

BEYOND THE THRESHOLD

BLACK STUDENTS at Moorhead State College 1968-1972

Arnold Cooper

WHEN Cynthia Wilson graduated in 1972 from Moorhead State College, she reflected upon her experiences as a black student at a predominantly white college: "Looking back, those of us who are graduating can see that we have achieved at least some of our goals: a stronger unity among ourselves, a greater knowledge of the world we have to face, and a way to put this knowledge to effective use." She urged her classmates "to make a commitment that wherever we go, we will work to do something effective about injustice and inequalities," and she also challenged the local community "to choose the option of initiating and supporting continuing change, by assisting minority students in the pursuit of education." She concluded that "these have been the four toughest years of my life, but it was the option I chose and I'm glad I did."¹

¹ Cynthia Wilson's graduation speech, May 25, 1972, in Project E-Quality Papers, Special Projects and Programs Series (hereafter E-Q Papers), University Archives, Moorhead State University Library (hereafter UA).

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GREGORY REED at Freshman Political Rally, Fall, 1968

Wilson entered Moorhead State as one of 35 black students recruited by Project E-Quality, a program instituted shortly after the death of Martin Luther King, Jr., in 1968. The moral and political pressure generated by the civil rights movement of the late 1950s and the decade of the 1960s had caused many white colleges to begin programs to recruit black students. Access to higher education was regarded "as one solution to the problem of racial inequality. For the first time, white colleges and universities were presented with the legitimate opportunity to participate in a cause that only a few years earlier would have been resisted by many segments of the society." In this era the black presence at northern white campuses increased so dramatically that by the fall of 1968 almost half of all black collegians were enrolled in white institutions. This enrollment was historically significant; black students now had a "claim . . . to a place of their own making on the university campus. . . . Higher education as a whole was finally within the grasp as well as the reach of young blacks."²

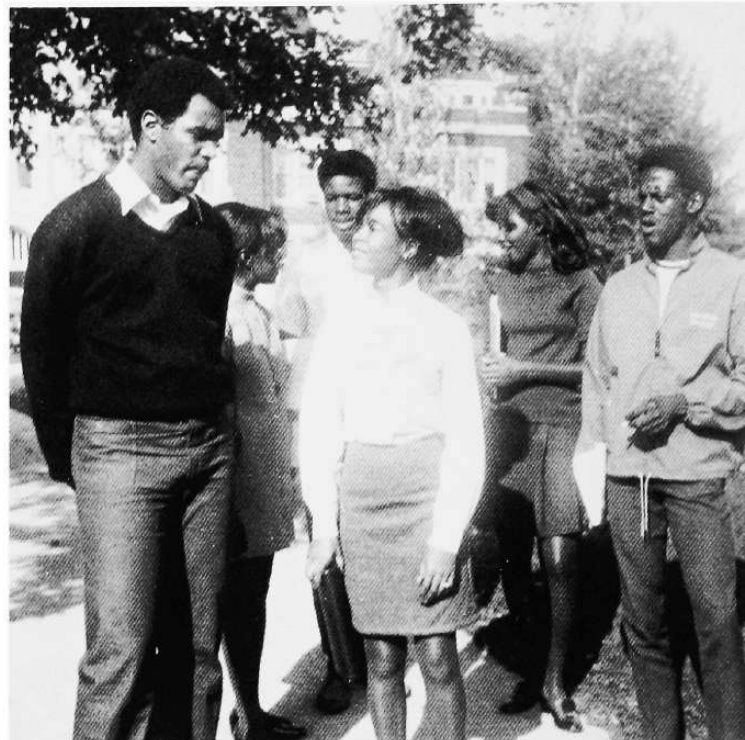
Dr. Cooper, an assistant professor of education at Moorhead State University, has published articles on the education of black Americans in Kansas History, Journal of Mississippi History, Alabama Review, and Annals of Iowa.

Many colleges and universities developed plans, policies, and some financial support to meet the needs of their new black students. Assistance, including “special admissions and financial aid programs; counseling, tutoring, and special classes; cultural programs and social activities,” helped “to dot and occasionally sprinkle the white landscape of academe with minority newcomers.” The accessibility of higher education to prospective black students, however, varied by region. Colleges in the Middle Atlantic states recorded the largest increase of black freshmen from 1969 to 1973 (from 6 to 13 percent), while in the North Central states figures remained stable (3 percent in 1969–71 to 5 percent in 1972–74). Schools in the West experienced the greatest fluctuations in black enrollment from year to year.³

Trends in black student enrollment also varied with the type of institution. Because they had more control over recruiting decisions, private colleges and universities set the pace and made “greater increases and reached higher black enrollment levels than public ones” from 1968 to 1974. In Minnesota, none of the state-supported colleges matched the *percentage increase* of minority students at Carleton College in Northfield and Macalester College in St. Paul in those same years. Carleton College had participated in an effort financed by the Rockefeller Foundation in 1964 to prepare talented young black students for attendance at private secondary schools through a series of summer programs. Four years later an Ad Hoc Committee on Negro Affairs was created to study “the college’s efforts on behalf of black students.” Subsequently, a drive to increase minority enrollment was initiated. Recruitment of black students, like their white peers, was “selective and on a national scale.” The college also created an Office of Minority Affairs in 1969. Black enrollment at Carleton increased from 50 in 1968 (3 percent of the student body) to over 130 (8 percent) by 1974.⁴

Macalester College increased its black student enrollment from 40 (2 percent) in 1968 to 170 (10 percent) by 1974. Macalester’s involvement with black students was sparked by Arthur S. Flemming, who became college president in the summer of 1968. A former secretary of the United States Department of Health, Education, and Welfare and past president of the University of Oregon, “Flemming became a catalyst for examining the college’s social commitment.” Macalester initiated an Expanded Educational Opportunities program, hired a director in 1969, and proceeded to recruit students.⁵

