

# Medgar Evers College:

THE PURSUIT OF A COMMUNITY'S DREAM

MEDGAR EVERS COLLEGE  
*The City University of New York*

FLORENCE TAGER & ZALA HIGHSMITH-TAYLOR

*Medgar Evers College:  
In Pursuit  
of a  
Community's Dream*

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## *Dedication*

This story is dedicated to the members of the Central Brooklyn Community who, through their tireless effort, years of struggle, intense perseverance and commitment, extensive political understanding, and enormous passion and concern, brought forth in the community, Medgar Evers College, a college committed to access, social justice and excellence.

## *Acknowledgements*

**We wish to acknowledge** all of those who came before us and created a space through which we could travel...those on whose shoulders we stand.

**We offer thanks** to the community that waged a relentless battle for the creation of Medgar Evers College and to those students, faculty, staff, administrators, and community members who have helped to build and sustain it.

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## *Foreword*

The Asante people of Ghana, West Africa, have an Adinkra word, **Sankofa**, which means, "Go back and fetch it," referring to the wisdom of learning from the past in building for the future. We feel that as Medgar Evers College moves through its fourth decade of existence, it is important to review its origins in the community struggles of the 60's in order to be reminded of the importance of this college to the community out of which it was born. We believe that this history will allow us to continuously reflect on the College's mission and the ways in which that mission incorporates and addresses the path the community laid out for what it felt was needed in the predominately Black community of Central Brooklyn.

The story of Medgar Evers College is an awesome story that deserves to be told and heard. It is an inspirational story that offers many lessons about the quest for equal rights and justice in this country, and it is the story of a community's vision, activities, and work to make its vision become a reality. It is also a story of phenomenal success and major setbacks. We have decided to present this story so that the

Medgar Evers community and the public might benefit from an understanding of the historical uniqueness and importance of this predominantly Black and female public college that exists within a city university.

There are people in the world who have moved past the desire to just 'survive' and, therefore, make plans and investments for generations yet unborn. And, of course, there are those who, based upon circumstances, just plan for each day or sometimes each hour at a time. There are also those who know and can recite their history for generations past, and who cultivate plans based upon what has happened generations ago. Then there are those whose history was stolen from them during periods of enslavement and/or colonization, often forcing them to mold a history from fragments placed in textbooks and/or stories passed on by their elders. This is the case of many people of African descent in the Americas who have had to fashion an historical story that recognizes the unquestionable gains, contributions, and cultural developments of the recent past, yet also makes the connection with the magnificence of Africa's ancient past and with struggling communities around the globe.

The history of Medgar Evers College is a recent story, which can help add a very significant, though small, piece to the puzzle that makes up the history of human life. Most importantly, this story is a piece of Black life in the United States and, as its name suggests, it carries forth the spirit of

Medgar Wiley Evers, the man and political activist who fought for social justice. We hope that the history of the College, short as it is as compared to the history of the world or of a people, will inspire the College community with the need and courage to “go fetch it,” to learn the lessons of the past as the College moves into the future.

All too often students, faculty, and administrators continue to move forward with very little understanding of what came before them, including what sacrifices were made so that they might have a space in which to work or attend college. Some believe that the College begins with them; others only see “excellence” in strictly traditional terms. The truth is that within history there are numerous examples of “excellence” that emerge from poverty and despair, that emerge from “making a way out of no way.” We must remember that The City University of New York (CUNY), together with the Central Brooklyn Community, established Medgar Evers College to both be different and make a difference, thus improving the lives of young people in the community and City.

We place the story of Medgar Evers College in the context of the 1960s project to democratize higher education through open admissions, remediation and affirmative action. We pay particular attention to open admissions at The City University of New York and the creation of Medgar Evers College as an open admissions senior college. Emphasis is placed on the drama that unfolded surrounding

the unprecedented negotiations between the African American community and the University to create the College. While we focus on the founding years of the College 1964-1970, we provide a brief update of the decades that bring us to the present.

The major part of the story is culled from innumerable primary sources found in the Bowker Files of the CUNY archives which include handwritten notes, letters, telegrams by both community activists and CUNY officials, as well as newspaper articles and CUNY generated reports. We used additional archival material of one of the founders of the College, Louise Glover, and interviews with select community residents/politicians enabled us to round out the story with anecdotes and eyewitness accounts. In addition, we examined the minutes of the Board of Higher Education, 1964-1970, and select editions of the *New York Times* to both contextualize the events and to understand the precise rulings and official positions that led to the opening of the College. Our rendition tells a part of the story of a unique institution and we welcome different interpretations and/or a more comprehensive history that chronicles the recent struggles by the college and the community to further its mission to be a college for the community and of the community.

The story of the founding of Medgar Evers College of the City University of New York is a heartfelt story told by two retired Professors, one an African American Professor of English and Interdisciplinary Studies who came to the College in 1980 and the other a Jewish American Professor of Education who came to the College in 1973. We came together as committed faculty because for over twenty-five and thirty-four years respectively of teaching at the College, we never doubted the importance of Medgar Evers' mission in the community, the City and, indeed, the world. Though there have been differences of opinion, ideas, and beliefs, we have always had mutual respect. In this way, we were able to confront our differences, celebrate our similarities, team-teach, and always engage in the struggles of building the College. We contend that, while the story of the College is of particular importance to the Medgar Evers College family/community, it is also pertinent to all impoverished communities struggling to find a way to build institutions that inspire community well being.

## *Part I*

# **Acts of Courage: A Community Challenges a University**

Our story opens on a brisk day in 2006. It is the day after Labor Day and the first day of classes at Medgar Evers College. Dusk is beginning to descend on the glass entranceway. Day students have left and evening students are arriving in droves for their six o'clock classes. There is an air of excitement and anticipation as they speak with each other in a potpourri of languages: English, Creole, Patois and Spanish. They are rushing, always rushing from work in Manhattan, from schools around the city, and/or from homes where they settle children with grandmothers and baby-sitters to arrive on time to their classes. Some are early enough to get a quick bite to eat at the cafeteria before class; others have to wait until a class break to get their needed coffee. These snacks will tide them over until they are ready to return home sometime after 9:00 p.m. It is a long day and part of the sacrifice they make to build a better future for themselves and their families.

As the sun continues to descend, its light shimmers over the glass doors of the entranceway like a beacon in the harbor offering guidance and hope to students and community residents. Yet, the same shimmering light also reminds us of the tragedies, struggles and triumphs that have been central to the vibrant life of this urban college. There was Wanda who, two months before graduation, died while trying to save her two young children from crossfire in the nearby housing project; Trevor, an ardent social justice

advocate and committed student who became an MP and poet in Trinidad & Tobago; Pat who became ill with cancer and couldn't finish her last semester of student teaching; and Iyanla Vannzant who, as mother of three and president of student government, went on to become a lawyer, writer and a well-known TV personality. It reminds us of Flavia, Alice, Ryan, Pearl and countless others who became nurses, doctors, teachers, principals, social workers, social change agents, scientists and business people in this community and communities around the world. It was the belief of members in this community and the energy of these students that pushed forward the dream of the founders to create a college in Central Brooklyn that would serve the community.

Beginning in 1964, Central Brooklyn fought long and hard to create Medgar Evers College, and though the College's modern structure seems to intrude on the more traditional buildings of the surrounding Crown Heights community, it is a most welcomed intrusion. To the left of the College's entranceway stands the Ebbets Field Housing Project, a constant reminder that this is a quintessential Brooklyn community, the site of the old Ebbets Field Stadium, home of the Brooklyn Dodgers. A pizzeria, two Caribbean restaurants and a Bodega line the street across from the College, suggesting the eclectic nature of life in Crown Heights where African Americans, Hassidic Jews, Caribbean Americans, and Latinos live side by side in an

uneasy peace. The Crown Heights Youth Collective, with 60s type murals and a cornerstone of community activism, intermingles with tree-lined streets of two family houses leading to the Carroll Street building of the College. Here the Math, Sciences and Nursing departments are housed. On the "urban campus" of this four-year college, students relax in a pizza parlor or on the stoop of the College buildings rather than on campus greenery. The lovely well-kept two family homes on the surrounding streets are often only a block away from decaying apartment houses where drug busts and other turmoil might be evident. Decay and destruction live side by side with struggle, hope and care in this Brooklyn community.

When Medgar Evers College opened its doors in 1971, faculty and students were always on the move as they taught and attended classes in the many different churches of Central Brooklyn - The Masonic Temple on Clarmont Avenue; Saint Lukes Church on Washington Avenue; Lafayette Presbyterian Church on Oxford Street; and St Joseph's Church on Dean Street. They traveled to these various sites in search of the college that was still to be defined and was very much a work in progress.

Today things have changed considerably. Medgar Evers is now an emerging campus located in the Crown Heights community of Brooklyn. Here it continues to expand as new buildings are being planned and built. It is now a significant institution in the community. Through its

graduates, its influence extends from Central Brooklyn to the rest of New York City, and from the Caribbean to Africa. Yet the ease with which the College sits within the community belies the hard times and struggle out of which it grew, just as the ease with which the students enter its doors belies the turmoil that often underlies their attempt to get an education.

From its inception in the 1960s as a dream in the minds of the Central Brooklyn Community, Medgar Evers College was different than the other schools in The City University of New York (CUNY) system, of which it is a part. It was the only CUNY College born out of community struggle and out of the racial conflicts that tore New York apart in the 60s. It was the only CUNY school in which the community participated equally with the CUNY Board of Higher Education in defining the College's mission, goals, and status. It was the only school to try to redefine the relationship between town and gown, the relationship between the community that it would serve and the academy. Finally, it was the first CUNY school to commit itself to working with the community in which it would be embedded.

This was truly a unique experiment and a unique moment in the annals of higher education. The paradigm of the liberal apolitical university comprised of detached scholars responsible only to the academy was being transformed into a model that accorded the community equal participation in defining a college. The traditional power

relationships were shifting away from the professional academician and the City's elite Board of Trustees to a shared relationship with the community. The players in this unique experiment continuously tried to bridge the great divide between the White power structure of New York City and the Black community, between the members of the academy and the community residents the college would serve. They were trying to redefine the very concept of an urban university, and this is what makes the story of Medgar Evers College a compelling story.

New York in the 60s was a city of drama and passion; a city of community organizing and of Black national and international political movements; a city where national leaders like Malcolm X organized and spoke regularly, and community workers like Ella Sease, Louise Glover, Shirley Chilsholm, Rhody McCoy, Al Vann, Jitu Weusi, Robert (Sonny) Carson, Father John Powis, Elsie Richardson, Delores Torres, Paul Chandler, and others organized protests, actions, conferences and discussions. It was a city where the Black Community asserted its voice and presence through political activity and where education became one of the most important sites of struggle. It was a city where community leaders organized on several fronts as they fought for integration, busing and community control of schools. It was a city where, in 1968, these activities culminated in one of the most bitter strikes in New York's educational history, the confrontation at Ocean Hill-

Brownsville, a struggle between the local Black community and the New York City Board of Education which ultimately closed the New York City public schools for over one month.

It was within this highly charged atmosphere that the Central Brooklyn community fought to create Medgar Evers College, a college of the City University of New York committed to open admissions and to serving the surrounding community of Bedford Stuyvesant, Crown Heights, and Brownsville. The story of Medgar Evers unfolds across the color line of New York City, the City's fault line - the great divide between the Black community and the White educational establishment.

The public struggles to create a new CUNY college first began in the Bedford Stuyvesant section of Brooklyn and mirrored the complex social and political relationships found between New York City's political and educational establishment and the disenfranchised Black community. Each side had a different understanding of what this college would look like. Would it be a community college or a four-year degree granting institution? What would the curriculum look like? Who would be the first president of the college? And what would be the nature and extent of community involvement? Each side also used a different language to describe the community in which the college would be located. Leaders on one side regularly referred to the community as a "slum," while local leaders described it as a vital and viable African American community.

