

Berea College and Interracial Education: The First 150 Years

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I. INTRODUCTION

Founded in the turbulent years before the Civil War, Berea College is a non-denominational Christian institution “dedicated to justice and racial equality.” Its foundation, the Great Commitments, “represent both a recognition of Berea’s historic purpose and its intention regarding the future” (Rewriting the Great Commitments). This essay will discuss how Bereans have tried to achieve one of the Great Commitments, the commitment to interracial education, from the founding of Berea College in 1855 to its sesquicentennial celebration in 2005-2006.

II. THE FIRST STAGE: BLACK AND WHITE TOGETHER

Berea came into existence because Cassius Clay invited John G. Fee to Madison County, Kentucky, to establish an anti-slavery settlement (Ellis, Everman, and Sears 105). Fee, the son of a slave owner, viewed slavery as “the sum of all villainies” (108). He desired to build anti-slavery churches and “to have a good school here in central Kentucky, which would be to Kentucky what Oberlin is to Ohio, Anti-slavery, Anti-caste, Anti-sum, Anti-secret societies, Anti-sin” (133). These tasks would be accomplished in a county which had 1,881 slaveholding families who owned a total of 6,118 slaves in 1860 (139).

Clay and Fee eventually parted company because of their differences over the gradual (Clay) or immediate (Fee) termination of slavery. Nonetheless, in 1855 Fee built a one-room school. The first articles of incorporation were adopted by July, 1859, but because the leaders of the community were forced to leave Kentucky in December 1859, the document was not

recorded until 1866. The first by-law stated: “The purpose of the College shall be to furnish the facilities for a thorough education to all persons of good moral character” (Peck and Smith 13). The second by-law declared that the college “shall be under an influence strictly Christian, and as such, opposed to sectarianism, slaveholding, caste, and every other wrong institution or practice” (Nelson 15). In a letter to Rev. J.A. Rogers, the first principal, Fee declared that “opposition to caste meant the co-education of the (so-called) ‘races’” (15). As to whether Negroes would be admitted if any applied, Edward Fairchild, the first president of Berea College, stated, “the question was not embarrassed by legal considerations, for there was no law of Kentucky forbidding education to free colored persons, or even to a slave, with his master’s consent” (Hall and Heckman 331).

The constitution did not mention whether the different divisions of Berea College were supposed to serve any particular race or region; however, the first catalog in 1867 mentioned two groups: recently emancipated Negroes and White people of eastern Kentucky. In his inaugural address, Fairchild stated: “We are aware that this feature of the school fails to meet the approbation of many of our fellow citizens,” but he did not “doubt that in the end this characteristic . . . will be most highly approved and popular” (Nelson 17). He also stated “that Negroes are to have and ought to have, the same civil and political rights as white men, and the sooner and more thoroughly both classes adapt themselves to this idea, the better for all” (Nelson 15). On March 6, 1866, 43 White students were enrolled at the institution; 18 left when four Black students enrolled at the school (Ellis, Everman, and Sears 211). In 1866, Rev. Gabriel Burdett, a former slave and soldier, became a member of the Board of Trustees. Like Burdett, other ex-slaves followed Fee from Camp Nelson, a Union camp located in Jessamine County, Kentucky. Fee “had determined that Berea would be the place where Black people could own

property of their own. He promoted ‘interspersion,’ with blacks and whites being interspersed about the country’s side and in the town” (Ellis, Everman, and Sears 218). Fee stated, “I do not propose to feed him (the ex-slave) but put an axe and land within his reach and let him work out his salvation-help him to a home” (Ellis, Everman, and Sears 219). In addition, an 1872 Board of Trustee resolution did not prohibit social relations “between the races [as long as both parties were discrete] . . . under existing circumstances” (Burnside 12).

Thus, in the first stage of the institution’s history the interracial commitment meant educating Blacks and Whites in the same environment. The founders believed that as Christians, they could do no less. This attitude continued from 1890-1892 during the tenure of William B. Stewart, the second president. If the composition of the student body is used as a criterion for judging the success of this experiment, then Berea was extremely successful. For most years before 1892 there were more Black students than Whites enrolled at the school, although in the college division there were more White students. However, during the second stage of Berea’s history, the story was different.