State-supported, four-year colleges in Minnesota were affected as well by societal interest in minority education. Undergraduate enrollment of ethnic groups grew in varying degrees among the six colleges compris-



STUDENTS at Carleton College, 1968

³ Marvin W. Peterson *et al.*, *Black Students on White Campuses: The Impacts of Increased Black Enrollments* (Ann Arbor: Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan, 1978), 310; Frank W. Hale, Jr., “A Sprinkle of Pepper: The State of Black Influence in White Colleges and Universities,” *Journal of Non-White Concerns in Personnel Guidance* 3 (Jan., 1975): 45; Meyer Weinberg, *A Chance to Learn: The History of Race and Education in the United States* (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 330–331. For excerpts from a black student’s journal of his residency at a white southern college in the late 1960s, see Frederick D. Harper, *Black Students: White Campus* (Washington, D.C.: APGA Press, 1975), 22, and Harper, “Black Student Revolt on the White Campus,” *Journal of College Student Personnel* 10 (Sept., 1969): 291–295. For data on black students, 1966–74, see Richard A. English and Theodore J. Settle, “Minority Students in Higher Education,” *Integrated Education* 14 (May–June, 1976): 3–6.

⁴ Peterson, *Black Students*, 32; Hale, “A Sprinkle of Pepper,” 46; William E. Sedlacek, Mary S. Merritt, and Glenwood C. Brooks, Jr., “A National Comparison of Universities Successful and Unsuccessful in Enrolling Blacks over a Five Year Period,” *Journal of College Student Personnel* 16 (Jan., 1975): 59. The median percent of black freshmen enrollment in colleges in the West ranged from 5 percent in 1969 to 8 percent in 1970 to 4 percent in 1972.

⁵ Peterson, *Black Students*, 31, 96–98.

⁶ Peterson, *Black Students*, 101–104. Peterson concluded that, of the 13 colleges and universities he studied between 1968 and 1974, Macalester had made “the most extensive commitment to black enrollments and drafted the most comprehensive initial plan for black and other minority programs.” He also presented a detailed account of the “intermittent controversy and conflict” engendered by Flemming’s commitment to minority education.

ing the state college system (Mankato, Winona, St. Cloud, Marshall, Bemidji, and Moorhead) from 1968 to 1974, although none of these enrolled as many minority students as the Minneapolis campus of the University of Minnesota. Full-time matriculation of minority students in all publicly controlled institutions in Minnesota went from 2.9 to 3.7 percent between 1972 to 1974.⁶ An examination of one recruitment program, Project E-Quality at Moorhead State College, provides a case study of black students at a state college from 1968 to 1972 as well as a context for assessing that particular experience. A focus on selected institutional features of the minority education program and the responses of both black and white students to the new collegiate environment offers various points of view and interpretations at a time of major social upheaval.

MOORHEAD STATE UNIVERSITY originated as a state normal school in 1887, became a teacher's college in 1921, a state college in 1957, and university in 1975. Located in northwest Minnesota, across the Red River from Fargo, North Dakota, the college had a student body of 4,200 in spring, 1968, that was described as "99 per cent Caucasian with 82 per cent of the students

coming from a 100-mile radius of Moorhead. There are 7 American Negroes, 16 American Indians, 5 Mexican-Americans, and 40 foreign students." Despite its homogeneous racial environment, Moorhead State did not disengage itself from a commitment to the civil rights struggle of the 1960s. The strong and consistent advocacy of human rights by John J. Neumaier, the college president from 1959 to 1968, set the stage for the energetic recruitment of minority students in 1968.⁷

Neumaier, a refugee from Nazi Germany, was a member of the Governor's Human Rights Commission and the Minnesota Advisory Committee to the U.S. Civil Rights Commission. As state chair of Brotherhood Week in 1960, he cited the "urgent need for wider attention in reducing and eliminating the tensions and prejudices that deprive individuals and groups of 'liberty and justice for all.'" He repeated the same message to the Minnesota Congress of Parents and Teachers four years later. At the opening college convocation in September, 1966, Neumaier devoted his entire speech to the school's responsibility in the area of human rights and urged students to respect "the dignity of individual human beings regardless of color . . . or cultural origin." To illustrate his own commitment, Neumaier offered scholarships to three black students from Minneapolis in the fall of 1966, following racial violence in that city.⁸

Efforts to increase black student enrollment during 1967 and 1968 included meetings with Urban League officials, school personnel from Minneapolis, and representatives from the United Negro College Fund. Black students already attending North Dakota State University in Fargo and Concordia College, a Lutheran-affiliated school in Moorhead, had joined with the few black students at Moorhead State to form the Afro-American Friendship Society in November, 1967. One member of this group remembered being

⁶ U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, Office for Civil Rights, *Undergraduate Enrollment by Ethnic Group in Federally Funded Institutions of Higher Education, Fall 1968*, 109, and *Racial and Ethnic Enrollment Data From Institutions of Higher Education, Fall 1970*, 51-53 and *Fall 1974*, 65-67, 199 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1969, 1972, 1976). The University of Minnesota, Minneapolis and St. Paul campuses combined, enrolled 2,673 minority students out of a total of 28,489 in 1968 and 1,383 out of a total enrollment of 27,465 in 1970.

⁷ "E-Quality, Outline of the Project and Progress Report," June, 1968, E-Q Papers, 1968-69. The lack of minority students at Moorhead State reflected the local community. In 1970 the city of Moorhead had only 69 black residents and 29,422 whites, while 32 blacks lived in Fargo, which had a white population of 52,942. See U.S. Department of Commerce, *1970 Census of Population and Housing, Fargo-Moorhead, N.Dak.-Minn.* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1972), 1.

