

THE CAMPUS COLOR LINE: COLLEGE PRESIDENTS AND THE STRUGGLE FOR BLACK FREEDOM

by Eddie R. Cole

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Images from the 1960s civil rights movement are burned into the American consciousness. Peaceful protesters blasted with a fire hose. White patrons jeering at the Black men and women sitting at the counter at Woolworths. The National Guard protecting James Meredith on his way to class at the University of Mississippi and Charlayne Hunter-Gault and Hamilton Holmes at the University of Georgia. These powerful moments define our understanding of this period, but many of the efforts to fight segregation, such as institutional leaders developing networks of allies and finding subtle ways to limit segregationist violence, happened behind closed doors. *The Campus Color Line* is a history of these efforts on the battlegrounds of American colleges from the perspective of college presidents. This is a history of the quiet resistance of Black college presidents, of the white presidents who trumpeted their success at recruiting Black students while working against Black people in their local communities, and of the damning silence of white academics when they left regions in favor of integration.

Author Eddie Cole emphasizes the hidden role of college presidents in shaping the desegregation movement, filling a notable gap in the civil rights scholarship. American colleges and universities, including predominantly white universities, played an important role in the development of racial politics and policy, and we can see their impact by looking at the actions of leaders in higher education during the 1950s and 1960s. Each of the book's seven chapters focuses on a different college president, beginning with a brief biography and their priorities coming into the presidency. The first chapter follows Martin D. Jenkins, the Black president of Morgan State College who had to build a network of allies silently to avoid alienating his white board of trustees and governor. Some of the existing histories of Black presidents during this pivotal time paint them as too deferential to white interests. In this chapter, Cole shows that, on the contrary, many of these presidents had to make difficult choices in order to support the larger effort to promote Black teaching and learning. Demonstrating this, Jenkins rescinded his invitation for W. E. B. Du Bois to speak on campus, but he did so weeks before asking the governor for funding to expand the college, the only opportunity it may ever have had to buy land to expand its footprint. Jenkins's work bolstered Black networks not just in Maryland but across the country.

The second chapter follows Lawrence Klimpton and George Beadle of the University of Chicago. Here Cole emphasizes a different kind of silence. Elite institutions like Harvard and Yale were recruiting more Black students, and these attempts at shifting university demographics had come to signal a progressive and more attractive campus. The University of Chicago adopted this

rhetoric of inclusion while simultaneously pushing for “urban renewal” in Chicago, a euphemism for buying properties close to the university and then refusing potential Black occupants. UChicago spent significant sums of money promoting restrictive housing policies in the city and further disenfranchising Black families. Students challenged these racist policies, forcing the university to address its quiet efforts to create a white bulwark around the institution and eventually rewrite some of its housing policies. If students and their allies in the city had not challenged the policy that the university wanted to hide, it may have allowed UChicago to keep shaping the city for its own interests.

Chapters 3–5 follow white presidents that sought peaceful integration for the good of their colleges. Franklin Murphy, president of the University of California, Los Angeles, believed that taking a stand on the issue of integration was the best way to gain the support of Black communities in Los Angeles and more promising students from elsewhere in the US and abroad. His efforts were curtailed by Clark Kerr, the chancellor of the University of California system who did not want to alienate any of the university’s stakeholders, forcing Murphy to take a softer stance publicly than he would have liked. In contrast, John Davis Williams, president of the University of Mississippi, wanted peaceful integration in order to avoid disruptions and to maintain a strong enough reputation to recruit faculty. Unlike Murphy, Williams was not a strong proponent of integration. He claimed to be “objective” by not making a public statement on his own beliefs. The most he was willing to say to promote peaceful desegregation at the university came during a campus rally when he told a story about an Ole Miss professor joining the Confederacy and returning to life as normal when the South lost the war. This professor held no bitterness, though, and did what was best for his institution. In the weeks following Williams’s case for peaceful desegregation, white mobs rioted on campus, shutting the university down. Frank Rose, the president of the University of Alabama, used the violence at Ole Miss to prevent damage at UA. Rose quietly reached out to several networks of influential white groups, including local businesses, fraternities and sororities, and the state government, to make the case that a peaceful transition to integration would be the best for white interests. Publicly, he dodged questions on his own beliefs, which helped him gain the support of segregationist organizations that could be convinced to stand down.

The book’s sixth and seventh chapters are notably shorter, covering the impact of free speech and affirmative action on northern college campuses and Black communities. In these chapters, we meet white college presidents who spoke in lofty terms about Black education in an attempt to recruit Black students to their own universities, regardless of what may have been best for the country writ large. Universities like Princeton attempted to poach faculty and students from Black institutions to make claims of diversifying at the cost of Historically Black Colleges and Universities. These predominantly white institutions used funding from the Ford, Carnegie, and Rockefeller foundations to

pay for initiatives meant to make them look better rather than have a positive impact, such as summer programs for Black faculty instead of more permanent programming. These self-serving efforts derailed existing work to create opportunities for Black scholars outside of predominantly white institutions.

Throughout, Cole artfully makes the case that higher education played a central role in shaping one of the most significant social movements in American history. Many of the major civil rights issues, such as housing, free speech, and desegregation, were inextricably linked to higher education. His analysis of presidents shines a light on the quiet ways some colleges and their administrators built networks of support to promote integration or to stem violent conflict by taking actions in the shadows that were at odds with public statements. At the same time, other institutional leaders claimed to be defenders of equal opportunity and affirmative action while undermining these efforts in private. White supremacy during the civil rights movement may be the most visible in the black-and-white documentaries my generation watched in our 1990s classrooms, but Cole shows how it was embedded in every institution, from the brick through a dorm window to the smile of a man promoting equality while keeping campus-owned buildings segregated.

The book's message to current presidents and administrators at predominantly white institutions is clear: you and your organization have an impact on society, even if that impact is not immediately apparent. The quiet decisions made by the presidents of primarily white institutions are important, but more must be done. Tepid and evasive responses define society almost as much as full-throated support for change. There is also an important message for all American colleges, universities, and legislators: HBCU presidents may not need to work in secret the way they once did, but many of the challenges they faced during segregation have not disappeared, and these institutions still need a network of allies who work for the benefit of the institutions themselves, instead of for their own self-interest.

The Campus Color Line is essential not just for filling this gap in the historical literature or because it shows another way that universities influence society. It is essential because it challenges those of us in higher education, both educators and administrators, to be mindful of our actions and, above all else, to do more.

LUCIAN BESSMER

A FIELD GUIDE TO GRAD SCHOOL: UNCOVERING THE HIDDEN CURRICULUM

by Jessica McCrory Calarco

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If the explicit curriculum of school consists of important lessons like how to summarize a text, use the Pythagorean theorem, and write a thesis statement, the hidden curriculum teaches less visible but long-lasting lessons: how to