On one side of the great divide stood the mostly white, mostly male, middle class Board of Higher Education that governed CUNY. Most had a limited knowledge of the history, culture, needs and concerns of Bedford Stuyvesant and the larger Central Brooklyn community, and a limited comfort level with the ideas and demands that would be raised at the negotiating table. As players in the drama, the CUNY Board and, most specifically, Chancellor Albert H. Bowker believed that the University would need to change some of its policies, curriculum and teaching practices if it was to reach new communities, extend educational opportunities and create a successful experimental college. The Board perceived itself as creating a community college in a "slum" with all the attendant problems associated with schools in this type of urban environment.<sup>1</sup> While they firmly believed in their mission to extend educational opportunity, they remained concerned with the reality of creating a college in this urban setting and with this new student population. Too often CUNY leaders were unable to let go of their preconceptions about the nature of university education and the nature of a working/poor African American community.

Chancellor Bowker, who had been brought from Stanford University to lead the newly formed City University of New York, would become the chief spokesperson for CUNY. He arrived in New York in the fall of 1963, two years after the State had raised the City College system to

university status and just months before the initial struggle to create a college in Central Brooklyn began. At this time, City University included only four senior colleges and three community colleges. Dr. Bowker, a mathematician and Dean of the Stanford Graduate School, had been recruited as chancellor to develop the CUNY graduate school.<sup>2</sup> During Bowker's tenure, this newly created university system underwent unprecedented growth and expanded to include ten new senior colleges and eight additional community colleges.<sup>3</sup>

The African American activists who comprised the other major players in this educational drama represented a variety of political venues and perspectives. At times, these activists united to cross the great divide, and at other times, they were fractured by their differing ideologies and vision. In the initial stages, the community spoke with one voice to ensure that their college would reflect their vision, concerns, and interests. They insisted that the collaborative process with the Board unfold with dignity and respect for the members of the community. To these activists, the local community was not a "slum". It was a viable community of artists, professionals, blue-collar workers, the working poor, and the unemployed; it was a site of active religious institutions, schools, and family life that had suffered from a history of unequal treatment. Schools, one of the most visible signs of this unequal treatment, often had crumbling

walls and teachers who were uninterested in the children's academic performance.

The economic and political situation in Central Brooklyn was complex, and community organizations that would come to the negotiating table often came with a history of unfulfilled promises, political betrayals, and a deep mistrust of the predominantly White City politicians and educators.

These activists came from the Central Brooklyn communities of Bedford Stuyvesant, Ocean Hill-Brownsville, and Crown Heights, all communities with a high concentration of Black residents who were economically poor. The 1960 census suggests that the Bedford Stuyvesant community was 76% African American and only 6% of the female workforce and 4.3% of the males were professionals. The population of Brownsville was 62.4% African American, and Crown Heights, where the college would eventually be located, was about 65% African American.<sup>4</sup> Similarities between the communities included high unemployment, few professionals to address community issues or needs, and a belief that their children were being seriously shortchanged by New York City's public education system. The residents of these communities made up the core of the movement to bring a college to Central Brooklyn.

Bedford Stuyvesant, the community that took the lead in the negotiations, was heavily involved in the early 1960s' "War on Poverty", which spurred community leaders to form

coalitions and community groups to empower residents. This was a time of serious political activity in Central Brooklyn, and a time when a significant part of community organizing was devoted to education. In many Black and Latino communities, schools became the site of confrontation as these schools were often below standard, had virtually no Black or Latino teachers, and had curricula that neither motivated students nor included their history and experiences. As a result, students often performed poorly and/or dropped out of high school. Community activists fought to change these conditions by bringing a college to Central Brooklyn that would provide local youth with educational opportunities that allowed them to effectively compete in the larger society. They believed this college would motivate younger students and encourage the growth of a professional class that could bring resources and greater stability to the community.

Ella Sease, a PTA activist in District 16 and one of the founders of Medgar Evers College, typifies some of the grass roots community activists. Ella's dream was to build a college for the youth of the community, and every Friday in the early sixties, she would sit at her kitchen table and write a letter to then Governor Rockefeller. In the letter she asked the Governor to provide funds for a new high school and college in Central Brooklyn. She persisted with this weekly activity for several years, and when one of the Governor's hearings took place in Brooklyn, Ella would show up

unannounced, insist on speaking, and exclaim to the Governor that, "... Central Brooklyn must have a college!"<sup>5</sup>

The dream that inspired Ella Sease was also the community dream that inspired The Central Brooklyn Coordinating Council, Inc., a coalition of community groups that would become a major force in the struggle to bring a CUNY college to Central Brooklyn. The group met regularly throughout the early and mid 60s to assess community needs and create programs that addressed these needs.<sup>6</sup> Its membership was impressive and broad-based. Dr. Cecil C. Gloster, a physician, was president, and Ms. Shirley Chisholm, who would go on to become the first Black woman elected to the United States Congress, was vice-president. Among the powerful groups affiliated with the Council were the Bedford Stuyvesant Neighborhood Council, Brevort Savings Bank, the Brooklyn Public Library, Carver Federal Savings and Loan Bank, Kingsborough Community Council, the Brooklyn chapter of the NAACP, and the Brooklyn Urban League.<sup>7</sup>

The Coordinating Council initially tried to get CUNY's newly formed Kingsborough Community College, which was temporarily housed in Central Brooklyn, to remain in Central Brooklyn. However, the Board of Higher Education and Brooklyn's political establishment had other plans for Kingsborough. They insisted on locating the College in Manhattan Beach, a community that differed radically in its composition and needs from the Central Brooklyn

community in which it was currently housed. Manhattan Beach, which was primarily a wealthy Jewish community located far from Central Brooklyn, would attract and service a very different population. This would leave the Central Brooklyn community without an institution of higher education.

These differing visions for Kingsborough Community College caused enormous tension and heated debates. In 1964, at the Site Selection Committee of the City Planning Committee, Borough President Abe Stark, members of the Board of Higher Education, and community residents of Manhattan Beach pushed their agenda forward and argued vociferously in favor of the Manhattan Beach site while William Ballard, the new Chairman of the Planning Committee, countered their arguments by claiming that, "... a beach should be used as a beach" and a "... college ought to be in the heart of a community."<sup>8</sup>

Ballard, advocating the position of The Central Brooklyn Coordinating Council Inc., wanted the new college to be located in a place like the Atlantic Terminal or Ebbets Field Urban Renewal site or the region around Fulton Park or Stillwell Avenue, all community based sites in Brooklyn.<sup>9</sup> Ballard's proposal seemed particularly reasonable as the current students of Kingsborough Community College were already meeting in the Masonic Temple and other sites in Central Brooklyn. After extensive debate, the meeting grew more fractious, and a decision concerning the site of the new

college could not be reached. The meeting was adjourned and a special meeting of the Site Selection Committee was scheduled for the following month.<sup>10</sup>

Though a month was hardly enough time to organize a full campaign to keep Kingsborough College in Central Brooklyn, the Central Brooklyn Coordinating Council quickly began to strategize and organize community groups to testify at the February hearing. They knew that trying to fight the CUNY establishment and the Brooklyn political establishment involved intense political activity, careful planning, and extensive lobbying of politicians. Dr. Gloster, president of the Coordinating Council, sent an influential memo to his constituency stating, "If we want this cultural institution for our area we will have to put up a hard fight to get it".<sup>11</sup> He went on to describe the ways in which the struggle should proceed stating, "The first round of the fight must be with Mr. Stark (Brooklyn Borough President) and then after much organizing, we will fight at the hearing before the Bureau of Site Selection on February 27th".<sup>12</sup> Dr. Gloster asked the members to spread themselves thin and act as a "committee of one" so that each member could individually influence as many people as possible. Members were encouraged to begin their first round of lobbying as soon as possible and to attend a community meeting on February 6, where they would develop a more detailed and elaborate plan of action.<sup>13</sup>

Though the community diligently followed Dr. Gloster's suggestions and many testified before the Committee, the dominant political forces of Brooklyn and the Board of Higher Education prevailed. At the February 27 site selection meeting, it was announced that Kingsborough Community College would be permanently located in Manhattan Beach. The Coalition lost the battle, but the community's aggressive pursuit of a college resonated loud and clear, and Chancellor Bowker responded by making a commitment to the Bedford Stuyvesant Coalition that a CUNY college would be established in their community.<sup>14</sup> Though this promise lingered in the minds of community residents, it would take a great deal more political activity and a radical change in the political climate of the country before the Board of Higher Education would act on it.

The Brooklyn Coordinating Council continued working to improve Bedford Stuyvesant and sponsored a one-day conference in October 1964 entitled, "The War on Poverty in Bedford Stuyvesant". At the conference, participants discussed the need for a college in Central Brooklyn.<sup>15</sup> Establishing a college in the community remained a central goal of the Council, and throughout the next year, community activists continued talking about strategies for bringing a CUNY College to Bedford Stuyvesant. Tensions mounted as CUNY planned to establish two new colleges in other parts of the City, while the promise made to the Central Brooklyn community continued to be ignored.<sup>16</sup>

In early 1965, the situation shifted when the State, the Federal Government and local Civil Rights groups entered the picture. The U.S. Office of Education requested an estimate of the number of "Negro" students enrolled in the CUNY system.<sup>17</sup> This request was part of a national effort to insure that public institutions receiving Federal funds were not segregated and were in compliance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.<sup>18</sup> Local Civil Rights groups also entered the picture and demanded information regarding the ethnic make up of the student population at each of the CUNY schools. They argued that only 1% - 2% of CUNY students were Black or Hispanic even though these ethnic and racial groups comprised a much larger portion of the high school graduates in New York City. They were angered by the fact that these groups were grossly underrepresented in the student body of CUNY, and that as a public institution, CUNY was not adequately serving the Black and Hispanic youth of New York City.<sup>19</sup>

CUNY was now forced to confront what had previously been easy to ignore: the ethnic and racial composition of their student body was not representative of the racial and ethnic make up of the city's secondary schools. CUNY mobilized a response to both Federal authorities and local Civil Rights groups and requested that each college estimate the number of students of "Negro" and Puerto Rican heritage. CUNY then compiled the data from each college into a report that differed from that of the Civil Rights groups

when it suggested that 7-10% of all undergraduates were of "Negro" or Puerto Rican heritage.<sup>20</sup> Civil Rights groups came back and disputed these figures claiming that CUNY had overestimated the number of Blacks and Hispanics enrolled at the colleges.

The following year at the Fall 1967 registration, CUNY attempted to compile a more accurate survey on IBM cards. Based on this survey, the document "Undergraduate Ethnic Census" was produced and sent to the Office of Civil Rights and The US Department of Health, Education and Welfare.<sup>21</sup> The report often cited different figures in different contexts and was difficult to decipher. Though sometimes the figures made CUNY look better than other public universities, it was always clear that Black and Hispanic students were underrepresented at CUNY. While varying figures existed on the number of Black and Puerto Rican students in CUNY, the survey found that of the 86% respondents - 10.2% defined themselves as "Negro" and 2.9% as Puerto Rican.<sup>22</sup> Yet a closer look at these figures suggests that the reality was somewhat different in that only 6% of the "Negro" students and 2% of the Puerto Rican students attended the CUNY senior colleges, and a large number of those in attendance were non-matriculated students who paid a fee for their courses and were, therefore, more likely to drop out of college.<sup>23</sup> Though the figures were sliced in many different ways and a variety of rationales for the range of figures was provided, one important fact remained clear,

there were far too few Black and Latino students in Baccalaureate degree programs.

At the conclusion of this ethnic census report, CUNY acknowledged the under representation of students of color at the University and recommended that if the high schools of "New York City are not fully able to prepare minority students for full time collegiate study, then the University should not only continue but significantly expand its programs of collegiate compensatory education."<sup>24</sup> The report stated that a rapid and dramatic expansion of SEEK and College Discovery programs, which used alternative admission criteria and significantly different support services, was needed. It also called for establishing new programs designed to improve the enrollment of minorities. This report set the stage for the many changes that would take place in the CUNY system over the next few years.

