

Epilogue

Something Has to Change—2019, Fifty Years Later

More than fifty years have passed since the Allen Building takeover. Race remains a flash point for conflict in our national politics, at Duke, and throughout higher education.

The Black students who participated in the takeover—now around seventy years old—went on to lead lives of remarkable accomplishment and service. Janice Williams became a social worker, spending forty years focusing on children in foster care. Charles Becton was a judge on the North Carolina Court of Appeals, became a law professor, and was the first African American to serve as president of the North Carolina Bar Association. William Turner served as dean of Black affairs at Duke, directed the Black studies program, was a professor in the divinity school for decades, and served for many years as the pastor of Mt. Level Missionary Baptist Church in Durham. Joyce Hobson was a university professor and research director, serves as co-executive director of the Beloved Community Center in Greensboro, North Carolina, and is the director of the Jubilee Institute, a nonprofit focused on leadership development and training. Brenda Armstrong, the second Black woman in the United States to become a board-certified pediatric cardiologist, was a professor in the Department of Pediatrics at Duke until her death in 2018. As

dean of admissions at the Duke University School of Medicine for more than twenty years, she recruited the most diverse classes in the school's history. Armstrong was a respected and beloved figure at Duke, and the Chapel was filled to overflowing for her 2018 memorial service, and flags across campus were lowered to half-staff.

Many former students see a cause-and-effect relationship between participation in the Allen Building takeover and the lives that unfolded for them. "Those Blacks who went [into the Allen Building] have almost twice as many advanced degrees as the white student body," Becton commented. Catherine LeBlanc recalled the day of the Allen Building takeover as one in which she was "bathed in the commitment [of] wanting to make a difference in my community." The takeover, she said, gave her "a very strong sense of purpose about my life and what I do." "It made a difference," Armstrong said. "Allen Building represented the turning point in all of our lives, I know it did in mine. . . . Allen Building showed us there was nothing we couldn't do. There was nothing that has matched it, and I'm sure there never will [be]."¹

Although participation in campus activism caused conflict in the families of many of Duke's Black students, the passage of time puts these events in context. Far from representing a sudden break from the past, the bold actions these students took were a continuation of the struggle for Black education that had been ongoing since before emancipation. "It was almost like a mission," Armstrong reflected, "and we were the ones at the time—the right time—to carry it out." Often, it was parents who inspired protest. "We saw the world through our parents' eyes," she explained, and "the pain that they experienced . . . being segregated, but we also saw the hope. . . . Because they were willing to tell me their stories, I understood who I was supposed to be." Even as events were unfolding, Armstrong saw herself as part of a continuum of change. One older adviser told Armstrong and her fellow students, "There will be a time when people will . . . talk about you—all like you—all talked about us." She responded, "Well, I certainly hope so."²

The takeover also changed Duke. "The occupation of Allen Building was one of the most pivotal moments in our university's history," Duke president Vincent E. Price told participants on the fiftieth anniversary of the protest. "In your actions on our campus and the lives of purpose you have lived since, you have forever changed this place for the better and improved the lives of many who followed." "It was . . . a dramatic, cataclysmic . . . intervention," Armstrong reflected. "We helped Duke become the school it is today."³

After the resignation of Douglas Knight, Duke made an inspired choice for his replacement. Looking beyond the academy, it hired Terry Sanford, the progressive former governor of North Carolina, to be its sixth president. Sanford brought to campus stature, creativity, a willingness to take risks, and a deep commitment to the cause of racial justice. The head of the search committee accurately described Sanford's record as one of "integrity, honesty, vitality and verve." In Samuel DuBois Cook's words, Sanford was "a moral force" on racial matters. He set a new tone and direction almost instantly. In his first public appearance after being chosen president, Sanford commented that he was "certainly not against collective bargaining" and, in January 1972, Local 77 was recognized as the union representative for Duke's service employees. "He had his creds" as a graduate of UNC, Turner explained, "he had his creds from the governor's office, and he had his creds from his work with John Kennedy." In Turner's view, Sanford's background allowed him to give "permission slips" to the many at Duke who wanted the institution to move beyond the toxic conflicts over race and student activism that had ensnared his predecessor.⁴ In Sanford, Duke finally found a leader able to unleash and harness the school's great potential.