III. THE SECOND STAGE: A CHANGE IN EMPHASIS

In 1892, William Goodell Frost became Berea’s third president. After his retirement, Frost wrote that he was not sure that he would ever have come to Berea “if it had not been for [his] ancestral and personal interest in befriending the colored race” (Peck and Smith 68). However, Frost believed in a different definition of interracial education or co-education of the races as it was known then.

Frost found an institution in financial trouble. In addition to an “air of dilapidation about the place, the vacant rooms in the dormitories, and the empty seats in the classes and the Chapel”

(Peck and Smith 48), many of the original donors had died and the new donors were interested in serving the Southern Appalachian region, not educating Black students. Frost's task was finding enough financial support to continue "the peculiar work of Berea." The number of Black students was decreased and the number of White students was increased to obtain a student body similar to the racial composition of the state of Kentucky, seven Whites for every Black person (Nelson 18). Frost felt his actions of a shift in emphasis "appealing more for the mountaineers" (Nelson 25) were consistent with the earlier actions of the founders and did not mean that he was not committed to interracial education. In fact, Peck and Smith argue that this shift in emphasis began with Fairchild who gave loving care to his Negro students and paid an increasing attention to the people of the hills (66). In a speech in 1895, Frost stated, "We have tried our simple plan for twenty-nine years, and the evil consequences have not come; and our way is the way of the Christian world at large" (Nelson 25). In his annual report for 1902, Frost stated that "this College now stands before the public as the representative school for the mountains, as Hampton and Tuskegee stands as the representative institutions for the colored people" (Peck and Smith 72). A statement was added to Article II of the school's constitution in 1911 recognizing the southern mountain area as Berea's special field (Peck and Smith 79).

During Frost's administration, segregation was emphasized on campus. For example, the Board of Trustees rescinded its resolution of 1872 pertaining to interracial dating on campus. Later, Frost remarked that students "did the proper thing by separating themselves by race in their eating and living habits" (Nelson 19). Frost stated in regards to hiring a Black professor, "A professorship is not the best place in which to demonstrate the powers of the Negro . . . We shall do [him] poor service . . . if for the sake of having colored professors we lost our chance to instruct mountain youth" (Nelson 21).

Fee's viewpoint was clear: Frost was betraying the thoughts and actions of the founders.

Fee wrote in 1899,

Let me say that the unique work of Berea College is not 'effacing sectional lines' . . . and helping white people or the ("contemporary ancestors in the southern mountains")... but effacing the barbarous spirit of caste between colored and white at home. Let the friends of Berea College demand faithfulness to the original design of the college. (Nelson 23)

The on-campus discussion became moot on January 12, 1904, when Representative Carl Day introduced the Day Law in the Kentucky House of Representatives that applied specifically to Berea. It became "unlawful for any person, corporation, or association of persons to maintain or operate any college, school, or institution where persons of the White and Negro races are both received as pupils for instruction" (Peck and Smith 51). Initially, Frost considered moving the school to Ohio or West Virginia. However, he was dissuaded from pursuing this option. On November 9, 1908, the Supreme Court of the United States ruled that the Day Law was constitutional. After the decision, Berea became an all White institution. Lincoln Institute, located in Shelby County, Kentucky, was incorporated in 1910 as a school for Negroes.

By the end of the second stage, there were no Black students at Berea College. Outside forces played a crucial role, but Frost was leading the school towards segregation before the Day Law. The only difference was that his method would have taken longer. Frost was a Christian who was primarily interested in the number of White students enrolled at the school. He would accept a ratio of seven Whites to one Black, but not a one to one ratio as existed in the first stage.

IV. THE THIRD STAGE: AN ALL WHITE INSTITUTION

From 1908 to 1950, the third stage, only White students from the Southern Appalachian region were educated at Berea College. However, efforts were made to continue and enhance

contact between the races. William J. Hutchins, the fourth president, annually scheduled one important Negro speaker or musical aggregation. In 1940, Francis Hutchins, the fifth president and William's son, initiated a series of interracial conferences and summer programs for Berea students to meet and interact with Negro college students (Peck and Smith 48). In 1950, Jesse H. Lawrence, the only black representative in the General Assembly of Kentucky, introduced an amendment to the Day law "to allow the co-education of white and Negro students in public or private schools above the high school level...provided an equal, complete and accredited course is not available at the Kentucky State College for Negroes" (Peck and Smith 60). In the fall of 1950, Berea College re-opened its doors to Black students and initiated the fourth stage of the school's history.