The times were changing, and so was the ethos of the city and country. *The New York Times* during October 1967 provides one index of the kinds of changes taking place in the country at large. On an almost daily basis the *Times* carried articles related to issues of race, social justice, and civil rights. Some of the most prominent stories reported over a four day period October 12–15, 1967, included: a series of articles about the murder of Civil Rights activists Chaney, Goodman and Schwerner in Mississippi; violence and alienation in the City's high schools; a description of "riots" in Newark, New Jersey's impoverished Black

Community; and excerpts of a report by a prominent University of California sociologist which predicted increased Negro militancy because there was "... increased awareness and frustration over the massive obstacles to real integration and an increased pride in Blackness."<sup>25</sup>

The intensely racialized political climate on the national level was reflected in New York City in the grass roots community activism of the Young Lords, the Black Panthers, the Ocean Hill-Brownsville community groups, and other national and local organizations fighting to extend economic, political and educational opportunities to all the residents of the City. There was fear, anger, militancy, and confusion as the conflation of pressure from above, through Federal and State Authorities, and pressure from below, through community groups and political activists, created the conditions for educational change in CUNY.

By the end of 1967, when the Chancellor and the Board reviewed both the data on race and ethnicity in CUNY and the State mandate for inclusion and expansion of community colleges, the Board determined that extending SEEK and College Discovery programs would be insufficient to meet these new enrollment mandates. CUNY was now forced to explore new venues to increase community college enrollment and to bring more Black and Latino students into the system.

As a solution to these enrollment issues and in response to mounting community pressures in the City, the CUNY

Board voted on November 27, 1967 to create a new community college henceforth to be called Community College No.7. The Board stated, "The proposed institution would be a comprehensive community college offering university transfer and occupational educational programs."<sup>26</sup>

Details about Community College No.7 was found in the document entitled, "A Proposal for the Establishment of Community College No.7," also produced in November 1967 by the Board of Higher Education.

The document defined the new college as experimental in design in that: (1) Admission would not be based on high school performance as was the case in CUNY colleges; instead all high school graduates who applied would be admitted to the first semester and then they would be able to transfer to career programs based on their performance in the first semester; (2) It would be located on the fringes of a poverty area; (3) It would serve the special needs of the community in which it was located; (4) It would search for new ways of meeting the needs of the City's high school graduates."<sup>27</sup> Though not explicitly slated for Brooklyn, the ground-work had been laid. Community College No.7 would eventually become Medgar Evers College - a four-year college in Central Brooklyn - only after continued and intensive struggle by the community.

To more completely understand the tension and struggles between the community and the Board that would follow, it is necessary to understand the educational

struggles of 1967 and 1968 in the adjacent African American Community of Brooklyn's Ocean Hill-Brownsville. This particular struggle over community control of the local schools would be an influential model for the struggle around community involvement in the formation of the College.

The formation of the Ocean Hill-Brownsville School Board, the first of three community-based school districts in New York City, occurred simultaneously with the Central Brooklyn community's fight to bring a CUNY college to Central Brooklyn. In fact, several leaders in the community control movement of Ocean Hill-Brownsville, including Sonny Carson and Al Vann, were also major players in the fight for Medgar Evers College.

The Ocean Hill-Brownsville experiment, which was supported and funded by the Ford Foundation, received initial approval from the teachers' union and the Board of Education. The newly elected school board, which represented the parents of the community, unanimously elected Rhody McCoy as the superintendent of schools for the Ocean Hill-Brownsville Community. McCoy, the first Black School Superintendent in New York City, would become a significant figure in the 1969 controversy between the Bedford Stuyvesant Negotiating Team and the Board of Higher Education over who would be the first president of the newly established college. The connections between the two communities were many, and, when in 1968 the Ocean Hill- Brownsville Community Board asserted control over the

hiring and firing of teachers, and transferred 19 teachers out of the district, the issue of the parameters of community control was put on the table.

In protest over the community school board's transfer of teachers, the newly established teachers' union called a strike in September 1968 that closed the public schools for over thirty days. Though many teachers crossed the picket lines in support of community control, clear battle lines were drawn between the local community of Ocean Hill-Brownsville and the Teachers' Union and Board of Education. The Board of Education, angered by the ensuing chaos, asserted its power and disbanded the Ocean Hill-Brownsville Board. This essentially ended the city's experiment with community control of the public schools, and asserted the right of the Central Board of Education to oversee all community decisions.<sup>28</sup>

The struggle over community control would surface again in Central Brooklyn when friction arose over whose voice would dominate in the choice of president for what would become Medgar Evers College. The events in Ocean Hill-Brownsville foreshadowed the tension between the Community and the Board of Higher Education, and set the parameters of community involvement in public higher education.

The intense community organizing and political activity in the African American communities of Brooklyn soon conflated with the demands made by the State, Federal and

local Civil Rights groups to increase the enrollment of "Negro" students in CUNY. At its January 22, 1968 meeting, the CUNY Board of Higher Education reiterated the distinct and innovative features of the newly created Community College No.7 that would address the concerns and interests of both the Federal government and local community groups. These features would make the newly formed community college (soon to become Medgar Evers College) a unique institution within the CUNY system. The Board reiterated its previous mandate that this newly established college would be experimental in the following ways: it would be located on the fringes of a poverty area in order to provide "disadvantaged" students with post high school training, provide "community service oriented to the special needs of the community in which it is located," and "develop new admissions criteria that would not be based solely on high school performance".<sup>29</sup>

These mandates, unique to Medgar Evers College, defined the new institution as an "open admissions" college before "open admissions" became the standard for CUNY schools. This new college would be one of the first CUNY schools designed to meet the needs of the community in which it would be located, and one of the first colleges in CUNY to be slated for the border of a poverty area.<sup>30</sup> This time, however, the plans for the College were more concretely defined. The Board now established a five member "Committee to Seek a President", headed by a

Board member, Fred Burkhardt, and Central Brooklyn was approved as the location for this new college.

Shortly thereafter, Chancellor Bowker wrote a letter to Mayor Lindsay explaining that, in the decision to create this college, he was honoring a long-standing commitment made by the Board. He explained that when the Kingsborough site was chosen, " ... the Board had made a public commitment that the next community college would be located in Central Brooklyn."<sup>31</sup> While this commitment to the Central Brooklyn community may have entered into the Board's decision, it was clear that more than this commitment had entered into CUNY's decision to establish this type of college, in this location, and at this time.

The Chancellor, in operationalizing the plans for Community College No.7, tried to capitalize on a possible new source of funds by bringing into the equation another plan that had been circulating in 1967 by a group known as Educational Affiliates of the Bedford Stuyvesant Development Corporation.<sup>32</sup> This plan, which received support from Senators Bobby Kennedy and Jacob Javitz, had been developed by community activists, including Al Vann of the African American Teacher's Association and Preston Wilcox of AFRAM Associates, Inc., both of whom would respectively become associated with Community College No.7 as chair of the community's negotiating team and as a candidate for president of the college. Others involved in the plan included Civil Rights activists James

Farmer and William Biernbaum, who served as the group's president.

The Bedford Stuyvesant Development Corporation's plan, which had many similarities to the Board's mandate for Community College No.7, emphasized professional programs in pharmacy, nursing, medical technology and teacher education and strong community involvement in the college. It included many features that would ultimately characterize the newly created Community College No.7.<sup>33</sup>

In his letter to Mayor Lindsay, the Chancellor elaborated on the ways in which the Bedford Stuyvesant Development Corporation's plan was similar to the plan for the newly approved Community College No.7. He explained that, though the plan had been promised funds from private and federal sources, the involved planners felt that the college should be sponsored by a public agency. Bowker then suggested to Mayor Lindsay that the University become associated with this plan so as to tap into the promised private funding. In this way, the University might be able to secure additional funds that would aid in the development of Community College No. 7. Bowker wrote, "Having given due consideration to such a possibility, we have come to the decision that this would be a wise course of action in the public interest, and in fulfillment of the commitment which we made to establish a community college in Central Brooklyn."<sup>34</sup>

Bowker wanted to align himself with the plan backed by Senators Javitz and Kennedy and prominent Civil Rights activists in order to get their support for the college and secure the additional funds. However, the salient fact was that these diverted funds would be used to establish a two-year CUNY institution rather than the four-year institution called for by the plan, and this clearly shortchanged the community. The issue of whether the new college would be a two-year institution as planned by the Board or a four-year institution as described by the community activists and Senators would become a central theme in all future discussions about the College.

This was clearly a time for celebration; a college was to be established in Central Brooklyn. However, it was also a time for vigilance. The community needed to carefully monitor the Board's activities to insure that community members played a vital role in all future decisions surrounding Community College No.7.

CUNY, in conjunction with the Borough President's office, hosted an affair at the Brooklyn Civic Center where they announced their plans to establish a college in Bedford Stuyvesant. Borough President Abe Stark, Senators Bobby Kennedy and Jacob Javitz, Mayor Lindsay, members of the Board of Higher Education and community leaders were among those present at this upbeat political event. Prominent politicians spoke eloquently about the potentially positive effects this new college could have on the Central

Brooklyn community and on higher education in America. Senator Kennedy said that the Board's decision to place a two year institution in Bedford Stuyvesant represented an "... imaginative and effective response to pressing needs".<sup>35</sup> The mayor declared, "Educational excellence must be our goal and innovation and deep community involvement the means to that end." He went on to say, "I look to this college for a model for the whole nation."<sup>36</sup> The Chairman of the Board of Higher Education, Porter R. Chandler, called the new institution, "... the first of its kind anywhere," and termed the "... education of disadvantaged students the single most important problem facing the University in the next decade."<sup>37</sup> He reaffirmed the new admissions requirements and stated that the University would not penalize students for their poor choices or poor performance in high school.

Though a great deal was invested by the city and the community in this new institution, community activists were angered because grass roots organizations had not been invited to this political event announcing a new college in Central Brooklyn. Others in the city were not completely comfortable with establishing a CUNY college in a "slum." A *New York Times* article described this underlying reservation when it stated, "It will be the first of the University's two year institutions to be placed in a slum."<sup>38</sup> Interestingly, the *Times* reporter seemed to know very little about the "slum", which was described as a Black and Puerto Rican section of Brooklyn. While Latinos lived in the area, over 75% of the

residents were of African American ancestry. The word "slum," used in the *Times* article, did not capture the residents definition of themselves or the active and complex life of an African American community. The chasm between the understandings of White institutions like the *New York Times* and the CUNY Board and the reality of the Black world of Bedford Stuyvesant was evident as was the anger of many grass roots organizations.

This profound mistrust of mainstream educators and politicians grew stronger among community groups when it became clear that the Board had established a Presidential Search Committee for Community College No.7, but, despite its rhetoric of community involvement, had not invited the community to participate on this committee. Outraged, the community protested the composition of the search committee and the fact that many grass roots community organizations had not been invited to the public announcement of the college. Walter Pinkston, of the Bedford Stuyvesant Youth-in-Action Coalition, sent a telegram on behalf of the community to Chancellor Bowker stating that the news of the establishment of a community college in Bedford Stuyvesant "... did not reach the people for whom the college was intended," and, therefore, it was imperative that a "mass meeting" be convened in February to address community concerns and questions."<sup>39</sup>

The Chancellor was asked to attend the meeting in order to answer any questions the community might raise about

the new college. There was a large turnout of Community residents, including activists and politicians like the Honorable Shirley Chisholm. The public meeting was held at Decatur Junior High School and was sponsored by a coalition of community groups that included the Central Brooklyn Coordinating Council, the Bedford Stuyvesant Youth-in-Action Community Corp., the Ad Hoc Planning Committee for Higher Education in Central Brooklyn, and the Community Action Neighborhood Board. Community residents raised many concerns about the relationship of the new Community College No.7 to the community residents.<sup>40</sup> Though the Chancellor did not attend, members of his staff tried to convey to him the tenor of the meeting as well as the issues raised.