Under Sanford's leadership, and that of the presidents who followed him, Duke has achieved a stature that even James B. Duke may never have dreamed of. For 2020, *U.S. News and World Report* ranked Duke tenth among national universities overall and eighth for providing the best value. The *Wall Street Journal* also ranked Duke tenth among national universities and tied for third in a measure of how much value a school adds to its students' future financial lives. *U.S. News and World Report* ranked Duke the best hospital in North Carolina, and ten adult specialties and nine children's specialties were nationally ranked. It also ranked the Duke School of Law tenth in the country, the School of Nursing second, and the School of Medicine thirteenth. And then, of course, there is the Duke men's basketball team, a source of great pride for the university, winning the coveted national championship five times between 1991 and 2019.⁵

Over time, one constant has been the university's deep financial resources. Initially entitled to a share of the \$40 million Endowment James B. Duke created in 1924, Duke University now has an endowment valued in 2019 at \$8.6 billion. On June 30, 2017, the university completed its most ambitious fundraising campaign ever, having raised \$3.85 billion over the previous seven years. More than 315,000 donors participated. Admission to Duke is highly competitive. More than 41,000 applications were received for the Duke class of 2023, and 7.8 percent of applicants were accepted.⁶

Over the years, Duke has made significant investments in becoming more diverse and inclusive.⁷ The school has an internationally recognized Department of African and African American Studies. In 1983, fourteen years following the Allen Building takeover, the Mary Lou Williams Center for Black Culture was opened.⁸ The Black Student Alliance, one of a number of affinity groups for students of color, provides a cultural base for Black students at the university and a platform for continuing the struggle for solutions to the problems faced by Black students on campus. The Center for Multicultural Affairs supports community engagement, multicultural education, leadership development, and social justice education. Through a partnership between the Center for Documentary Studies at Duke and the SNCC Legacy Project, Duke has become a center for civil rights scholarship. The Samuel DuBois Cook Society recognizes, celebrates, and affirms the presence of African American students, faculty, and staff at Duke University. The society held its 2019 awards ceremony at Hope Valley Country Club.

The composition of Duke's student body reflects an institutional commitment to diversity. In the class of 2023, 55 percent of students are nonwhite, 12 percent are Black/African American, and 8 percent are first-generation college students. Admission is "need-blind." Applicants are accepted based on their merits, regardless of their ability to pay for college.⁹ In part to foster communication and relationships among students of diverse backgrounds, all Duke freshmen live on East Campus.

The university has also taken important symbolic actions. Its main quad has been renamed Abele Quad, to recognize the contributions of Julian Abele, the African American architect of Duke University's original campus. The Sociology-Psychology Building on West Campus has been renamed the Wilhelmina Reuben-Cooke Building in honor of her many contributions to the university, including her role as one of the first five Black undergraduates. A statue of Confederate general Robert E. Lee was removed from the entrance to Duke University Chapel, a step taken to express the "abiding values" of the school. Most recently, the university announced that the Carr Building on East Campus will be renamed. Despite Julian Carr's philanthropic contributions to Trinity College, a committee determined that his "white supremacist actions . . . , even when considered in light of the time in which they were held, are inconsistent with the fundamental aspirations of this university."¹⁰ Other steps are under consideration.

Still, even with these initiatives and investments, Duke has yet to create a campus culture of inclusion and racial justice. Indeed, parallels to the issues and conflicts of the 1960s abound.

The absence of interaction among students of diverse backgrounds is one issue. “I think if you did a dot map of color or socioeconomic status . . . and you looked at East Campus,” 2019 graduate Trey Walk commented, “it would be super spread out in diversity.” But after freshman year, students move to West Campus, where fraternities, sororities, and other selective living groups dominate. At that point, Walk—a Black student elected a “young” Duke trustee in 2019—observed, “enclaves of different groups” emerge. The amount of intergroup interaction drops significantly.¹¹ One professor who leads a DukeEngage project in South Africa continues to be surprised that Black and white student participants had never engaged in discussions of race until attending a program located thousands of miles from campus.