V. THE FOURTH STAGE: THE RETURN

Educating White students from the Southern Appalachian region remained the focus during the fourth stage. However, in 1950, the Board of Trustees "empowered the administration 'to admit such negro (sic) students from within the mountain region whom it finds thoroughly qualified, coming completely within provisions of the Kentucky law, and whom in its judgment it appears we should serve'" (Peck and Smith 61). As a result, until the end of the 1960's, the number of Black students increased very slowly. In the opinion of Peck and Smith, the low number was caused by "the small number of Negro residents in the southern mountains; the poorer educational opportunities for Negroes in elementary and secondary work; and Berea's policy of admitting Negro applicants most likely to do college work well" (61). Subsequent events forced change upon the institution.

On November 26, 1967, 18 Black students submitted a petition which stated: “We, the Black Students of Berea College, are in support of the initiation [sic] of a Negro History course in the academic curriculum on this campus.” This event marked the end of the fourth stage and the initiation of the fifth stage.

VI. THE FIFTH STAGE: THE BLACK REVOLUTION

This stage was the shortest and most difficult for Berea College. In the late 1960’s, nationwide Black college students were no longer satisfied with being Black imitations of their White counterparts. They wanted their own culture and heritage remembered and taught. The status quo was unacceptable. They were no longer Negroes; they were Black or Afro-American. They wore African clothing and had natural hairstyles. They wanted all Black floors or suites in dormitories, Black Studies courses and more Black students, faculty and staff. The Black students at Berea College were no different.

In the Fall Term of 1968, Berea College responded by offering History 373, Negro History. Richard Drake, the teacher, stated the History Department offered the course “because most of us feel that Negro history is a legitimate field – in part created by a Berea graduate, Carter G. Woodson – and partly too because of Berea’s commitment to bi-racial education” (July 26, 1968). Drake felt that he was “well prepared in the field,” even though the Black students preferred for a Black person to teach the course. Nonetheless, Drake believed that both Black and White students responded well to the course (Nov. 16, 1968).

The Black students continued to express their concerns. On November 7, 1968, approximately 50 students, predominantly Black, walked out of a campus wide symposium. One student said,

I feel that Berea College is not living up to its ideals of racial equality. Most of my fellow white students are not getting an interracial education because of the small number of blacks that they come in contact with. People cannot understand other people if they are not exposed to their thoughts and ideas. This is shown best by the fact that only six percent of the student body is black, there are no black instructors, no blacks in the administration, and very few black chapel speakers. Improvements in these areas would aid greatly in the broadening the perspective of both black and white students – particularly white. (*The Berea Citizen* Nov. 14, 1968)

Drake saw the walkout as “skillfully run, and in the best of taste really” (*The Berea Citizen* Nov. 16, 1968). Louis Smith, Dean of Berea College, thought it was in very poor taste. He believed that “Negro teachers” wanted to teach Negroes in “all-Negro schools” (*The Berea Citizen* Nov. 14, 1968). Smith also stated that the college’s “first commitment is to the underprivileged youth of the Appalachian Mountains and this is the main reason for the small percentage of Negro students” (*The Berea Citizen* Nov. 14, 1968).

Joseph Taylor, a member of the Sociology Department at Indiana University-Indianapolis and future Berea College Trustee, was hired on a part-time basis to assist Drake in the Negro History course. In 1968, the Negro Studies Committee, composed of students and faculty, was formed to examine the curriculum and to suggest ways to examine the racial issue in America. The committee recommended adding relevant courses and that all General Education be re-examined to be sure that race and prejudice were receiving adequate attention, that College assemblies be utilized as important avenues of communication, that the Audio-Visual Services and library holdings of materials related to Negro Studies be examined and expanded (Negro Studies Committee 2). Ralph J. Bryson, the Chairperson of English at Alabama State University, was hired to evaluate Berea’s efforts to achieve the interracial commitment. He recommended

additional Black Studies courses, the integration of Black Studies into the present course offerings, a concerted effort to recruit Black faculty, more extracurricular activities geared to the interests of Black students, and the establishment of a chair in honor of Carter G. Woodson, the Father of Negro History (Black Consultants Folder).