⁸ Neumaier, born in 1921, entered the United States in 1940 and became an American citizen in 1943. He received his doctorate from the University of Minnesota in 1954, was an instructor and dean at Hibbing Junior College (1947-58), and, at Moorhead, became Minnesota's youngest college president at the age of 37; "Biographical Sketch" and assorted clippings in the John J. Neumaier Files, Administrators Papers Series, UA. On Neumaier's role in Brotherhood Week, 1960, see a Jan. 21, 1960, clipping (source not included), Neumaier Files; for his 1964 address see the file entitled "Memos and Reports to Faculty and Related Newspaper Articles." A summary of his 1966 speech is in the Neumaier Files; for the entire speech, see the college newspaper, the *Moorhead Mystic*, Sept. 23, 1966, p. 1. The three students left the college after one year because of academic deficiencies.



JOHN J.
NEUMAIER,
1968

consulted by Moorhead State officials about efforts to increase minority enrollment. A week before the death of Martin Luther King, Jr., in April, 1968, Neumaier appointed Lois C. Selberg, a white faculty member, to chair a steering committee whose goal was to bring 50 minority-group students to Moorhead State by September. Later, at a special memorial service honoring King, Neumaier discussed his proposal. He cautioned that it would not be enough to enroll minority students: "We must explore ways and means of how to help them socially and academically once they are here," he emphasized. "I must warn you that it is by no means enough to show good will. . . . Superficial overtures or phoniness will accomplish nothing."⁹

Resolve followed rhetoric. Action to bring minorities to the campus accelerated sharply after the memorial service. Formal organization of a college program entitled Project E-Quality was completed in late April with the creation of an advisory council of 80 students, faculty, and interested townspeople. The mandate was clear: "We can no longer . . . afford to insulate ourselves and our students from what will very likely be a dominating challenge to moral and social leadership in America for the rest of our lives."¹⁰

As project director, Lois Selberg frequently articulated the major purposes of the E-Quality program to staff, students, and community organizations. She explained in May, 1968, that E-Quality was designed to offer an opportunity for a college education to students whose "poverty, class, environment, and color" had made schooling "almost impossible." The project, soon nicknamed E-Q, was to be Moorhead State's contribution toward educating "the neglected" because the college had "a moral responsibility to try to undo the damage" of "poverty, degradation, fear and humiliation" imposed upon minority groups by the white world.¹¹

But there were other reasons for the project beyond an attempt to help correct the ills of a racist society. E-

Quality would also benefit white students who were "forced to form their opinions [of minority groups] on the basis of stereotypes and hearsay; they [white students] need the opportunity [to] work and talk with real people who happen to have dark skin. . . . They need a basis for a realistic approach [to] this major challenge facing America today." The program also offered the community a "focal point of dialogue leading to a more objective, enlightened understanding of American race relations."¹²

TO LAUNCH Project E-Quality, the institution created a number of programs for its new students: recruitment, financial aid, academic support services, and cultural programming. Recruitment initially focused on blacks residing in Minnesota, especially those from Minneapolis and St. Paul and "other large ghetto areas" because "they are in many ways the most deprived of all minority groups." Black students already on campus helped the effort, and by September, 1968, the first 50 students admitted to the program included 35 blacks, eight American Indians, and seven Mexican Americans.¹³ The first contingent of black students included some from Illinois, Michigan, Mississippi, and Arkansas because too few state residents were found. Traditional admissions criteria did not have to be changed for E-Quality applicants, since the college fre-

⁹ Carl H. Griffin, Jr., July 15, 1976, oral history tape, Northwest Minnesota Historical Center Collections (NWMHC), Moorhead State University; Neumaier, "Memorial Convocation for Dr. Martin Luther King," typed speech, April 8, 1968, Neumaier Files. Griffin entered Moorhead State in spring, 1967, and graduated in 1970.

¹⁰ Memorandum from John Neumaier to Advisory Council members, April 17, 1968, E-Q Papers, 1968-69. Project E-Quality was the officially designated program for minority students between 1968 and 1970; in 1971 the name was changed to Educational Opportunities for Minority Students (E.O.M.S.). For clarity, the name Project E-Quality is used throughout this article.

¹¹ "E-Quality, Equal Opportunity in Education," May 1, 1968, p. 1, 2, E-Q Papers, 1968-69. A native of Rustad, Minn., Selberg earned her bachelor's degree at Moorhead State in 1947 and her master's degree at the University of Minnesota. A member of Moorhead State's English department since 1960, she was on special assignment in 1968 as a counselor for the Tri-State Educational Search for Talent, a federally funded program to identify and assist high school and college students with academic promise who had discontinued their formal education. See Moorhead State College, *Report to the Alumni Bulletin*, May, 1968, [p. 9], Alumni Records Series, UA.

¹² "E-Quality, Equal Opportunity in Education," May 1, 1968, p. 1, 2, and "Outline of Project," May 20, 1968, E-Q Papers, 1968-69.

¹³ "Equal Opportunity in Education Progress Report," April 24, 1968, "Outline of Project," May 20, 1968, and "E-Quality: Equal Opportunity in Education," [Oct., 1968]—all in E-Q Papers, 1968-69. The original E-Q recruiting goal



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quently used "other evidence of academic potential" for students who did not meet ACT and/or high school ranking standards. The project had an explicit recruitment strategy: "We will attempt to find students who, according to our best estimate, based on interviews, recommendations, and intuition . . . are in the upper half of the population in learning *potential*. . . . Many will be 'high risk' students but all will be strongly motivated to continue their education."¹⁴

Related closely to recruitment and admissions was the matter of financial aid. E-Quality students received Educational Opportunity Grants, work-study appointments, and loans to finance their education. But students often needed additional funds for application fees, physical examinations, transportation, and some-

was 30 black and 20 American Indian students. Project Test was already operating on campus to "identify, enroll and finance up to 25 Mexican-American migrant workers of college age and potential in a college orientation program." These students were considered eligible for all Project E-Quality services: "E-Quality. Outline of the Project and Progress Report," June, 1968, E-Q Papers, 1968-69. Project Test was also intended to include disadvantaged white students.