Student activists continue to press many of the same issues that were the focus of 1960s protest. The university’s treatment of its nonacademic employees and contract workers remains a central concern. In 2016 Duke executive vice president Tallman Trask hit a contract parking worker with his car and allegedly used a racial slur as he drove off.¹² Workers were furious. Then Duke president Brodhead received a report from a former special events manager at Parking and Transportation Services describing a culture of “racism, harassment, retaliation and bullying” in the department. The same person reported “innumerable” incidents in which members of the special events department were called “n****r, coon, porch monkey, bull dagger and dyke while working Duke special events.”¹³

On April 1, 2016, nine Duke students occupied the second floor of the Allen Building, demanding better treatment for Duke workers. Among the demands were that Duke commit to paying all its employees the current Durham living wage of \$12.53 per hour and offer basic health care to these employees. On April 6, the university announced that it refused to negotiate with the protesters until they left the building. The sit-in ended after seven days. “Though we have disagreed about . . . their demands and their choice of means,” President Brodhead said, “I respect their underlying passion for making Duke and the world a better place.” In 2017, Duke raised the minimum wage for all employees to \$13 per hour, with further increases to \$14 in 2018 and then to \$15 per hour by July 1, 2019—a 37 percent increase in Duke’s minimum wage over four years.¹⁴

Student activists are convinced that the 2016 Allen Building takeover and other campus protests have forced the university to act on various issues, even if Duke administrators refuse to acknowledge that fact. “People always tell me, ‘You’d get stuff done if you just went through the right channels,’” activist

Sydney Roberts commented. They say, “That’s not how you talk to people. You’re just gonna make them angry.” It is clear to Roberts, however, that only direct action gets the administration’s full attention and prompts action. “It has always been calculated, collective disruption that has made the university realize, ‘Oh, we have to actually pay attention to this,’” Roberts observed.¹⁵

Current activists see themselves as continuing work started during the 1960s. “At some point we came together,” Roberts commented, “and we looked back and realized that a lot of concerns, grievances we had, were actually the demands from 1969 that have not been fulfilled.”¹⁶

The hate and other racially charged incidents that occur at Duke are perhaps the most troubling echo of the 1960s. Such incidents are on the upswing on college campuses throughout the nation, and Duke has experienced numerous examples. In 2015 a noose was found hanging near the student center. Also in 2015, a death threat was made against gay freshman Jack Donahue when “Death to all fags @Jack” was scrawled on a wall in his dorm. In October 2015, a Black Lives Matter flyer posted in a Duke lecture hall was defaced with racial slurs.¹⁷

In November 2015, Duke convened a “community conversation” to discuss the racist and homophobic incidents. “I do not feel safe as a black female at Duke,” Katrina Miller told President Brodhead and other administrators in attendance. “I shouldn’t have to feel obligated to call my mother every night to tell her that I survived another day at Duke.” “If everything had gone according to plan,” a female Asian American student said through tears, “I would have been another suicide because I don’t feel safe here. I don’t feel that I belong here.” “You have created a space for us to fear for our lives,” one hundred students said in unison. “Duke, you are guilty.”¹⁸

In 2017 NPR reported that African American students matriculating at Duke’s divinity school felt that they have “entered a racial nightmare seemingly from another era.” “One of my classmates . . . texted me and asked me to come to her class,” Amber Burgin, president of the Black Seminarians Union, told NPR, “because a student was in her class saying, ‘N***** like you come here and think that you can just change everything.’” Burgin told of white students using slurs like “jigaboo” and calling a Black classmate “ghetto.” “I’ve had classmates who have left the program because they were tired of being treated in such a way,” Burgin said.¹⁹

In 2018 the incidents continued. In January a Black student said she was passed by two men who said, “F*** you, n*****” to her. During the last week of the spring semester, two Snapchats made by a Duke student using a racial epithet were posted on the memes page and the racial epithet “n***** lover”

was written on sophomore Cara Kim's door. Just after the Snapchat incident, Larry Moneta, vice president of student affairs, generated controversy when he tweeted that "freedom of expression protects the oppressed far more than the oppressors," urging that those who want to ban hate speech read "Free Speech on Campus," a book he found illuminating. "I think telling students who are asking you to do something about being targets of hate speech to 'go read a book' is intellectually dishonest and ethically irresponsible," Henry Washington, a former president of the Black Student Alliance, responded. After the racial epithet was posted on a student's door, Moneta commented, "I don't have a plan for a major initiative." Saying, "You want to be careful," he observed, "I think we need to just sit back and think about what is going on that a few people would feel like that was a good way to behave." Students were outraged. Junior Mumbi Kanyogo commented that the Duke administration is "more concerned with the mental gymnastics of avoiding responsibility for policy failure" than ensuring that Black students at the university are safe.²⁰