In 1969, because of the efforts of “a young black admissions counselor,” the Admissions Office initiated an aggressive effort to recruit more Black students. During the 1968-69, 70 Black Americans were enrolled at Berea; in 1969-70, this number increased to 120 (Black Consultants Folder). Another new face for the 1969-70 school year was “a young black counselor in the advising office,” the individual around whom a later incident would revolve.

On March 3, 1970, three Black students were harassed by some local White citizens. At the time, Berea was basically a segregated town as the majority of the local Blacks lived in predominantly Black communities on the outskirts of the town. Instead of arresting the local White citizens, the police arrested the three Black students for carrying a concealed weapon, “a big stick.” The next day, Black students staged a sit-in in Lincoln Hall, the administration building (Blacks 1924-1970). Eventually, the charges were dropped against the students. This incident was serious, but the events in December of 1971 shook the foundations of the college.

Willis D. Weatherford became the president in 1967. He was familiar with the history of Berea College because his father had been a member of the Board of Trustees for almost five decades. Weatherford and the college attempted to respond to the concerns of the Black students. There were at least five courses on “the books which might be called Black Studies” courses (Blacks 1924-1970). The number of Black students increased. There were two Blacks on the professional staff. In the fall of 1971, the institution hired two Black faculty members in History and Spanish and a campus minister. Nonetheless, trouble occurred in December 1971.

The Black counselor hired in 1969 was informed that he would not be rehired after the conclusion of the 1971-72 academic year because “the students of the college had lost confidence in his performance of duties as a counselor.” In the counselor’s opinion, another factor in the disturbance was “when a white male student who had written a letter ‘full of lies about me’ and ‘pulled out and flourished’ a switchblade knife in [my] presence” (*Berea Citizen* Dec. 16, 1971). Rumors about “a firearms arsenal of undefined size in some of the male dormitories, and [that] there was an undercurrent of comments that white and black students were preparing for impending trouble” circulated throughout the campus (*Berea Citizen* Dec. 16, 1971). A disturbance in a female dormitory resulted in faculty and security officers having to restore order. On Monday, December 13, 1971, a number of Black students occupied the administration building and presented Weatherford with eight demands including: reversal of the decision about the termination of the counselor; a dismissal of specific members of the faculty and staff “because of their overt racist acts”; a search for weapons; and refuge in the administration building for protection and security until the situation was rectified (*Berea Citizen* Dec. 16, 1971).

The administration closed school early for the Christmas vacation and urged all students to leave campus by 5 p.m. on Tuesday, December 14, 1971. Weatherford felt that “it [had] become evident that an academically profitable examination week [was] not feasible” (*Berea Citizen* Dec. 16, 1971). He hoped that “closing one week earlier [would] allow passions to cool over vacation . . . and the ideal of brotherhood [would] be reasserted in the new year in this college” (*Berea Citizen* Dec. 16, 1971).

When classes resumed in January 1972, there was outward calm. During the break, the counselor left campus and reached an agreement with the college to go on terminal leave until

June 30, 1972. The faculty created a project called Operation Zebra to “welcome the students back to campus in an atmosphere of friendship and conciliation” (*Berea Citizen* Jan. 6, 1972).

This brought to a close the fifth and most traumatic stage of the history of Berea College.

What occurred at Berea was not unique. Similar demands were being made at other institutions of higher learning. However, this offered little comfort to Bereans; many thought that the school’s history would insulate it from the Black Revolution, however, Berea was a community divided between two schools of thoughts. One emphasized frank discussions to confront racism and the other placed a high value on toleration, decency, and courtesy, believing the less said about racial problems the better [Self-Study 1973-1974 302]. The fifth stage was a transitional era from the fourth stage in which the latter school of thought controlled until the sixth stage, in which the former school of thought gained the advantage.

VII. THE SIXTH STAGE: A NEW DIRECTION

Two areas of the new curriculum implemented in 1970-1971 dealt specifically with the interracial commitment. First, Issues and Values, a new required freshman core course, was added to the General Education curriculum so all students would be exposed to the Christian, Appalachian, and interracial commitments from an academic perspective. Its goals included examining current issues, the Christian commitment and the role of values. Black America and Appalachia issues were two of the continuing issues (Curriculum Committee 1969 5). In the fall of 1982, Issues and Values was replaced by Freshman Seminar, a course to involve all freshmen, “in a critical study of the topic Freedom and Justice as it relates to the commitments of Berea College, to Appalachia, the Christian faith, the kinship of all people, or the dignity of labor” (Berea College Catalog 1987-1989). Each section of the course dealt with only two of the Great

Commitments; a decision made by the specific faculty member. For many years, less than fifty percent of the sections dealt with the interracial education commitment.