¹⁴ "E-Quality. Equal Opportunity in Education," May 1, 1968, E-Q Papers, 1968-69, emphasis in the original. The seven Mexican-American students admitted in Sept., 1968, were probably from Texas. American Indian students came mostly from Minnesota. An admissions committee of three students, the registrar, and the project director as an ex-officio member was established for the E-Q program in April, 1969; E-Quality Steering Committee Minutes, April 16, 1969; *E-Quality Report*, April 17, 1969. The *E-Quality Report* first appeared on Feb. 7, 1969, under the title *Minority Report*, as a weekly bulletin of news, announcements, and opinion. Complete volumes for 1969-71 are in the E-Q Papers.

¹⁵ "E-Quality. Outline of the Project and Progress Report," June, 1968, E-Q Papers, 1968-69; Memorandum from Lois Selberg to Faculty, Mar. 27, 1969, "Project E-Quality Contributions," and "Acknowledgements Concerning Donations, 1971-1973"—all in E-Q Papers, 1968-69. The Fargo-Moorhead community contributed \$5,000 for 1969-70. Faculty gave \$4,700 to the E-Quality Fund from July, 1969, to May, 1970, while Student Senate allocations totalled \$4,000 for 1968-69, \$7,000 for 1969-70, and \$10,000 for 1970-71 and 1972-73; Student Senate Minutes, April 4, 1968, April 28, 1969, UA. In August, 1970, the Otto Bremer Foundation of St. Paul made a five-year commitment of \$450 annually. Other contributors included the Phillips Foundation, Minneapolis, the Bing Foundation, Long Lake, and the Bayport Foundation. The Honeywell (\$1,000) and Apache corporations (\$100) also gave to Project E-Quality in 1968.

¹⁶ Minutes of the Faculty Senate Meeting, April 24, 1968, Faculty Senate Records, UA; author's interview with Roland Dille, Dec. 29, 1986, notes in the author's possession.

¹⁷ "Official Description, Project E-Quality," [1968], and "E-Quality News," Sept. 11, 1970, E-Q Papers, 1968-69. Faculty volunteers taught the seminars as course overloads. Seminars were initially held for Mexican-American and American Indian students in Sept., 1970. The origins of the institute are mentioned in *E-Quality Report*, Mar. 7, April 3, 1969, and *Minority Report*, Feb. 7, April 10, 1969.

times "clothing, and other similar items usually provided for by the student or his family." An E-Quality Fund helped meet these expenses and enabled each participant to receive an additional grant of \$350 per year. This fund represented a significant commitment to the college's effort; by March, 1969, its total, from contributions and such money-raising projects as E-Quality fairs, reached \$17,600. Faculty members contributed \$4,000 and the Student Senate appropriated a similar figure the first year; financial support from these two sources remained constant throughout the project's existence. Other contributors included the Alumni Association, the local American Legion, service clubs, churches, and individuals in the community. Roland Dille, who succeeded Neumaier as Moorhead State's president in September, 1968, assiduously cultivated financial support from foundations. His efforts resulted in donations from at least seven Minnesota philanthropies totaling \$10,000 during the first two years of the project.¹⁵

Faculty support for the project went beyond financial donations. Members "heartily endors[ed] . . . [the] suggestion to bring substantial numbers of disadvantaged college students to this campus" in April, 1968—but not without some apprehensions. One faculty member believed that minority students might not succeed without committed faculty advising, a colleague worried about the impersonal nature of large classes, and another cited the importance of ensuring that the program continue beyond its initial year. (Moorhead State had few minority faculty members: two blacks were hired in 1965, another in 1972, and one in 1974. Since few faculty members at all were hired between 1968 and 1972, due to declining enrollment, there was no debate about recruiting minority faculty or staff to provide role models for both white and minority students.) While the entirety of faculty response is not well documented, Dille described allegiance as "nearly total" and in accord with the program's goals and aspirations.¹⁶

E-Quality students needed academic as well as financial support. The institution responded with a focus on tutoring, counseling, advising, and an adaptive curriculum. Each participant was assigned a faculty adviser selected from volunteers; a tutoring program provided academic assistance. Students in the project also enrolled in a sequence of three humanities seminars related to the history and culture of the ethnic group to which they belonged "to provide opportunities for developing minority group identification." These seminars eventually resulted in the creation of an Institute for Minority Group Studies to offer academic minors in several ethnic cultures. This program, involving six academic departments, was proposed in February, 1969, and initiated in the winter of 1969-70.¹⁷

The E-Q project also promoted a Cultural Exchange Center designed to encourage "communication and understanding between individuals of the same minority groups, between different minority groups, and between minority groups and the white middle-class students and citizens in the community." The committee that planned the center recognized the need of minority students "to escape the pressure of the middle class majority" and acknowledged "the segregation suggested in this proposal, but the [cultural center] committee, headed by a Negro student, has convinced us that this is necessary and valuable."¹⁸