In April students circulated a petition demanding that the university "create and enforce a standardized set of consequences for acts of hate and bias on campus." They collected almost seven hundred signatures before presenting the petition to the university administration. The hate speech "is just a reminder," Kim commented, "of the deep-rooted racism that still exists on this campus and through its students." "I just want to see my university be the leaders they are hoping to produce," Kim said. "A leader . . . doesn't just put out the fire, but stops it from even happening." A couple of weeks later, provost Sally Kornbluth and Richard Riddell, senior vice president and secretary to the board of trustees, told students that "when the fall semester begins, we will re-engage with interested students with the goal of further clarifying our hate and bias policies." "We fully understand the urgency of these issues," they said, "but also feel that careful consultation is imperative so that we, as a community, can understand the ramifications of any such policies."²¹

Before the spring semester was over, Moneta was again in the middle of controversy. A regular at the campus coffee shop Joe Van Gogh, Moneta visited the store on May 4, 2018. While inside, he heard the song "Get Paid," by Young Dolph, playing over the store's sound system. Hearing lyrics that included "n*****" and "f**," Moneta said he was "offended." He told the *Duke Chronicle* he found the lyrics "quite inappropriate for a working environment that serves children, among others." Moneta asked barista Britni Brown, who is Black, to turn off the music. She did so immediately. Apologizing profusely, Brown explained that the song had been streaming from a radio playlist on

her phone. Because she kept the volume low so she could hear customers' orders, Brown did not know what song had been playing.²²

The episode did not end there. After leaving the store, Moneta immediately called Robert Coffey, head of Duke dining services, to complain about the song he had heard in the coffee shop. Several days later, on May 8, Brown, and Kevin Simmons, a second barista working during Moneta's visit, were summoned to Joe Van Gogh corporate offices and were told that they could no longer work for the chain. "We had gotten a call from Robert Coffey of Duke saying that the VP of the university had come into the shop and that there was vulgar music playing," Joe Van Gogh's head of human resources, Amanda Wiley, explained. "Duke University has instructed us to terminate the employees that were working that day."²³

Although Moneta told the *Duke Chronicle* that the decision to fire Brown and Simmons had been made by Joe Van Gogh, not Duke, protests soon followed. The incident, many believed, reflected callous indifference to the employment security of two Duke workers. Protesters also pointed to Moneta's earlier statements defending "free speech," even in the face of hate incidents. After protesters went to Moneta's office to express their concerns to him directly, he issued a statement that "if my actions in any way led to [the workers'] dismissal, I apologize and hope that the JVG management consider ways to reinstate their employment." Joe Van Gogh also apologized for its handling of the situation and offered to reinstate Brown and Simmons. Both declined the offer. On May 11, the owner of Joe Van Gogh announced that the company was severing ties with Duke "to preserve Joe Van Gogh's brand independence. . . . Joe Van Gogh has always been about bringing people together, not driving them apart," he said.²⁴

In the fall, incidents of hate speech resumed. On August 25, 2018, the word *Nigger* was found scrawled over the word *Black* on a wall in the Mary Lou Williams Center for Black Culture. A mural celebrating Latinx Heritage Month was found defaced in September. In mid-October, a swastika was found carved into a stall in the bathroom of the Languages Building and, the day after Halloween, a pumpkin with a swastika carved into it was found on campus. In November 2018, a mural honoring the victims of the Tree of Life synagogue massacre in Pittsburgh was painted over by a swastika.²⁵

Disturbing events continued in 2019. Duke garnered unfavorable worldwide attention after Megan Neely, the director of graduate studies in the Department of Biostatistics, sent an email warning Asian graduate students in the program not to speak Chinese in social settings with other students. The

email was prompted by a report from two faculty members that they had heard two Chinese students speaking to each other in Chinese “VERY LOUDLY” in a student lounge. They criticized the students for “being so impolite as to have a conversation that not everyone on the floor could understand.”²⁶

Racial incidents now occur at Duke so frequently that some students have become numb to them. “It’s in the water,” Trey Walk said with resignation. “When they happen at this point, we’re not surprised.”²⁷

Neely stepped down as the biostatistics chair not long after the incident. Duke leaders also issued a statement acknowledging the “exhausting and hurtful” events that had taken place at the university. “These events are not restricted to one school or group,” they stated, but “they are widespread on our campus.” As they had in the past, Duke leaders reiterated the university’s commitment to inclusion. “We emphatically affirm our promise to value the identities, heritage, cultures, and languages of every individual at Duke,” they said.²⁸