Second, a cultural area requirement was added and “structured to acknowledge the plurality of cultures and our need to understand them, and to help us meet our commitment to the brotherhood of man” (Curriculum Committee 1969). The requirement could be fulfilled by successfully completing three levels of foreign language or one cultural area course in either Black or Appalachian culture and one in non-Western culture. A study in 1987 revealed that the overwhelming majority of the students chose to avoid the Black Studies course and enroll in an Appalachian Studies course. In the fall of 1988, students not choosing the foreign language option were required to complete a Black Studies course, an Appalachian Studies course, and a non-Western course.

The number of Black students enrolled at Berea College fluctuated during the fifth stage. The high was 152 in 1973, but dropped to 88 in 1974. On a percentage basis, the low was in 1982 when there were 89 Black students who composed 5.6% of the 1,588 students in the student body [Self-Study 1983-1984 72]. Also, during this stage, the first Black faculty were granted tenure: Cleophus Charles (History) in January 1982 and Betty Olinger (Nursing) in January 1983.

In November 1979, Weatherford appointed a committee to determine what programs should exist at Berea College in order to attempt to reduce the amount of prejudice and misunderstanding. The mandate of the committee was “to develop a recommendation on steps the college should take in its interracial program to more effectively carry out the commitment to equality and brotherhood” (Weatherford Nov. 30, 1979). The committee recommended that the college “establish a Black Studies Center with staffing and responsibilities comparable to the

Appalachian Studies Center” created in 1970 “to stimulate and coordinate course offerings on Afro-American culture in various departments, to encourage off-campus programs and experience for students which will serve to enhance the understanding of Black culture, and to develop institutional relationships with other organizations which share the Berea commitment to racial equality and multi-cultural understanding” (Berea’s Interracial Committee 9).

This recommendation led to the creation of the Black Cultural Center and Interracial Education Program (BCCIEP) in July 1983. The BCCIEP was to serve as a source of renewal and cultural affirmation for Blacks, attempt to build common bonds among the races, and focus attention on the issues of integration and equality in the college community and the world at large (Black Cultural Center and Interracial Education Program Brochure). The long, “cumbersome and confusing” title revealed the division on campus about its mission.

The sixth stage ended in 1984 when Weatherford retired. When he departed there was still division on campus about interracial education, but the tension was much less as Bereans, Black and White, peaceably searched for solutions.

VIII. The Seventh Stage: Stagnation

John Stephenson became the seventh president in July 1984. The title of his thesis for the M.A. in Sociology, “On the Role of the Counselor in the Guidance of Negro Youth,” indicated he was interested in the education of African-Americans, so hope abounded on campus with his inauguration. Despite some positive initiatives, Stephenson was deficient in terms of providing leadership in achieving Berea College’s commitment to interracial education.

Stephenson did not view Berea College’s commitments to interracial education and to mountain youth as competing commitments; he saw “African Americans in Appalachia [as] a

seemingly invisible significant minority” (182). Because of this vision, Stephenson and one of his former students at the University of Kentucky, sought and obtained funding from the W. K. Kellogg Foundation to create the Black Mountain Improvement Association (BMIA), “a community-based organization” in existence from 1990-1994 (Black Mountain Youth Leadership Program). Like other outreach programs created during the Stephenson era, there was a lot of dissatisfaction on campus about the BMIA. Some of the faculty saw the programs as interfering with Berea College’s “primary mission of undergraduate teaching or as diminishing support for academic programs” (Wilson 186). The poor administration of the BMIA only helped to increase the dissatisfaction both on and off-campus. Funds were not sought to continue the program after 1994. In addition, in 1993, the first Great Commitment was changed from: “To provide an educational opportunity primarily for students from Appalachia, who have great promise and limited economic resources,” to the following: “To provide an educational opportunity for students from Appalachia, black and white, who have great promise and limited economic resources” (quoted in Wilson 197).

In 1988, Berea College was one of twenty colleges that received funding from the General Telephone and Electronics Foundation to create an outreach program for African-American high school students: Science Focus (Science Focus). In 1999, Science Focus merged with Upward Bound and became the Carter G. Woodson Math and Science Institute.