AFTER TWO YEARS as an E-Q student, Cynthia Wilson conveyed a sense of anxiety when asked about her collegiate life: "I'm going to school here. I want to go to school. If anyone says anything, does anything, to take that away from me, I am not going to let that happen." Tension and dissent had also accompanied the good intentions of Project E-Quality. The editor of the student newspaper betrayed his ambivalence when he supported the project but warned that "there will be problems, perhaps knifing in the dorms." The Student Senate decision to contribute activity funds met with some vocal disapproval. One student referred in print to the "50 colored, underprivileged students" who would attend the college and wished that he had been "born colored living in a Minneapolis ghetto" so that he could receive "full rides financially." Another student, dismayed by this kind of attitude, which he perceived all around him, asked, "Why should we bring those students to our area? Why bring them here?"¹⁹

Negative community reactions also surfaced. The president of the Student Senate, a Fargo native, reported in May, 1968, that he had received "a number of telephone calls from community acquaintances of long standing that have stunned him with their attitude about his work on the project." He was "shocked to learn . . . of the prejudice existing in the Fargo-Moorhead area." Another white student claimed that prevailing community sentiment "wants to keep these people [E-Q students] tied down to the slums and ghettos" rather than educate them at Moorhead State. Sniping also came from the editor of the local newspaper who wrote disparagingly of the "importation of 150 Negro freshmen" to the area.²⁰

Neither the community nor dissenting students developed any organized attempt to end the program, but negative perceptions and stereotypes heightened the consciousness of being black on a white campus. A black student from Atlanta, Georgia, remembered that "When I first got here it was like a mirage. I'd go downtown, and everybody would be just staring at me; I couldn't help but think, 'Hey, I don't belong in this place.' I stayed in my dormitory room alone all the



DOWNTOWN Moorhead as it looked in the 1950s

time." A black female student from St. Paul discovered that "half of the white girls who were friendly toward me at first never talked to me again. I think it's because they're just not used to being around black people. . . . A lot of people here seem to think that all the black students came from the ghetto."²¹

Other black students cited interracial dating as a cause of hostility. A male freshman from Minneapolis stated that "I wouldn't go anywhere in this town alone with a white girl. It wouldn't be safe." Another answered white critics who charged that blacks were being too "clannish": "What they expect I don't know. They certainly weren't interested in integration when we started taking out white girls." One black male student vividly characterized white reactions to interracial dating in an essay for the campus literary maga-

¹⁸ "E-Quality, Outline of the Project and Progress Report," June, 1968, and "E-Quality, Outline of Project," May 20, 1968, E-Q Papers, 1968-69. The Cultural Exchange Center was used almost exclusively by black students.

¹⁹ *Moorhead Independent News*, Nov. 19, 1970, p. 11; *Moorhead Mystic*, May 3, p. 2, May 10, p. 4, May 24, p. 2—all in 1968. The *Moorhead Mystic* was suspended from publication in early May, 1969, for printing obscenity; a newspaper entitled *Moorhead Mystic* published several issues in May and September, 1969; the *Independent News*, which was never officially sanctioned, appeared from 1970-71, supported by student donations. In November, 1970, it presented "The Inside Story" of E-Quality by publishing interviews with E-Q students.

²⁰ *Fargo Forum*, May 8, p. 10, April 13, p. 4, and *Mistic*, May 24, p. 2—all 1968.

²¹ *Fargo Forum*, Jan. 12, 1970, p. 3.



zine: "The (cardinal/common) sin was committed . . . we took out white girls. . . Mothers and fathers gasped and threatened, sisters and brothers rejoiced

²² *Minneapolis Star*, June 16, 1969, p. 13A. The essay, "Reflections of an Equality (hal) Student," was submitted to the campus literary magazine *Fat Giraffe*, but the editors decided not to publish it because they did not want to "jeopardize the future success of Project E-Quality." Instead, with the author's permission, they printed and distributed the essay to the faculty at the expense of the magazine, stating that "one student's frustrations with the whole situation a Project E-Quality student must face . . . needs to be understood." A copy of the essay with a cover memorandum from *Fat Giraffe* to all faculty, (May, 1969), is in E-Q Papers, 1968-69.

²³ Accounts of the dorm incident vary in detail. The *Mistic* published an account given by white students who acknowledged that they congregated around the six black students after receiving curses rather than pizza. The paper also printed a report of the incident by the Minority Students Coalition; *Mistic*, April 25, 1969, p. 1, 4. Both the *Fargo Forum*, April 19, 1969, p. 1, and the *Minneapolis Star*, June 16, 1969, p. 13A, also provided details.

College officials tried not to embarrass the three black students subject to arrest and set up an "arranged arrest" at a designated campus location. For a retrospective account, see Lois Selberg, oral history tape, July 8, 1976, NWMHC. Selberg reconfirmed her recollections in an interview with the author, Sept. 25, 1986, notes in author's possession. For more on college officials' efforts not to exacerbate the incident, see interview of Robert MacLeod by the author, Sept. 29, 1986, notes in author's possession. MacLeod was Dean of Students in 1969.

²⁴ *Fargo Forum*, June 12, 1969, p. 1; *Moorhead Independent News*, Nov. 19, 1970, p. 11.

²⁵ *Fargo Forum*, April 21, 1969, p. 1; *Mistic*, April 25, 1969, p. 4, 5.

and spat. Friends dropped their jaws, smiled and cursed."²²

Mounting mistrust between black and white students surfaced dramatically on April 17, 1969. A fracas started late that evening in the lobby of Snarr Hall, where pizza had been delivered at the request of several black students in the dormitory. An argument between them and a group of white students who wanted some of the pizza quickly developed into a racial encounter as "twenty to thirty white students began to gather together in the lobby, and six black students stood before [them]." When the white students refused to leave, a black student "fired a blank in the direction of the floor. The whites dispersed and the blacks returned to their floor." The next day three of the black students, all E-Q participants from Minneapolis, were arrested at the college and charged with aggravated assault after one of the white students filed a complaint with the police. A picture of the arrested students, along with a banner-headlined story, "3 at MSC Charged in Gun Incident," appeared on page one of the local paper.²³