This meeting was enormously important to the history of the College because it established in embryonic form much of what would take place between the community and the Board. Its immediate importance was threefold: (1) It established the community as a viable partner in the formation of the College; (2) It made the community's concerns visible to the Board; and, (3) It provided the basis for the formation of a new coalition that would represent the community's voice in future negotiations with the Board.

Community residents and activists who attended the Decatur meeting provided the basis for two other well-attended public meetings at the Bedford YMCA. At one of

these meetings, a steering committee representing twenty-five community organizations was established. This group, which would become known as the Bedford Stuyvesant Coalition on Educational Needs and Services, insisted that, "... any college in Bedford Stuyvesant must be community controlled and offer BA degrees," and that all planning for the college be stopped until dialogue with the community was established.<sup>41</sup> The newly formed coalition, which included representatives from the NAACP, the Central Brooklyn Coordinating Council, and other groups that had been part of the initial push for a college in Central Brooklyn, became the voice of the community. This group would articulate the needs, concerns, and interests of Bedford Stuyvesant in all future negotiations with the Board.

Chancellor Bowker, apprised of the discussions that had taken place at the Decatur meeting, wrote a series of letters to many of the community groups that had been present. In these letters he affirmed the University's commitment to community participation in the establishment of the college and applauded the community's enthusiastic support of the college. He wrote, "The whole concept of Community College No.7 rests on the promise of just this kind of community enthusiasm."<sup>42</sup> In another letter to the Central Brooklyn Coordinating Committee he stated, "I hope we will be able to produce in this new college in Bedford Stuyvesant true quality education of college level for young people of the entire neighborhood."<sup>43</sup> In a third letter sent to Walter

Pinkston, one of the conveners of the meeting at Decater, he wrote of the college, "... it will be oriented to the Bedford Stuyvesant Community and will be operated in consultation with the community."<sup>44</sup> He went on to reiterate these comments, "It will have a community board ... It will be rooted in the ghetto community but will embrace and have access to the total educational resources of CUNY."<sup>45</sup>

Bowker's response to the Decater meeting clearly showed that the community had successfully negotiated a commitment from the University to be included in the Board's processes. Yet the nature of this inclusion would demand still further negotiations. Bowker's understanding of community participation and the community's desire for community control were somewhat different. These concepts would come into conflict as questions concerning the extent of community participation in the creation of the College reappeared in different guises throughout the negotiations.

Despite the reassurances made by Bowker in his letters, the community remained mistrustful of the Board's intentions. Agitated by what appeared to be a lot of rhetoric and little action, Walter Pinkston sent another telegram to Bowker in February 1968 which demanded, "... a halt to all planning and negotiating for establishment of a community college in Bedford Stuyvesant until the Board of Higher Education has conferred with the Coalition which represents the communities that would be affected by this proposed

institution.”<sup>46</sup> The telegram called for a meeting with the Board so that the Coalition could define its role in the establishment of the college. Bowker turned the telegram over to Porter Chandler, Chair of the Board of Higher Education, and shortly thereafter, Frederick Burkhardt, Chair of the Presidential Search Committee, invited the Bedford Stuyvesant Coalition on Educational Needs and Services to meet with the Search Committee on March 14, 1968 at the CUNY Central Headquarters.<sup>47</sup> This meeting would initiate the unique and momentous year long relationship between the CUNY Board of Higher Education and the Bedford Stuyvesant community.

Prior to the historic March 14<sup>th</sup> meeting with the CUNY Board, the Bedford Stuyvesant Coalition on Educational Needs and Services met to elect a steering committee. This committee would represent the community at the March 14 Board meeting. The fifteen community representatives, chaired by Al Vann, met with six members of the Board and five CUNY staff members. The community representatives were cautious, and it took a while to break the ice. As Vann put it, “It soon became obvious that the ‘establishment’ was almost as mistrustful of us as we were of them. The long evening required a great deal of patience and dialogue on both sides.”<sup>48</sup>

By the end of the evening, the members of the Board seemed very impressed by the level of concern exhibited by the community representatives and by their singleness of

purpose.<sup>49</sup> The community members emphatically raised two basic concerns: (1) The college should be a four year college granting BA and BS degrees, and (2) The college should be controlled by the community. They also pressed for a decisive role in the selection of a president, the distribution of the budget (after allocation by the Board), the determination of curricula, and the selection of all college personnel.<sup>50</sup> Even though the Board responded positively to the community concerns voiced at the meeting, community representatives saw this first meeting as a “polite confrontation,” a tentative relationship that would require expert steering and maneuvering if the interests of the community were to be served.

The March 14<sup>th</sup> meeting obviously had an impact, and at the official meeting of the CUNY Board of Higher Education held on March 25, 1968, the Board passed an unprecedented resolution to include an equal number of community representatives on the Board’s Committee To Seek a President for Community College No.7. The Board also extended the work of the committee to include “... the responsibility to plan for the development of and to activate the college in the Central Brooklyn area designated as Community College No.7”.<sup>51</sup> The community group was given extensive power as the Board went on to further define their responsibilities by stating that this group would be “... designated by these communities to participate fully in the continuing deliberations of the committee in planning the

development and activation of the college. The committee as thus enlarged shall be authorized to hear and consult with any and all individuals and groups in the community in question."<sup>52</sup>

The community representatives were given an equal voice on the Board's committee, and with this new role they had successfully carved out for themselves, the first phase of the struggle ended. A partnership had been established between the Board and the community. The Search Committee's mandate, which had been extended to include planning and operationalizing the new college in Central Brooklyn, meant that the community, with its five member representation, would now have an equal voice in all aspects of establishing this new college. This was an historic moment for the African American community and an historic moment for The CUNY Board. For the first time in the history of higher education in New York City, the African American community would have equal voice in defining a CUNY college.