Academically, in December 1983, the Berea College faculty approved the minor in Black Studies. In 1985, Cora Newell-Withrow became the Chairperson of the Department of Nursing. In 1986, Janice Blythe was hired and appointed as the Chairperson of the Department of Home Economics. Roland and Dorothy Goode, two Berea College alumni, contributed funds in 1988 to establish the Goode Visiting Professor in Appalachian and Black Studies to bring scholars in

Appalachian and/or Black Studies to campus for an academic term or year. In addition, in 1994, the Black Ensemble, the extra-curricular activity created by African-American students in 1969, became the Black Music Ensemble, a course open to all students. Despite these positive actions, the number of African-Americans who were students, faculty, staff and/or administrators during 1984-1994 is evidence that the appropriate term to describe the efforts to achieve interracial education during the Stephenson administration is “stagnation.”

As stated earlier, the BCCIEP came into existence on July 1, 1983, without clarity on campus about its goals and objectives. The title and responsibilities of the center changed in 1996, but it was not until 2002 that an administrative assistant was hired to assist the director. In addition, from 1983-1994, except for the Director of the BCCIE), no other African-American occupied an executive level administrative position. The numbers were also dismal for African-American students. In 1986, the Students of the Future Subcommittee of the Long Range Planning Committee (LRPC) reported that in 1973, 152 or 11.3% of all students were African-Americans and in 1985, there was less than 100 African-Americans or 6.21% of the total enrollment (Students of the Future 7). Keila Thomas wrote in a report for the LRPC: “Berea College does not maintain an official goal for the percentage of American black students attending the institution. However, the admissions office ‘unofficially’ strives toward a twelve-percent black enrollment. From 1973, this goal was only reached twice” (45). According to the “Berea College Institutional Self-Study, 1993-1995,” in 1982-1983 only four of 106 faculty were African-Americans. In 1993, eight of 112 faculty were African-American (53). Thus, for the entire Stephenson era, promotion, recruitment and retention of African-Americans, no matter whether they were students, faculty or administrators, was a problem.

In May 1985, Stephenson created a long range planning committee “to identify external environmental trends which may affect the College in the future and to examine current institutional strengths and weaknesses” (Report of the Future of Berea College 1). Four of the subcommittees discussed interracial education at Berea College.

The Students of the Future Subcommittee stated that complacency or inaction by previous administrators, trustees, alumni and students resulted in “a history of moderation and conservative actions” (7) and blamed leaders of Berea College in the 1950s for the problems of the 1980s. It also wrote, “The institution’s history of attempting to provide interracial education is indisputable: the extent to which that commitment has been actualized is debatable” (13). The Subcommittee on the Christian Commitment wrote that though the “Black commitment is chronologically prior, it has been overshadowed, and at time totally eclipsed by the ‘white commitment’” (The Christian Commitment 6) and recommended that “students have the opportunity to study Afro-American...understandings of Christianity” and “the core curriculum be restructured” to incorporate the viewpoints of Afro-Americans, Appalachians, women and individuals living in the less developed world (10-16). The Subcommittee on Berea’s Interracial Commitment explored the meaning of the interracial commitment, how best to implement the commitment and what actions would be required to achieve the goal. It stated, “Although Berea was slow to reintegrate its campus during the early 1950s and will never again reach the level of integration achieved during its early history, this strong past dictates that Berea reaffirms its interracial commitment and make a more vigorous expression of this commitment in the future” (Berea’s Interracial Commitment 2). The Subcommittee on What Kind of Faculty Do We Want to Be recommended the creation of a special endowment to provide grants for a minimum of four years each to help two African-Americans become faculty members and a subcommittee to the

Advisory Council, to be known as the Equal Opportunity Employment Committee, to report on matters pertaining to the hiring and retaining of women and minorities (8).

The recommendations of the subcommittees led to “one of the clearest, strongest calls for change to emerge from the planning process: to increase racial and ethnic diversity among our students and throughout the institution” (Report of the Future of Berea College 19). In its final report, the Long Range Planning Committee made the following recommendations in order to assist with planning for the next 20-25 years: high institutional priority be given to increasing the Afro-American enrollment to 15-25% of the total by the year 2000 and international student enrollment be increased to 9-10% of the total by the year 1994.