After the incident, Nayoung Aimee Kwon, the director of Duke’s Asian American studies program, issued a statement. Acknowledging that there is a “national and global uptick” in discriminatory incidents, she observed that Duke had experienced “more than our share.” Four task forces had been formed in the wake of prior incidents, Kwon said, but their recommendations “are still to be circulated widely or implemented in visible ways, sometimes years after . . . the submission of their reports.” “The ongoing problem of racism in our campus community has reached a boiling point,” she warned. Kwon urged the university to “lead with a zero tolerance policy toward any forms of bias and discrimination.” “Our students are watching us,” she said, “and now the world is watching us, to step up and take action now.”²⁹

This returns us to the central question of this book: Is “inclusion” a core value of Duke University? Although Vincent Price, Duke’s current president, has identified “inclusion” as one of five core values at Duke, fifty years after the Allen Building takeover, many think not. Even as a freshman, Walk witnessed hate incidents on campus that were not dealt with effectively—if at all. He saw how poorly laborers on campus—still primarily Black Durham residents—were treated. Walk also noted how few Black professors he had had while a Duke undergraduate. He concluded that “there was a commitment on paper and in words to [the idea of] inclusion,” but that “Duke’s money [and reputational] interests were at the forefront, beyond those things.” Creating a culture of inclusion on campus was viewed by administrators, according to Walk, as “something that would be good to do” but was not “essential for Duke’s identity.” “Everybody has a gift,” Armstrong observed, “and nobody’s gift is better

than anyone else's. But that culture of sharing and appreciating each other's gifts has not been achieved on the Duke campus." "Duke is not what it once was," Mark Anthony Neal, chair of the Department of African and African American Studies at Duke, commented, "but it certainly is not where it needs to be." "The truth is," Chandra Guinn commented in 2019, "the experience of black students at Duke is one that continues to need care."³⁰

In May 2018, after the Joe Van Gogh incident, Price addressed the university's attempts to create a culture in which all members of the community felt safe and respected.

When we learn a racial slur has been scrawled on a dorm door, a social media posting has used abhorrent language, anti-Semitic posters have been distributed in Durham, or workers on our campus have been treated unfairly, we feel angry, discouraged, and disappointed. Duke should be a place where these things don't happen. They are a painful reminder that we have more work to do to make our Duke community the dynamic, diverse and welcoming community of students, faculty, and staff we aspire it to be. . . .

Something has to change.

I will simply say that I am deeply sorry that we are not where we want to be as a university. . . . We must do better.³¹

Still, Price urged patience: "We cannot and will not succumb to a rush to judgment that demands instant retribution absent context and deliberation." Duke's problems of "basic decency, and our legacies of racism, intolerance and xenophobia, that continue to follow us, and indeed all of society . . . do not lend themselves to easy answers or quick fixes," the Duke president wrote. "But they will continue to plague us," he concluded, "unless we address them directly, honestly, in good faith, and with a healthy dose of courage."³²

So the problem remains. Race is, and has always been, the core issue for Duke. Only after Duke's Black students forced the university to consider the implications of desegregation and the aftermath of Jim Crow could the institution achieve the national and international prominence to which it aspired. But true greatness will only become possible if the university is able to create the diverse and inclusive culture it seeks. To complete this project, Duke leaders will require self-reflection, empathy, and a moral commitment to racial justice that so many of their predecessors lacked. For now, whether Duke can become an institution that achieves its lofty aims remains an open question.

POSTSCRIPT

In June 2020, not long before this book was published, Duke's Black students, faculty, and staff spoke out about racism at the university during an all-day event, "Living while Black." Soon thereafter, Duke president Vincent Price committed the university to taking "transformative action now toward eliminating the systems of racism and inequality that have shaped the lived experiences of too many members of the Duke community." He acknowledged that members of the Duke community had "often not fully embraced" their mission of serving as "agents of progress in advancing racial equity and justice." Price outlined a series of bold and specific actions that would "resolutely turn [the university's] attention toward the mission of anti-racism."³³ Though these issues had confronted the university since the 1960s, both the tone and the substance of Price's words conveyed new urgency.

The work of antiracism, Price recognized, would depend on sustained effort and deep engagement by those not subject to racism "with humility, with humanity, and with honesty."³⁴ It would also require significant resources during a very challenging time for higher education. Is change really coming? Only time will tell.