Released on their recognizance after a one-hour arrest, the black students eventually pleaded guilty to simple assault charges and were given 60-to 90-day jail terms by the local justice of the peace, who suspended the sentence. A year later, Cynthia Wilson, among others, expressed bitterness because only blacks had been arrested: "They pacified the white community. If they had arrested some white students, the community would still be burning about it."²⁴

White student reaction varied. The Student Senate called a press conference in which its president condemned the local newspaper for reporting the dorm incident in a "sensationalistic manner." But the student representatives excluded from the conference David Brawthen, editor of the campus newspaper, the *Moorhead Mistic*. Brawthen interrupted the agenda to read a resolution that expressed disgust at the way "the white community has trumped up the incident to display the Blacks[] actions of self-defense as criminal actions." Several letters to the school newspaper blamed Project E-Quality for "buying trouble for this campus." One student believed that the college deserved what happened: "If these blacks weren't brought up here where people aren't accustomed to them and treat them as something they aren't, there wouldn't have been three of them 'unjustly accused.'"²⁵

Black students responded to this criticism by issuing a Minority Students Coalition Report, claiming that the dormitory incident was one of a "long string of intimidations throughout the quarter" in which blacks were "threatened with bodily harm" and "harassed by groups of whites." The coalition answered the "many people who feel the need for a gun on campus is unnecessary" by recounting a series of incidents the preceding

quarter that "may demonstrate the opposite." Carrying a weapon was therefore justified "in light of the circumstances."²⁶

A second incident followed on April 20, only three days after the dorm fracas. A black student reported that he had been shot at several times while driving home after a date with his white girl friend. Four bullets were fired into his car, "two of them smashing into the front passenger window and two more lodging in his car. An attempt was made a split second before to blind him with what are believed to be spotlights." The man escaped unharmed.²⁷

The next day President Dille called a convocation. In an 11-minute address to nearly 3,000 students and faculty, he said that violence would not be tolerated. He went further than a concern with the legal and disciplinary problems caused by the two campus events: "we would sadly delude ourselves if we refused to see that at the root of our problems lies racial tension, and we would delude ourselves further if we sought an explanation of our problems elsewhere." He urged his audience to "look within ourselves and beyond ourselves. It is *we* who must learn that if we do not join white hands to black we will join bloody hands to bloody." Dille also used the occasion to request a rebirth of the spirit that initially inspired the E-Q program: "Minority students are on this campus to stay, and this college is committed to their just and equal treatment. . . . We can escape neither history nor ourselves. We can escape the judgment of neither, if we do not now submit to the compelling demands of our own humanity and move resolutely toward a future that must belong to all men."²⁸

The text of Dille's speech and the context of the times became intertwined. Dille provided indispensable support for Project E-Quality. In his inaugural address of November, 1968, he had maintained that colleges could not divorce themselves from the turmoil and strife of society: "the great gift of learning is the gift of involvement." For him, "the agonies of every man [were] the agony of each." Several weeks before the shooting incidents, he had restated his commitment to E-Q: "It is our college that profits most from the Project, from its capacity to broaden the educational experience and to teach us and our students the necessary lesson of responsibility."²⁹

Beyond the assertive leadership of Dille, the crackle of gunshots created a variety of black and white student reactions. The Student Senate voted to increase its allocation to the program from \$4,000 to \$7,000 for the next school year. Some white students publicly expressed the hope that the campus had learned something about racism and the fear that it had not. Several black students expressed anger. One told a reporter from the state's largest paper that "These honkies have

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finally got around to realizing that there's racism here." Another maintained that "We blacks can't go to sleep and forget what's happened." And one concluded that "Moorhead is as different from my ghetto as the planet Mars is to the moon."³⁰

BLACK STUDENTS played several distinct, yet overlapping, roles at Moorhead State from 1968 to 1972 in an effort to create the best possible educational milieu for themselves. They became educators of the college and the white community as well as exponents of race unity and self-determination.

At the college's memorial service for Dr. King a black student bitterly excoriated the people of "lilly-white [*sic*] Fargo-Moorhead . . . [who] have sat back and turned themselves away from the conditions of this nation. You have tried to isolate yourselves from the problems this nation is now facing. You have tried to hide."³¹

Black students decided to become teachers and am-

²⁶ *Mistic*, April 25, 1969, p. 4, 11. The dean of student personnel services informed the *Forum* on April 19, 1969, p. 1, that possession of weapons in dormitory rooms was prohibited in a student's contract. However, students who liked to hunt were allowed to check their firearms with "the dormitory director who has custody until the student wants to go hunting. When he returns he checks in his gun again."

²⁷ *Mistic*, April 25, 1969, p. 11.

²⁸ The text of Dille's speech (emphasis in the original), April 21, 1969, is in the Roland Dille Files, Administrators Papers Series, UA. It was also printed in the *Fargo Forum*, April 22, 1969, p. 1-2.

²⁹ "Inauguration Address, Dr. Roland Dille," Nov. 20, 1968, Dille Files; Memorandum from Roland Dille to Faculty, April 1, 1969, E-Q Papers, 1968-69.

³⁰ *Minneapolis Tribune*, May 5, 1969, p. 24; *Mystic*, Sept. 24, 1969, p. 2.