The best summary of the seventh stage of Berea College’s effort to achieve its interracial commitment was made by Wilson in *Berea College: An Illustrated History*. He wrote:

The college affirmed its missions to African-Americans, setting ambitious enrollment goals to move Berea beyond mere tokenism. The understanding of interracial education was further expanded to include international students as well as curricular experiences to enhance multicultural learning... Faculty, staff and students were involved in serious and meaningful examination of Berea’s mission, but this conversation was difficult to sustain. (Wilson 194)

Wilson was partially right. During this stage, in terms of achieving the interracial commitment, there was a lot of conversation, but not enough action.

VIII. The Eighth Stage: Progress

In July 1994, Larry D. Shinn became the eighth President of Berea College. Shinn saw education as means of finding common ground “in a society plagued by divisions based on race, religion or ethnic origins” (Wilson 202). At Bucknell University, Shinn initiated and implemented major affirmative action and minority hiring and enrollment plans. So, there was

hope that the college's efforts to achieve the commitment to interracial education would improve.

In 1994-1995, Berea College developed a two-year long range planning process. One of the elements was a comprehensive strategic plan titled "Being and Becoming." The external and internal challenges and strengths of the institution were explored in the document. Like previous long range planning documents, Berea's admission policy was a topic of discussion. This time there was a plan of action.

The new admissions policy reaffirmed who would and would not be recruited. The approximately 1500 students would predominately be from Appalachia, Black and White, men and women; have limited economic resources; have "great promise" academically and personal qualities consistent with Berea's Great Commitments; be attracted by Berea's clearly articulated emphasis on learning, labor, and service; and represent a diverse cultural and ethnic mix to create a 21st century learning environment (Being and Becoming 1996 11). The goals were "to hold firm or increase the number of students who are recruited from Berea's Appalachian counties, to increase the number of black students and international students, and to reduce the number of students taken from Western Kentucky and the non-Appalachian counties" (Being and Becoming 1996 39). To implement this policy and achieve the goals, specific actions were initiated such as including Cincinnati/Hamilton County, Ohio within Berea's "in-territory" admission's recruiting area to recruit needy Appalachian youth and African-Americans; developing a plan to target specific cities while instituting [a] recruiting program that will increase Berea's accomplishment of its interracial mission; and conducting a study about single parents from the region as a specific group of underserved students (Being and Becoming 1996 38-39). This policy was important because

there needs to be a critical mass of such students if Berea's interracial educational environment, for blacks and whites, is to be viable. While no specific quotas or target numbers should be set, it is clear that there are too few black students on campus currently to provide a realistic interracial setting for many of Berea's white students who will encounter an interracial workplace beyond the College. (Being and Becoming 1996 56)

The most significant action in creating the critical mass of African-American students was "The establishment of [the] Minority Service Team in 1997" (Thomas). The team identified targeted recruiting areas; focused on increasing African-American enrollment; and expanded the open house visitation program. Although the first open house occurred in February 1979, the program was formalized in February 1998, and became the Carter G. Woodson Open House (Thomas). In the 2003 African American Student Study by the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment in collaboration with the Black Cultural Center, the students rated the Carter G. Woodson Open House as one of the top three relative strengths of Berea College (African American Student Study). Other actions implemented included reorganizing the Admissions Office and revising its literature. As a result, from 1995-2005, the African-American student enrollment increased from 8% to 19% (Being and Becoming 2006 65, 72). During this same period, the freshman retention rate improved from 65% to 80+% and the five-year graduation rate improved from 35.9% to 58.9% (72). The intentional recruitment of single parents with both financial need and academic promise also helped to increase the African-American enrollment. The program began in 1999 and many of these students have been single African-American females with children (Wilson 214). Thus, in this stage of the college's history, the enrollment and retention rates of African-Americans improved with the implementation of new strategies.

In 1996, the BCCIEP was reorganized. According to Gail Wolford, "through a process of discussion and consensus-building" the Black Cultural Center (BCC) was separated from the

Interracial Education Program and was placed in the Labor and Student Life Division. Its new mission included providing support services for African-American students and organizations, administering African-American service and outreach programs, and creating a hospitable environment for minority students, faculty and staff (Wolford). A new director was hired. Ironically, even though the BCC and BCCIEP were different, one problem still existed: it was 2002 before an administrative assistant was hired for the BCC. As with the Director of the BCCIEP, the Director of the BCC was expected to do everything.