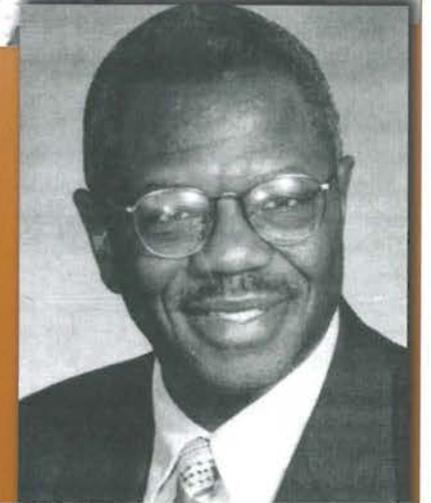
## Faculty



Faculty



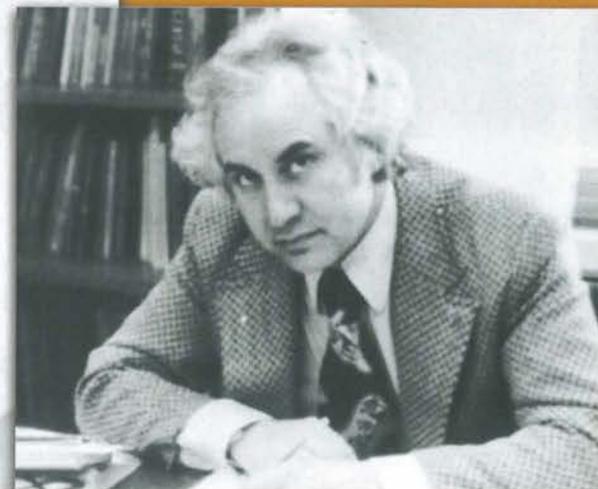
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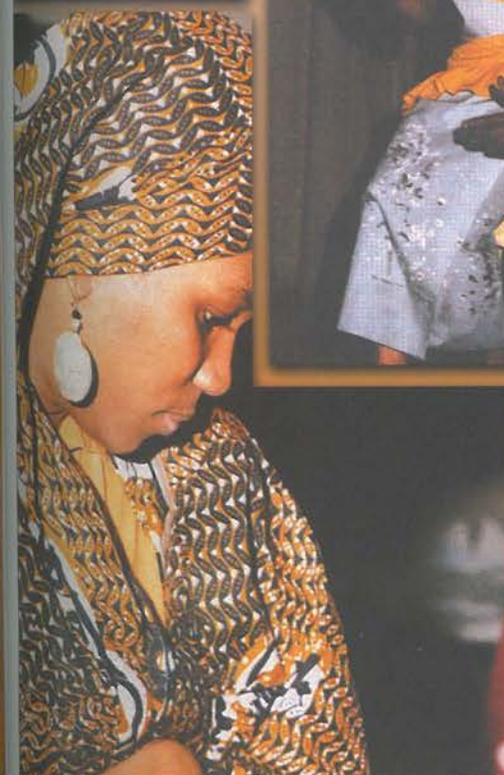
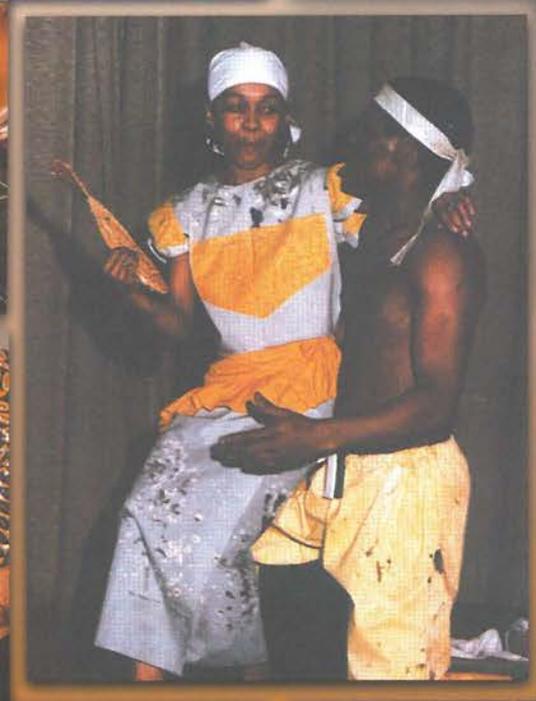
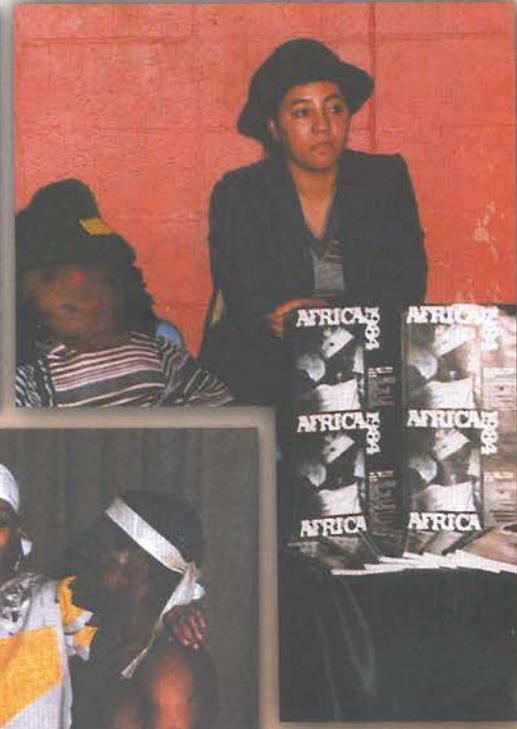
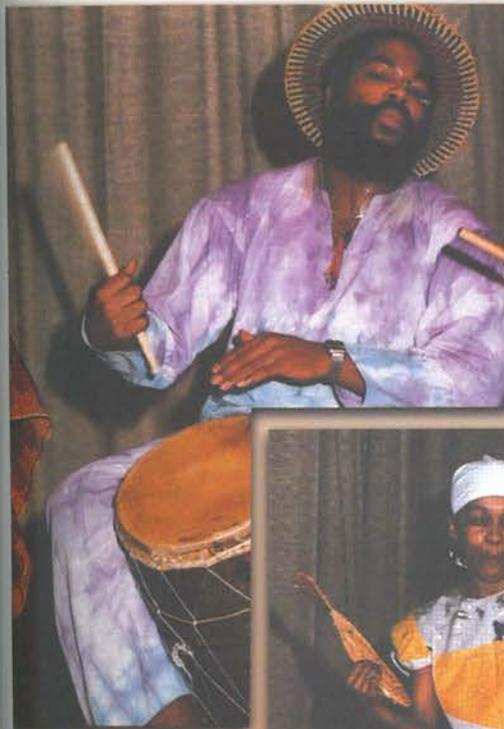
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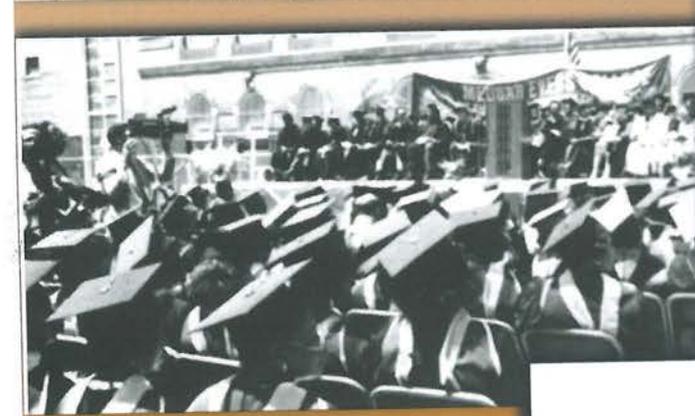
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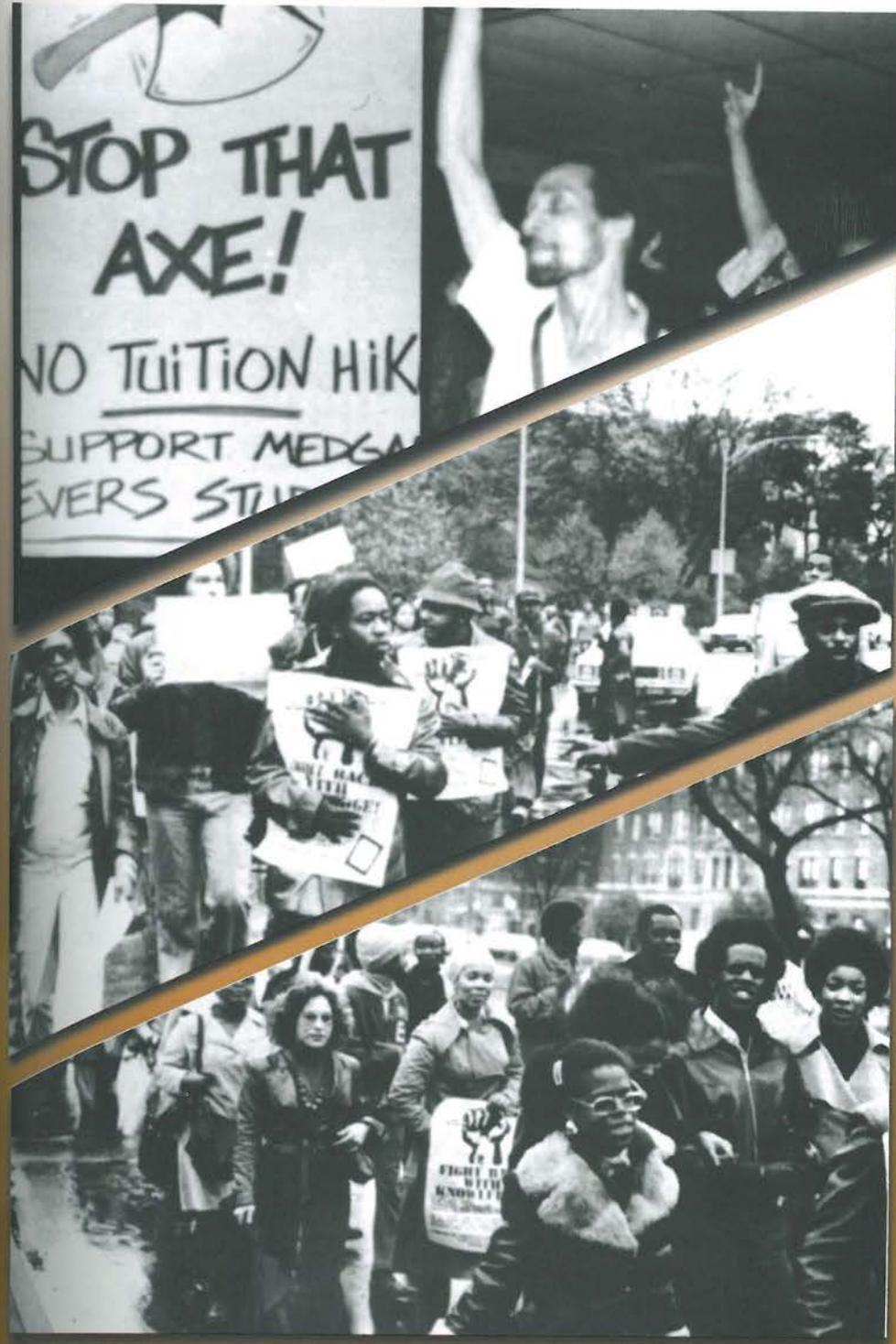
Cultural Life

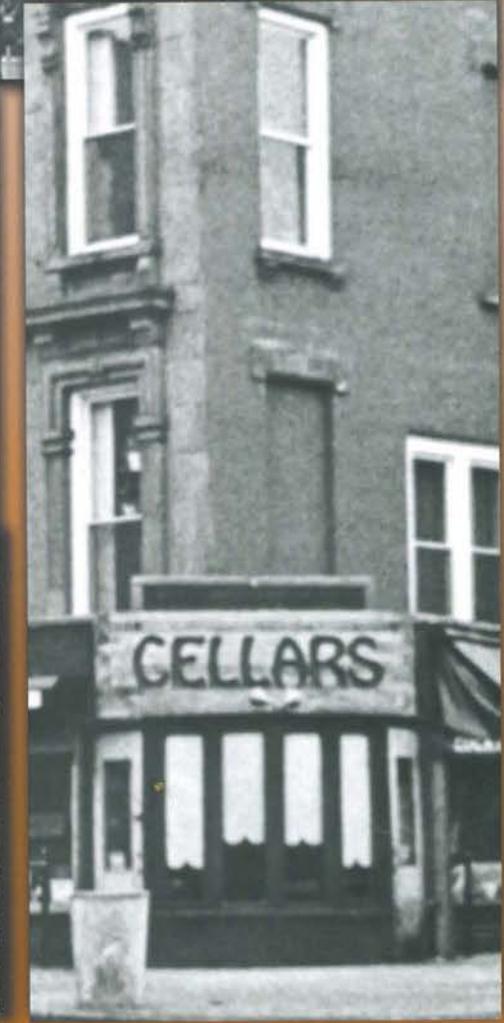
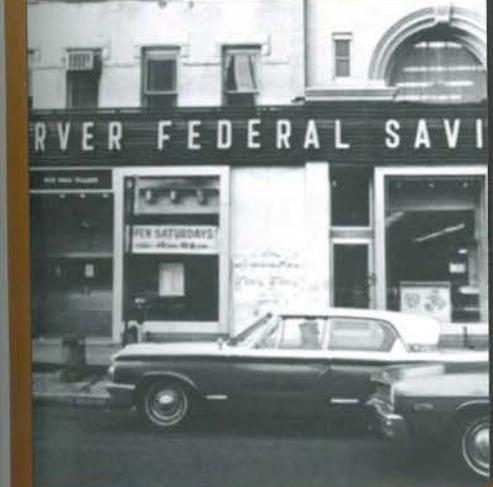
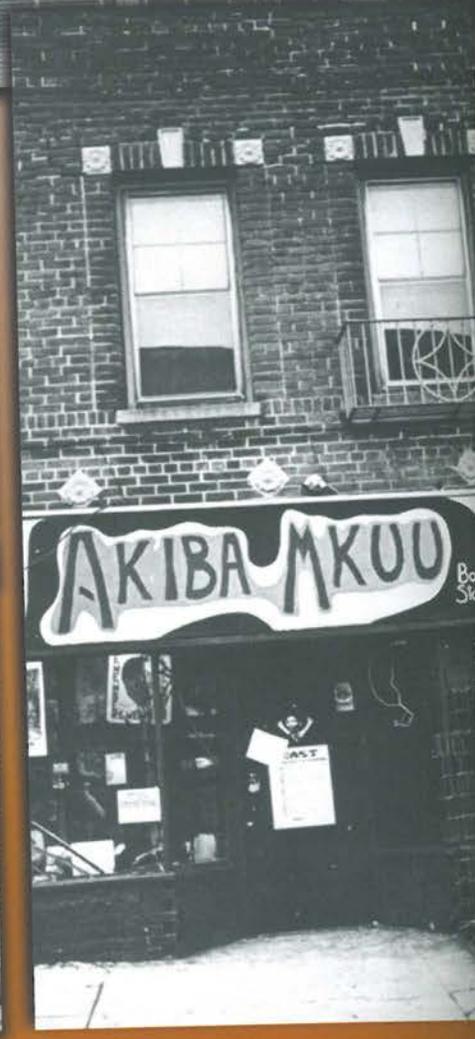
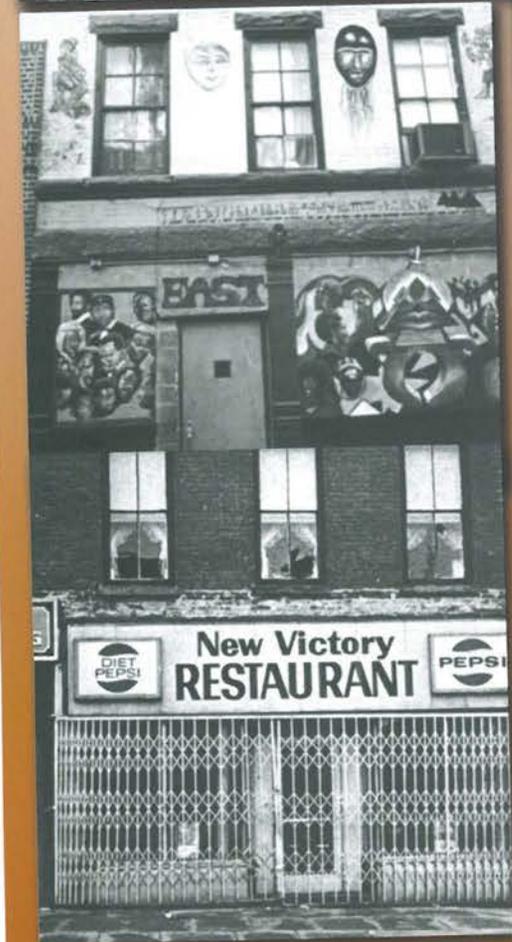