³¹ *Mistic*, April 12, 1968, p. 1.

bassadors to their white college and community in order to remedy this complacency. Several sought to help their white counterparts to a fuller understanding of black America through a student-run course in the college's Free University. Entitled "A Primer for Honkies," the weekly Wednesday evening class offered a "seminar in Black history and contemporary issues in the Black crisis." Readings included Lerone Bennett's *Before the Mayflower* and *The Negro Pilgrimage* by C. Eric Lincoln. One participant reported that usually ten white students appeared but attendance tripled after the pizza incident. One white participant recalled the impact of the classes: "I went to the Primer for Honkies. . . . We discussed, obviously, racism . . . some of [the] beliefs of Black Muslims. . . . One day, one of the girls said, 'why don't we meet for coffee.' Another time, 'hey, let's go rap about racism'. . . . My racism . . . was subtle . . . comments that are always made in the white community . . . so subtle it is a part of you . . . because you grew up in a sheltered area. Given a chance to confront human beings on human terms, color ends, people begin."³²

Black students did not confine their educational efforts to the campus. White community groups interested in their experiences often requested their presence at meetings. A panel of three E-Q students appeared at a local Lutheran church in February, 1969, and discussed black contributions to revitalizing all-white campuses; two months later several blacks participated in a panel discussion of the "Black Response—Past and Present" at a local high school; in November, 1969, another group traveled 180 miles east to a high school in Grand Rapids to speak about racism. Black students continued to make "the position of Black Americans clear" to a variety of groups throughout 1970 and 1971 and by 1972 had established a Black Speakers' Bureau to "effectively provide information to . . . better understand Black culture and lifestyles" on such topics as "The Black Woman," "Black Aesthetics," and "Racism, Prejudice, and Discrimination." Student speakers claimed that "our presence has been a learning experience for the white community." One black student re-

membered that "those who were culturally deprived were not the black students but the students in the Fargo-Moorhead area. Most had never even been around anybody that was any darker than they were."³³

While several E-Q students paid considerable attention to their role as educators, many more frequently celebrated the need for racial unity, pride, and cohesiveness. One student, offering "A Point of View to the Brothers and Sisters," believed that "learning to relate to each other as distinctive people who are oppressed" was an important part of attending "an institution such as this one." By 1969, the aim of many black collegians had become a "search for black identity, black independence, [and] black pride." Blacks at Moorhead State were no exception. They were determined to define their own existence, and this definition included the ingredient of "emergent separatism," a conviction shared by many that "the Afro-American must become independent of the white world."³⁴

Black unity assumed many forms. The Black College Masters competed in intramural basketball and baseball, and an E-Q bowling team participated in campus-sponsored tournaments. Organizations such as the United Black Students, S.O.U.L. (Social Organization for Unity and Leadership), and the Black Women's Organization appeared in 1970 and 1971. These groups formed networks with similar organizations at other state colleges and universities. When a black cultural center at St. John's University in Collegeville opened, Moorhead State students were encouraged to attend a "big Black Weekend" in celebration. S.O.U.L. sent two representatives to a Black Conference Week at Macales-

A PEACEFUL lunch at Kise Commons Cafeteria, 1975



³² *Minneapolis Star*, June 16, 1969, p. 13A; *E-Q Report*, Mar. 7, April 3, 1969; *Moorhead Independent News*, Nov. 19, 1970, p. 8.

³³ *E-Q Report*, Feb. 7, April 17, Nov. 18, 1969, Jan. 12, 1970; Gregory Reed (chairman, Black Speakers' Bureau) to Dear Faculty, Feb. 3, 1972, and "Black Speakers' Bureau," Jan. 18, 1972, *E-Q Papers*, 1972-74; Griffin oral history tape. Students who participated in the speakers' bureau earned \$10 for each engagement.

³⁴ *E-Q Report*, Sept. 30, 1970; Virgil A. Clift, "Higher Education of Minority Groups in the United States," *Journal of Negro Education* 38 (Summer, 1969): 300; Peterson, *Black Students*, 199.



PRESIDENT Dille (far left) meeting with members of the United Black Students organization, about 1972

ter College, while others attended a regional meeting of the African Students Association of Minnesota (ASAM), established to "utilize the Black students and their talents." E-Q students also hosted 28 of their peers at the first meeting of the Black Students of Minnesota Association (BSMA) in April, 1972. This group, with roots in ASAM, hoped to "bring the Brothers and Sisters . . . together in unity and Brotherhood."³⁵

The quest for cohesiveness, however, did not eliminate discord. One black student publicly stated her concern about "Division Within The Ranks" in 1969: "Everyone is in their own bag. . . . The brothers and sisters need to . . . support one another." Two years later, another student mentioned dissidence as a significant problem: "When we get together it is to cut each other down in any way possible. We get in our little . . . groups . . . and talk about people, do sly and petty things, and in general, cause a lot of hell for each other." She lambasted those who could not get along with each other and who could not be friends.³⁶

THE SHEER NUMBER of black E-Q students and their aspirations to be ambassadors to whites, advocates of racial unity, and asserters of self-determination tended to eclipse the position of Mexican-American and Indian students on campus. The number of Hispanic E-Q students never exceeded 19 at any one time from 1968 to 1972; Indian students in the program increased from eight in 1968 to 13 by 1972. E-Q officials admitted in 1970 that they were "markedly unsuccessful in recruiting American Indian students, and only slightly more successful with Mexican-Americans." Black students comprised 75 percent of the applicants.³⁷

A Mexican-American Youth Organization (MAYO) was formed in the fall of 1969 and by June, 1970, students in that group had voiced a concern about their place in the E-Q program. Several months later, MAYO members boycotted the E-Q Fair, a fund-raising effort, because they believed that they did not receive the benefits. The leader of MAYO publicly labeled E-Q "decidedly black" and observed that Mexican-American students in the immediate area went unrecruited.³⁸

³⁵ Such unity did not mean that black students shunned campuswide activities. Several E-Q members belonged to the Varsity Choir, one appeared as a soloist with the stage band, and another won a prize for his painting at a student art show. Cynthia Wilson became a dormitory resident assistant in 1970, and another student was elected to the Student Senate a year later; *E-Q Report*, Feb. 20, Mar. 7, May 29, 1969, Jan. 18, 1971. See also *E-Q Report*, Jan. [1?], 27, 1971, April 17, 1970; *Harambe*, Sept. 26, 1972, *E-Q Papers*, 1972-74. *Harambe* was a newsletter of the BSMA, printed at Moorhead State. The influence of the E-Q project was spread beyond the campus through the work of Sylvia Maupins, director of Equal Opportunities for Minority Students, the project's successor. Maupins helped organize the Minnesota Association of Counselors and Directors of Minority Programs in April, 1972; see *E-Q Papers*, 1972-74.

