¹²⁶ *Columbia Spectator* 1985 (17).

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*; South Africa Catalyst Project 1978.

¹²⁸ ACOA 1985.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ *New York Times* 1985; American Friends Service Committee 1985.

¹³¹ Myers investigates how anti-apartheid, the cultures of hip-hop and rap, and Jesse Jackson's presidential run were a part of the political context in the lead up to the 1989 Howard protest in Myers 2019.

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