Student Life

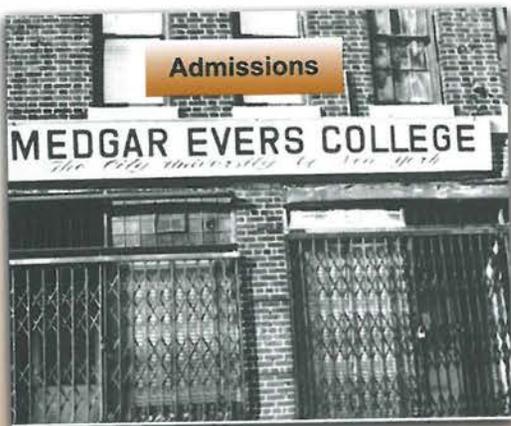


Struggle Years

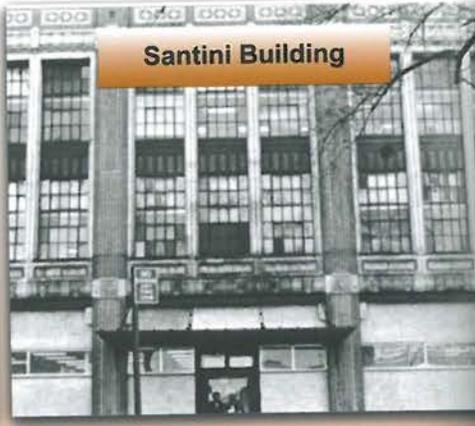




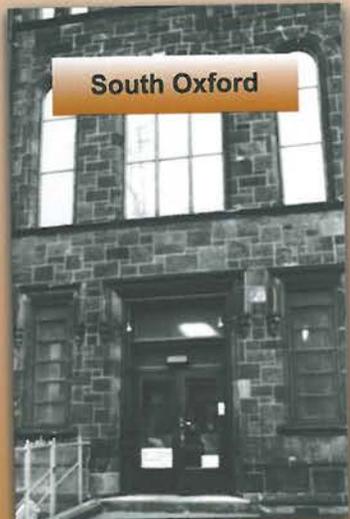
Original Campus Buildings



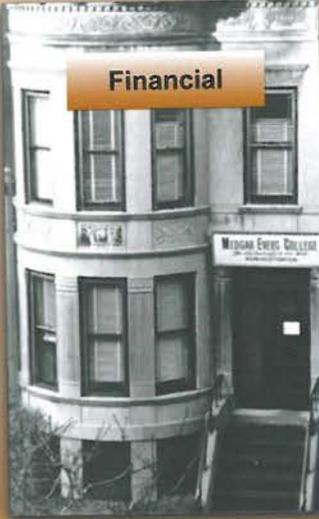
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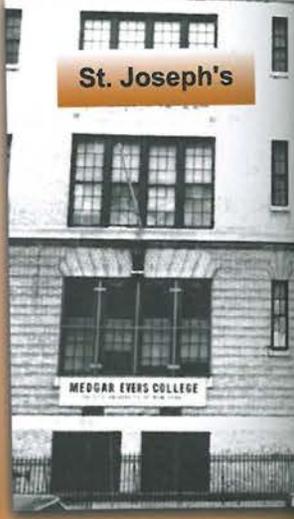
Santini Building



South Oxford



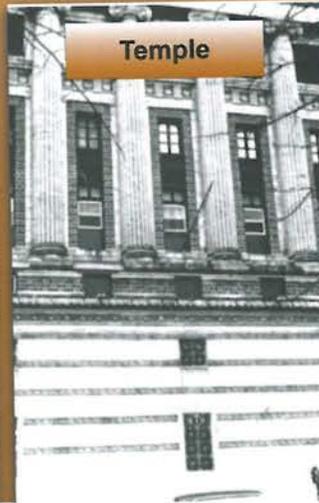
Financial



St. Joseph's



Temple



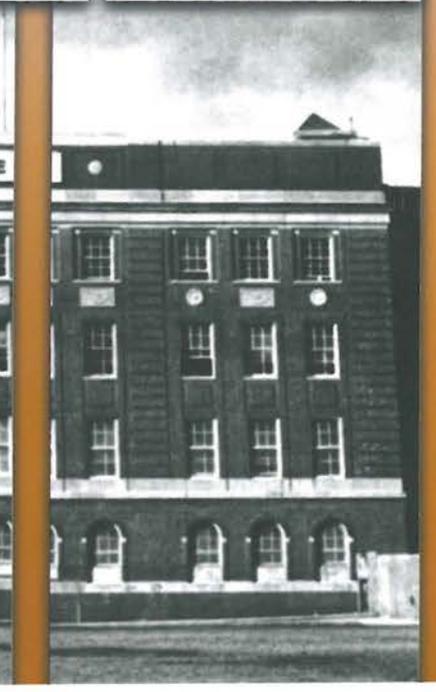
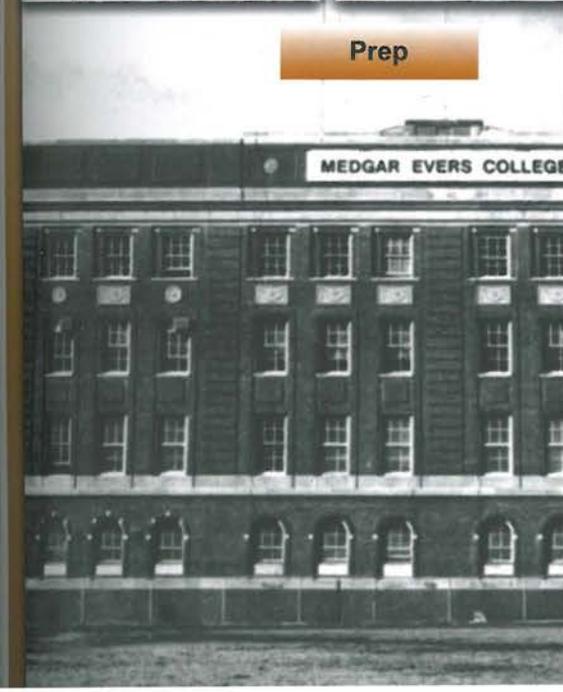
Original Campus Buildings



Prep Entrance



Prep



The photographs included in this history are representative of faculty & staff in the founding decades of the college. These pictures were culled from existing college yearbooks. We apologize to all faculty and staff whose pictures were unavailable.

## *Part II*

# **Breaking Ground in the Racial Divide of New York City**

New alliances are often fragile and tenuous. They either become stabilized and entrenched or fractured and never heard of again. Within this context, the newly constituted and unprecedented Presidential Search and Planning Committee began the next phase of struggle where members of the community and members of the Board carefully traversed uncharted territory that they negotiated through a veil of mistrust. These negotiations across a gaping racial divide were a testament to new possibilities. This section of the story explores both the potentialities and shortcomings of this significant attempt to redefine race relations in public higher education in New York City.

In April 1968, shortly after the newly constituted Presidential Search and Planning Committee was established, the Bedford Stuyvesant Coalition's steering committee sent a letter to the Board, Governor Rockefeller, and Mayor Lindsay gracefully accepting their new role on the Search Committee. At the same time the letter chastised the Board for not seriously considering, "... our just demands ... and irreversible concerns: A four year college that is community controlled."<sup>53</sup> Vann, writing on behalf of the Steering Committee of the Coalition, acknowledged the positive actions taken by the Board in response to the community. He continued by making a strong case for both community control and a four-year degree-granting institution. Vann noted the alienation of African American

youth from established educational institutions, and cogently argued that when schools articulate and reflect the values of the community, they counter this chronic alienation. Vann then cited the ineffectiveness of City College in working with the Black and Puerto-Rican community and the students' resultant alienation. To counter this, Vann demanded that Mr. Chandler (the Board Chair) indicate in writing the mechanism whereby the community would be assured of a "legitimate" college that was a community controlled, four year degree conferring institution.<sup>54</sup>

This letter was important in two ways: It established a pattern of negotiations which continued as long as the community interacted with the Board, and it affirmed that the community would accept the Board's compromise but continue to actively press for their primary demand, a four-year degree-granting college that is controlled by the community. In response, the Board would meet some of the community's concerns but ignore others. Neither group was truly comfortable with the compromises needed to insure cordial negotiations. While these compromises allowed the negotiations to continue, they also left unresolved issues that hovered over the negotiations. When these issues finally erupted, they widened the fault line of the Great Divide.

Shortly after accepting their role on the Presidential Search and Planning Committee, Al Vann sent a second memorandum of understanding on behalf of the Steering Committee of the Bedford Stuyvesant Coalition that outlined

the two commitments he claimed the Board made to the community: (1) The community would exercise final approval in the presidential search; and (2) The Presidential Search Committee would have a majority of community representation.<sup>55</sup> These commitments as defined by Vann were never again mentioned in any correspondence with the Board or in the Board's correspondences or reports. Most significantly, these claims never became part of the actual operations of the newly formed committee. However, Vann's memo of understanding revealed the community's profound mistrust of the Board and their desire to insure that community needs were prioritized. This memo foreshadowed the final conflict over the presidency.

At the next meeting of the Bedford Stuyvesant Coalition Steering Committee, a five member negotiating team was chosen to represent the community on the CUNY Search Committee. The Negotiating Team, as they would henceforth be called, would be headed by Al Vann, and included: Ella Sease, PTA District 16; Judge Thomas Jones, Chair, Board of Directors, Bedford Stuyvesant Restoration; Robert Carson, Community Relations Corporation; Jack Panningam, Brothers and Sisters for African American Unity; and Dr. Herman B. Patterson as an alternate representative.<sup>56</sup> The team represented a broad spectrum of the African American community. There were community members who believed that working through the law and the legislature were the only way to meet their educational

needs; community activists involved in the Ocean Hill-Brownsville struggle; political activists who defined their understanding of racial politics in terms of human rights, social justice, and principles of Black Power; and a PTA representative and other community residents who just wanted a better education for the children in the community.

Chancellor Bowker kept a small file of flyers and newspaper articles that documented the political activities of some of the newly elected community members. One can only speculate on why these files were kept, as there were no parallel files for other Board members. Most likely the Chancellor felt the need to become better acquainted with the range of perspectives held by the community representatives in order to better negotiate the Board's position. One can also speculate that liberal members of the Board might have been intimidated by the intense radical political climate in New York City and were suspicious of the more militant members of the Negotiating Team. Most probably, this climate encouraged them to collect newspaper articles, fliers, and other printed materials that kept them abreast of nuanced changes in the thinking and beliefs of the Black community.

One newspaper article in the Bowker files showed Robert "Sonny" Carson speaking at a July meeting of The Peace and Freedom Party. The Party platform projected an image of a revolutionary group working in the U.S. in a situation that had deteriorated so badly that Black people

had to be in "... a state of rebellion which is what the Black people are in now."<sup>57</sup> Another letter in the file from the Black Caucus, a political action group who addressed their constituency as "Brothers and Sisters," listed Al Vann, a veteran member of the Ocean Hill- Brownsville struggle and a member of the African American Teachers Association, as their campaign manager. The Caucus' philosophy, printed on the letterhead, stated, "We believe that Black people, in order to participate in the present political framework of the country, must have their own party and political representatives. We feel that only men and women based in the Black community can meaningfully represent and serve the Black community."<sup>58</sup> These letters, fliers and newspaper clippings explained or encapsulated some of the ideologies that the Board would confront as negotiations for the development of the new Community College No.7 unfolded over the next year.