In 1997, Cora Newell-Withrow was appointed the Director of Black Studies on a temporary basis. After her retirement in 1998, Academic Vice-President and Provost Steve Boyce and the Black Studies Advisory Board agreed upon the creation of a permanent position. After a national search, the Director of the Black Studies Program was hired in August 1999. On May 11, 2006, Berea College faculty approved the major in African and African American Studies (Canterbury).

In terms of faculty and administrators, the changes have been less dramatic than the increase in African-American students. In 2005-2006, out of 130 total full-time teaching faculty, 8% were African-American (Institutional Characteristics). Historically, at least eight faculty of African descent have received tenure; only one has been denied. Still, no African-Americans have been a vice-president, provost or an academic dean. However, two have served at the next administrative level: the Associate Dean of the Faculty from 2002-2006 and the Associate Provost for Advising and Academic Success from 2004-2008. They have also been recipients of major faculty and staff awards: Paul C. Hager Award for Excellence in Advising Award, the Elizabeth Perry Miles Award for Community Service, and the Seabury Award for Excellence in Teaching.

A new General Education curriculum was implemented in 2006. One of the required core courses, Writing Seminar II: Identity and Diversity in the United States, engages “all students on issues close to the historic mission of the College—race, gender, Appalachia, and class. Initially, each section explores the story of Berea, including as it relates to the unifying themes of GSTR 210” (Berea College Catalog 129). In addition, every student is required to “develop an understanding and appreciation of diversity through the study of one or more of those groups central to Berea Commitments: African-American, Appalachian, and/or Women” (Berea College Catalog 29). Students must pass at least one course designated by the Committee on General Education that fulfills this requirement. Interestingly, since the General Education program was first implemented in 1970, African-American, Appalachian, and Women Studies courses have always been in the same category and as a result, compete against each other for students.

Another example of the increased importance of the commitment to interracial education is the Founder’s Day Convocation, which was reinstituted in 2000. This event “celebrates Berea’s interracial history by honoring African-American and other alumni and leaders who overcame many obstacles to establish Berea College...and whose distinguished service to his/her community reflects the ideals of John G. Fee and his vision of an education for all” (Boggs). Since 2000, the majority of the recipients have been family members of African-Americans who attended Berea College before the Day Law.

As mentioned earlier, in Spring 2003, the IRA in collaboration with the BCC, conducted a survey of African-American students “to understand what factors account for the relatively high success of the College in attracting African-American students and retaining them to graduation.” In the Fall 2003, there were 260 African-Americans; 67 were new freshman. Both

comprised 17% of the total student body and freshmen class, respectively. The most recent five-year graduation rate available in 2003 reveals that 59% of African-American students graduated compared to 58% of other domestic students and 100% of the international students. When asked, “Is the Berea College learning environment an inclusive one for African-American students?,” 63% said “yes” and cited Berea College as an opportunity and described themselves as feeling comfortable (African American Student Survey). The consensus was that as Berea College approached its sesquicentennial in 2005-2006, African-American students, overall, were more pleased than displeased. Despite many flaws and obstacles, there was progress in achieving the interracial commitment during the eighth stage of Berea College’s history (1994-2006).

IX. Challenges

In the 2006 edition of “Being and Becoming: Berea College in the 21st Century, The Strategic Plan for Berea College,” the Strategic Planning Committee (SPC) defined interracial education at Berea College as

the education of black and white people together for the benefit of their learning (both inside and outside the classroom), their understanding of one another, and the reconciliation of the breach in our lives caused by slavery, institutional racism, and the resulting personal prejudices found in both black and white communities.
(71-72)

The SPC was reaffirming that the intentional education of Blacks and Whites in a Christian environment is seminal for achieving racial conciliation and broader cultural diversity and continuing the work of the founders. Thus, 150 years later, the commitments of the founders of Berea College are still important.

However, there is a major change. Now, the challenge is to achieve the interracial commitment in a world and region that is more diverse ethnically, racially and religiously and calling for multicultural education. But, as to the first 150 years, to paraphrase an old cliché spoken on many Sundays in predominantly African-American churches, from the perspective of this alumnus and faculty member, Berea College is not where it should be in terms of achieving the interracial commitment, but thank God, it is not where it was during the second and third stages of the College's history!

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