³⁶ *E-Q Report*, Nov. 18, 1969, Jan. 27, 1971.

³⁷ U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, *Undergraduate Enrollment by Ethnic Groups, Fall 1968, 74, and Racial and Ethnic Enrollment Data, Fall 1970, 52, Fall 1974, 66*. See also "E-Quality: Equal Opportunity in Education Progress Report," June 1, 1970, *E-Q Papers*. References to the number of Mexican-American and American Indian E-Q students, in addition to figures provided on black enrollment, are scattered throughout the *E-Q Papers*.

³⁸ "Equality News," June 30, 1970; *Moorhead Independent News*, Oct. 15, 1970, p. 1, Nov. 19, 1970, p. 9.

Reactions of Indian students to the predominant black presence in E-Q are sparsely documented. One native American student did state in November, 1970, that "There hasn't been much interest taken in them from the Project—in recruiting them or finding out if Indian students are available. . . . I sure would like to see more Indian students. If you worked at it, I'm sure some would be found."³⁹

Black student reaction to these sentiments is not recorded. A study of the available evidence, however, reveals that black students, in an effort to create a viable presence on campus, touted the virtues of racial solidarity and pride irrespective of criticism or challenge. They charted these directions because they wanted to be a self-sustaining, self-promoting, and self-determining group. In an era when equality was still an aspiration rather than a fact, black students at Moorhead State sought to make their environment congruent and hospitable. By a variety of means, they heeded the advice of one of their militant contemporaries, H. Rap Brown: "The education that Black college students get will be irrelevant, fruitless and worthless unless they use it to define and articulate positions that are relevant to Black people."⁴⁰

Black students forged and sealed an emotional link with the E-Q project between 1968 and 1972. As a whole, their adherence helped power the program's perennial recoveries from the dialogues and debates over its presence and the disputes inflicted by the dormitory and shooting incidents. Academic retention remained high. Twenty-two of the original 50 E-Q students, including 14 blacks, graduated in 1972; another 15 completed two years or more before leaving to take jobs. (The graduation rate for the entire college was 50 percent.) The over-all grade-point average of these students was 2.60 on a 4.00 scale. Black graduates in 1972 received degrees in elementary education, mathematics, history, sociology, business administration, and speech and theater.⁴¹

Evaluations of the project reflected this scholastic success. When asked to rate various aspects of their experiences in 1969 and 1970, black students indicated over-all approval, reserving their highest accolades for "Feeling of success," "Administration of the project," especially the commitment of Lois Selberg, the project's director, and "Instruction—your college classes." They consistently ranked below average items related to their acceptance by the community. Alienation from the surrounding environment, however, provided some students with an opportunity for self-definition. As one reflected in 1970, "Glad I came if for nothing else than for . . . [the] opportunity to crystalize myself on life. . . . [Because of the] isolation the black student faces here . . . you're bound to come up with pearls of truth about yourself."⁴²

Black students clearly did not view themselves as passive objects of white concern but rather as decision makers about their educational futures. As a new constituency they felt "visible and often embattled," but they were determined to confront their collegiate environment, pass beyond the threshold of Moorhead State, and enter into the "guarded preserve" of higher education.⁴³

Changes in higher education in the 1970s, including a decrease in financial aid and the waning of the moral fervor generated by the civil rights movement, produced a "list of dilutions" that adversely affected minority students. By 1974, the E-Q program enrolled only 13 new students, lost its distinctiveness, and became part of the Office of Student Affairs. During its brief existence the project had served at least 120 black students and had acted as a barometer of campus and community racial feeling.⁴⁴

This investigation into the origins of Project E-Quality reveals the need to study the varying social contexts from the perspectives of both minority students and institutions. E-Q students were articulate in describing their actions and reactions. It is not as easy to discern how the project affected the educational milieu of Moorhead State. E-Q did not engender a cohesive campus community, but it did create an atmosphere for opening lines of communication, co-operation, and co-ordination among black students, their white peers, and college officials. It sought to provide opportunities for "students without opportunities" and attempted "to deliver students from provincialism." As a facet in the struggle to increase educational opportunity, it served a crucial function.⁴⁵

THE PHOTOGRAPHS on p. 24, 28, and 30 are in the MHS collections; all other were provided by the Moorhead State University Archives.

³⁹ *Moorhead Independent News*, Nov. 19, 1970, p. 10. A special counselor for American Indian students was hired for 1971-72.

⁴⁰ H. Rap Brown, cited in Harry Edwards, *Black Students* (New York: The Free Press, 1970), 58.

⁴¹ Roland Dille to "Dear Faculty Member," May 24, 1972, E-Q Papers, 1972-74.

⁴² *E-Quality Report*, Jan. 12, 1970, and "E-Quality: Equal Opportunity in Education Progress Report," June 1, 1970, E-Q Papers; *Moorhead Independent News*, Nov. 19, 1970, p. 9-10.

⁴³ Peterson, *Black Students*, 318; Weinberg, *Chance to Learn*, 263-336, outlines the history of black access to the "guarded preserve."

⁴⁴ Peterson, *Black Students*, 317.

⁴⁵ Dille interview, Dec. 29, 1986.



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