In the early stages of the negotiations, dissension was kept to a minimum. The community members and the Board representatives on the ten-member search Committee were united around a common goal and were eager to begin their task of defining a new college. The negotiating team set up a small office in the community and put in a request to the CUNY Board for a more comprehensive space, personnel, and funds to help them effectively carry out their mission. They believed they would need independent resources in order to negotiate competently and to make intelligent and

free decisions on behalf of their community. To this end, they formulated a budget, and they reaffirmed the community's demands for a four-year college that would be community controlled. They then sent their request for funds to the Board.<sup>59</sup>

In the series of memos and phone calls that followed this initial request, the Coalition continued to negotiate for space in Bedford Stuyvesant and for a support staff that would help with their work on the Search Committee. They were looking to rent offices and a conference room that would accommodate 15 to 20 people. This additional meeting space would be designed to encourage extensive community participation in the planning of Community College No.7.<sup>60</sup>

When some time had passed and the community still had not received space or funds, their negotiations with the Board became tense. Al Vann chastised the Board for not providing the bare essential services and personnel that had been promised, and he warned that, "The community would soon begin to once again suspect insincerity on the part of the establishment."<sup>61</sup> Chancellor Bowker tried to persuade the Board to meet the community's request for space even though internal memos sent to Board members suggest that he didn't believe the community needed the space to continue their work on the Search Committee. He acceded to the request because he understood that this would be a significant step in trying to bridge the power differences

between the two groups and because he felt that not honoring the request would "... precipitate a major crisis." <sup>62</sup>

This cautious interaction set the tone for the initial stages of the negotiations; both sides perceived a need for vigilance as mistrust surfaced. In the attempt to negotiate uncharted terrain, the Board was sensitive to disparity in power and funds, and aware of the intensity of the larger racial struggle within the city and the country. Concerned with maintaining an adequate working relationship with the community, the Board acceded to those community demands they felt they could honor. The community, on the other hand, needed to insure that they would be taken seriously, treated with respect, and given the material conditions to function effectively as a community group on the Board's Search and Planning Committee.

As negotiations over funding continued, CUNY produced a document in 1968, entitled, "A proposal to Establish Community College No.7," which clearly established that the Board was, "... moving to correct the existing situation where several communities within New York City receive a disproportionately small share of the educational opportunities available to the city as a whole." <sup>63</sup> The report contained the clearest statement of the goals and principals of Community College No.7 and established that this was to be the first truly neighborhood community college in CUNY designed to meet the needs of a "ghetto" population. <sup>64</sup> For the first time the proposal mentioned the

possibility of, "... an additional upper division institution similar to Richmond" which would include a teacher training institution like the one that had been proposed for Harlem. <sup>65</sup>

The report continued to show that the University was seriously grappling with ways to make the college, "... meet the special needs of the students and community at-large in a disadvantaged area," while acknowledging that budgeting and staffing limitations made it difficult to develop programs based on the latest educational research for this new student population. <sup>66</sup>

There was clearly an unease with this new kind of college as the report defined specific guidelines and innovations like Saturday workshops, reduced loads, faculty development, additional support services, and counseling for the new student population. <sup>67</sup> While these new and interesting ideas grew out of both the educational innovations of the times and the particular interactions between the Board and the community, it also seemed that these guidelines were not only generated to improve academics but also to make the Board feel more comfortable with the idea that a college in a "ghetto" community could succeed. In either case this new way of thinking about a college education was important in democratizing higher education in United States.

Amicable negotiations continued as the steering committee of the Bedford Stuyvesant Coalition continued to forcefully press for Baccalaureate programs. In fact, this

constant pressure for a four-year institution was probably the most significant factor in finally establishing Medgar Evers College as a baccalaureate degree granting institution. Furthermore, the Board's willingness to listen and respond to the voices of the community effectively encouraged dialogue across the Great Divide.

While Bowker personally agreed that Medgar Evers College should be permitted to offer baccalaureate degrees, he was bound by state regulations and the State's official designation of Community College No.7 as a two-year institution. In his letter dated Aug., 1968, Chancellor Bowker explains in detail the state imposed constraints on establishing a four-year institution and claims that the college was essentially approved and funded by the state as a community college and, therefore, funds could not be "diverted" to establish another entity.<sup>68</sup> The Chancellor tried to assuage the community by suggesting that there might be creative ways to deal with establishing four-year programs at the college. He then made a personal commitment to seek permission from the Board of Regents and the State University to "... permit Community College No.7 to extend its course of instruction beyond the junior college level in specialized professional lines such as teaching and nursing and to award baccalaureate degrees in such fields."<sup>69</sup>

The Chancellor argued confidently that he could get this authority, and promised that if the present plan failed, he would explore alternate plans for establishing baccalaureate

programs. Bowker's position was interesting on several levels. It showed a strong desire by the Chancellor to meet the demands of the community; however, it also clearly asserted the power of the Board. Bowker put forth a veiled threat stating that if the community was not interested in Community College No.7 as it has already been defined, it was unlikely that the Board of Higher Education would proceed with the plan. He asked that the community accept his promise and plan, and stated that if they didn't accept "... the current assurance that baccalaureate degrees will be available to these students and that City University will work on different approaches to this issue, then I don't think the Board of Higher Education will (would) proceed with this plan."<sup>70</sup> Bowker tried to persuade the community to accept the plan as it was, with the assurances he had given.

The Chancellor worked on two fronts. The first was to establish four-year programs for Community College No.7. The second was to obtain additional funds for staffing and space for the Bedford Stuyvesant Coalition Steering Committee. When he finally succeeded in procuring funds from the CUNY budget, he met with resistance from members of the Board who did not want CUNY funds diverted to community groups. Determined to accommodate the Community, Bowker managed to obtain grant money from the Ford Foundation for \$442,000, some of which was to cover the costs of the Bedford Stuyvesant

Coalition. Until the Ford money came through, Bowker agreed to cover minor interim costs from University funds.<sup>71</sup>

Conflict had been contained and another step in the negotiations was completed. The community would now have the money to staff an office in Bedford Stuyvesant. Their next major focus was to extend the definition of Community College No.7 to include Baccalaureate programs as well as Associate degree programs. While the Board had intimated that this was a real possibility and promised to pursue the issue, there were still no official documents acknowledging that the college in Bedford Stuyvesant would offer four-year programs.

Yet on August 28<sup>th</sup>, the Coalition issued a news release entitled, "Bedford Stuyvesant Seeks President for Experimental Community College." In this release, the Coalition asserted that a community controlled junior college "... will open its doors to 500 students in September 1969 as a result of Bedford Stuyvesant community's decision to accept CUNY's proposal to establish a two-year college in the area which will grant Baccalaureate degrees in specialized fields."<sup>72</sup> This news release seemed to be based more on Bowker's promise than on any official documentation, and the issue of four-year degree programs continued to remain an item for negotiation throughout the Fall of 1968. The press release also established that the president for whom they were currently searching would be crucial in defining the new college because his educational

philosophy would be, "... the fulcrum in creating this revolutionary institution of higher learning ..."<sup>73</sup>

The release went on to enumerate criteria for the new leader stating, "He must be aware and sensitive to the problems, educationally and environmentally, plaguing minority group youth in large cities; be able to identify with the aspirations of the Bedford Stuyvesant area to develop an institution of excellence; and have strong and positive convictions about community control."<sup>74</sup> The release concluded with a request that parties interested in the presidency send resumes to the Coalition as soon as possible.

That fall the entire Black community of New York City closely watched the political activity surrounding the creation of the new college in Bedford Stuyvesant. When an editorial appeared in the *Amsterdam News* using harsh words to describe the Negotiating Team and criticizing the slow pace of the negotiations, Al Vann chastised the editor for the newspaper's lack of support and stated, "In view of the facts, the inference in the editorial directed at the Coalition and its negotiating team are unwarranted and unjust. The interests of community cohesion demands better investigation."<sup>75</sup>

There had always been differing ideas within the African American community about how negotiations should proceed, and Al Vann, the Negotiating Team, and the Coalition continually tried to address these differences so

that one voice would be presented across the Great Divide. Vann and others felt that the editorial, which was critical of the negotiations, was disruptive of what appeared to be a unified presence. Meanwhile, the Steering Committee of the Bedford Stuyvesant Community Coalition continued to meet every two weeks to develop negotiating strategies, address community concerns about the presidency, and work on all other pressing issues regarding the establishment of Community College No.7.

This was a particularly difficult and confrontational period in New York City. The teachers' strike had closed down the City's schools in September 1968, and tensions within and between communities and between the communities and the City ran high. Al Vann, Chair of the Negotiating Team, was also an active member of the African American Teachers Association, which was instrumental in the ensuing struggle between the community of Ocean Hill-Brownsville and the teachers' union and the City. The African American Teachers' Association opposed the strike, and many of its members worked in the schools of Ocean Hill-Brownsville alongside parents in order to keep those schools open. Vann was now forced to miss several Coalition meetings in order to address the deepening crisis in the adjacent community of Ocean Hill-Brownsville. Both he and Sonny Carson, who was also a member of the negotiating team, were deeply involved in that struggle. Their involvement clearly had a profound effect on the

negotiations over community control and the presidency of the new college.

By early October, the negotiating team began to review the resumes of potential presidential candidates and then readjust the criteria. Additional criteria now included, not only those characteristics outlined in the September press release, but also that the candidate must be Black, not more than 55 years of age, willing to reside in the community, have experience in public schools as well as higher education, have creative ideas on curriculum development and a willingness to accept community control of the College. Judge Jones, another member of the Negotiating Team, added to this list that the candidate should be married so that he could be an important role model for youth.<sup>76</sup> The Coalition then developed a survey which would be sent to target populations in the community asking what would they like to see in a college in the community, what turned them off about going to college, and other pertinent questions.<sup>77</sup> The questionnaire was designed to help the community plan a college that would be attuned to the youth in the community and would be able to meet their needs and aspirations.

At this point it is interesting to note that only two members of the ten members Search Committee were women and that gender played a subtle role in some of the team's attitudes and decisions. We see gender issues at play in the assumption that the president of the college

would be male, and, once again, when Ella Sease, the only female community representative on the Negotiating Team, defended the children's right to an education over what she believed were the politics involved in choosing a president for the college.

The Coalition, in conjunction with the Negotiating Team, reviewed the resumes of the candidates while CUNY continued to pursue strategies that would allow the college to provide Baccalaureate Degree programs. An internal document, written in the Fall of 1968 and sent out from the Dean of Community College's office, claimed that there was extensive opposition to adding Baccalaureate capacity to a community college and that CUNY would now have to take a new approach to the issue. The document stated that, "A totally new approach has now offered itself for consideration. This is to establish a specialized 4-year college which would combine two year curricula with baccalaureate degrees in professional career fields."<sup>78</sup> The report went on to state that, "... all aspects such as funding, standards and general orientation of the College would remain as presently defined."<sup>79</sup>

This new approach identified Community College No.7 as a four-year college but limited the number of Baccalaureate programs to those in professional career fields. The report argued that this experimental senior college would be exclusive to the Bedford Stuyvesant community and would implement innovative ideas being tested around the country.

The new college was now being defined as a senior college with associate degree programs rather than a community college with baccalaureate programs. The report stated that, "Under this plan the Bedford Stuyvesant college would be considered in the same category as a senior college although it would be a distinct and special type of senior college."<sup>80</sup> As we shall see, this new definition of the College would have many positive implications for the further development of the College.

CUNY needed approval from the Board and from state officials before it could publicly acknowledge the new plan. During this interim period, information pertaining to the plan was kept highly confidential and for internal consumption only. The community's persistent pressure was finally beginning to pay off.

In early December, a snag in the negotiations emerged when the community discovered that CUNY had not notified them of the funds received from the Ford Foundation that were to be earmarked for their operating expenses.<sup>81</sup> In response, Al Vann sent a telegram to Chancellor Bowker canceling all presidential interviews "... in view of the developments which necessitate a meeting with the presidential search committee to bring about clarification to the Negotiating Team."<sup>82</sup> The strong wording of the telegram was directly related to the outrage felt by the community at not being notified of the newly acquired funds.

This reticence by the Board "... reinforced many negative expectations about CUNY and its representatives, and preparation was made for inevitable confrontation at the next meeting."<sup>83</sup> At this meeting, members of the community's Negotiating Team confronted members of the Board, and Fred Burkhardt, Chairman of the Planning and Search Committee, reassured the Coalition that the spending of the Ford Grant would be a cooperative effort. A follow-up memo from Acting Dean Joseph Shenker reaffirmed that the grant entitlements would be a cooperative effort, and that the portion that was specifically delegated to the community coalition would be given to them directly.<sup>84</sup>

The memo calmed the Coalition, and Vann immediately responded to the Board appreciatively, acknowledging the Board's immediate response to community concerns and the sensitivity with which they addressed these concerns. Vann stated that, "... both parties are sincere and have flexibility." He then went on to say that, "... since all the grievances had been aired, it was now possible to build on the positive relationship that had been established over the past eight months."<sup>85</sup> Vann further acknowledged that the negotiations between the different members of the Search Committee had been an extraordinary accomplishment and perhaps would provide a model that could be emulated by other community groups and universities around the country.<sup>86</sup> Both Vann and the Board were proud of the fact that this experimental college and their collaboration charted new

territory in higher education, and they wanted to insure that this innovative relationship continued to benefit both parties.

Things started to move rapidly, and in January 1969 the Board approved the resolution to create a four-year experimental professional college in Bedford Stuyvesant. The resolution stated, "The Board is asked to authorize, instead of a new community college in joint operation with SUNY, a four year experimental professional college with four-year professional and technological programs in a variety of fields, also offering two-year career curricula in technological areas and transfer programs in Liberal Arts and Sciences ..."<sup>87</sup> This new resolution was adopted with a nearly unanimous vote, and would now need final approval from the State Board of Regents.

A new document outlined the need for this experimental college in Brooklyn and demonstrated CUNY's awareness of the segregated patterns of enrollment in higher education. The document argued that the present arrangement of community colleges and senior colleges seemed to foster segregation and that this, "... new type of baccalaureate program afforded by the college of professional studies would attract students from all parts of the city, thus contributing to a desirable racial balance."<sup>88</sup> It emphasized the importance of this new college if City University was to meet its target goal to increase enrollment in community and senior colleges, and if City University was to be more sensitive to the labor needs of New York City.<sup>89</sup> The

essential point of the document was that both the community and the university would benefit from this new four-year institution.

With the Board's mandate for a new experimental college in Bedford Stuyvesant that offered both select Baccalaureate Degree programs in professional studies and Associate Degree programs, one of the Coalition's primary goals was achieved. This was another amazing victory for the community and for the Negotiating Team. Traditional separation of town and gown had been momentarily erased when the town had clearly influenced the "gown". Yet, this historic moment remained fragile as the issues of community control and who would be the president of the new experimental college still needed to be addressed.

The community strongly believed that the president would be crucial in defining the college and establishing the complex and unprecedented relationship between the college and the community. The stakes were high, particularly if the vision of the community was to extend beyond the negotiating stages and into the future life of the college.

The January meeting of the Search Committee began with an informal interview of Rhody McCoy, one of the presidential candidates. The names of the other candidates to be interviewed were reviewed and included a number of significant figures in the Black community: Samuel Westerfield Jr., Preston Wilcox, Samuel O Proctor,

Deborah Wolfe, Jerome Holt, and Roscoe Brown. After meeting with McCoy, Bowker clearly stated his belief that, "... should a man like McCoy be chosen ... one who has great community support and less educational background, he would not be academically respected."<sup>90</sup> He argued that if the committee was going to consider a non-academic for the role of president, they should focus on significant public figures. The following week, at the January 13<sup>th</sup> meeting held at the Graduate Student Center, the committee agreed to continue interviewing candidates for a few more weeks. Following those interviews, they would review their findings and nominate the president of the new experimental college in Bedford Stuyvesant.

Meanwhile, dissension within the Coalition became more evident, and Al Vann tried to insure that the community would continue to speak with a uniform voice. He was aware that any crevice could weaken their bargaining power. In a letter to members of the Coalition, Vann addressed this concern by praising the community's unified work and their amazing achievements to date, specifically mentioning their victory in establishing an experimental College in the community offering four-year professional programs. He then went on to severely chastise members in the community who he felt were, "... Brothers attempting to destroy the achievements thus far and deter us from the realization of our common goal."<sup>91</sup> Vann was very aware that a split in the community would allow the Board to make

deals with those groups who were most accommodating to the Board's position and that this would dilute the power of the present Negotiating Team.

Vann accurately assessed a situation that would only grow more fractious as the selection of the president proceeded. However, in the early stages of the process, while there was some grumbling and complaining, there was little dissension over the Board's and the Community's first choice for president. On March 21, 1969, the Search Committee sent an official letter offering the position of president of Community College No.7 to the Honorable Hugh Smythe, a U.S. ambassador to Malta. Dr. Smythe, a former professor at Brooklyn College who also headed the graduate program in Sociology, had received a unanimous vote from the Search Committee. Unfortunately, Dr. Smythe declined the nomination because he felt that as only one of four Black U.S. Ambassadors, he must serve out his term.<sup>92</sup> Several other candidates were now offered the position, but they too declined.

With the list of candidates almost exhausted, the Committee meetings became more contentious. The Negotiating Team began to assert its right to select the president who would be most conducive to the needs of the community. Rhody Mc Coy, who had been the superintendent of the Ocean Hill-Brownsville School district, became the choice of the five community representatives on the Presidential Search Committee. The five CUNY Board

members on the search committee vetoed McCoy. The battle lines were drawn along the fault line of the Great Divide as the Community's position became more intractable over the next few months.

After almost a year of negotiations, the Board's Search Committee had come to an impasse. Tensions reached a feverish pitch at the May 1969 meeting held at the Graduate Center. Community representatives insisted on McCoy as president of College No.7, while the five Board members refused to entertain their choice.

The ensuing arguments over the impasse concerning who would be president of the College were intense. The Chancellor received reports about verbal altercations, and he was particularly disturbed by the Negotiating Team's insistence on one particular candidate. Chancellor Bowker responded to the fractious meeting by expressing his distress in a letter to Al Vann. For the first time Bowker addressed Mr. Vann as Chair of the Bedford Stuyvesant Coalition rather than as Chair of the Negotiating Team, the position he had held for the last year.<sup>93</sup> Bowker asserted his power as Chancellor and dealt with the impasse by removing Al Vann from his official position on the search committee. In his letter to Vann, the Chancellor wrote, "I very much regret that we have come to an impasse - a deadlock with the Negotiating Team ..."<sup>94</sup> He went on to articulate his and the Board's position. He reaffirmed his commitment to a community oriented and community involved college, but

reiterated the initial agreement that the community would be given equal weight in the choice of the first president of the newly formed College No.7. He re-emphasized the phrase "equal weight."<sup>95</sup> The letter went on to argue that, "The Board of Higher Education could not by law or policy divest itself of its responsibility to establish and operate a college in Central Brooklyn."<sup>96</sup> The implication of the statement was that the Board and the Chancellor would not allow the community to override the veto of the Board.

Bowker proceeded to clarify the agreement made between the Board and the Community, and explained that "The Board never pledged, suggested or implied that the negotiating team could ever be given the power to name the president regardless of the views of the Board."<sup>97</sup> He went on to say that the joint committee operated on an implicit and explicit agreement in which the Board would respect the veto power of the representatives of the community and of course the community would recognize the veto power and inherent legal responsibility of the Board. The Chancellor strongly suggested that the present impasse had not honored this agreement, and that the Board's Search committee could not and would not endorse Mr. McCoy's appointment.

It was clear that the Board would not let the community's voice override its concerns. While the Chancellor acknowledged the candidate's sensitivity to the needs of the community and his strong support in the community, he and the Board felt that Rhody McCoy was unacceptable because

he did not have adequate administrative experience in higher education and would not be able to gain the respect of other academicians or be able to attract good faculty.<sup>98</sup> The Chancellor continued to explain that McCoy's name on the list of final candidates did not imply the Board's approval but rather implied that it was merely part of an agenda of names the Board would consider.

Clear about the University's and the Board's decision and clear about the ways in which the lines between the two groups had hardened, the Chancellor felt forced to close off all possibility of continued negotiations with the existing community representatives. He ended his letter to Vann by stating that plans for the College could not be pursued unless, "... new arrangements for community participation in the discussion and planning can be arrived at."<sup>99</sup>

Not surprisingly, the community saw the situation differently. In a letter to the Chancellor, Vann discussed the perspective of the community. He described a process whereby McCoy became one of six finalists after the committee had reviewed 100 resumes. Several of the six finalists had declined and others already had positions, thus leaving McCoy as the only viable candidate on the list of finalists. Vann explained that it was his understanding that in the Board's agreement of the six finalists, they had made a tacit agreement that McCoy was an acceptable candidate for president. In the letter, Vann continued to take exception to not being addressed as the Chair of the Negotiating Team

and asserted his view that the Chancellor did not have the power to suddenly remove him from his elected position on the Team. He reiterated that the community's choice for president of the new college was Rhody McCoy, and he ended the letter by saying, "The coalition remains intact and ready to continue to plan for a college of excellence. Our Negotiating Team is our legitimate negotiating structure and will continue to represent the community."<sup>100</sup>

In a recent interview, Vann clarified this position. He told the interviewers, "Nobody (whom the community chose) would have been acceptable. We had established a process which they did not honor."<sup>101</sup> Vann was referring to his understanding that McCoy, who had made it to the list of the six finalists, was a viable candidate and should not have been discarded by Board members once he became the only candidate willing to accept the position.

Each side had become more and more entrenched in their position and the lines had hardened. Yet, it was not completely clear why or how the positions had reached such a hard line at this point. Not too much earlier the Negotiating Team seemed much more amenable to the Chancellor's position of equal voice and, in a progress summary Vann sent to the community in March 1969, only two months earlier, he proudly stated: "For the first time the community will share in the selection of the person who will become president of the College. This person must meet the approval of the members of the Board of Higher Education

and of our negotiating team."<sup>102</sup> Clearly, Vann's progress report in March accepted the notion of equal voice, but by May this had all changed.

One explanation for the subsequent intractability could have been directly related to the demise, in November 1968, of the community control experiment in the adjacent Ocean Hill-Brownsville. McCoy, who had been superintendent of that school experiment, was no longer superintendent and was now available for the presidency of the new college. Perhaps Vann and others saw in McCoy an opportunity to resurrect the dream of community control that had inspired the Ocean Hill-Brownsville experiment. Perhaps they also firmly believed that only someone who had worked with community control, who was familiar with the Central Brooklyn Community, and who was committed to the ideals of community involvement would be able to create a community-based CUNY college in Central Brooklyn. In a recent interview, Vann confirmed these conjectures when he queried, "How much community control can you have if the man (President) is really chosen to follow their (the Board's) tune?"<sup>103</sup>

Another explanation for the intractability could have been that Vann and the others were concerned that opening the search a second time would prolong the process to such a degree that the College would not be opened for some time. They might have felt that, in the delay, the momentum and the promises of the four-year institution to be run by the

community would be further compromised. Perhaps they were also concerned that the Board appeared to be less supportive of the concept of a community-based college since they rejected the only candidate who had experience with community based education.

In either case, while Vann appeared to articulate the position of the community, the dissension and questioning that had always existed within the Coalition surfaced more strongly. Not everyone agreed with the particular political position Vann articulated, yet because everyone had agreed to a common set of educational goals, dissension had been kept to a minimum. All the members of the Coalition supported a college that conferred four-year Baccalaureate degrees and had community input in the designing of the college and in the selection of a president. This common understanding created a camaraderie that allowed for a unified voice. Vann clearly held the respect of the community and when disagreement surfaced, he was able to rally this common voice to rise above the detractors so the community could slowly edge toward its goal. However, the rigid stance on McCoy sparked dissension in the ranks of the Coalition. Now the muted voices became much louder as division mounted and cracks deepened.

Interviews with two community activists, both of whom were women, provide additional insight into the political dynamics surrounding this impasse. Louise Glover, a long time member of the Coalition, believed that this was a

particularly critical time in the African American community and explained, "It was a time when everybody was trying to be Blacker than everybody else. If you did not agree with Al and his friends, then you were an outcast; you weren't Black at all."<sup>104</sup> In describing the controversy as it became more and more entrenched, Louise said, "We all agreed that McCoy was significant. He stood ten feet tall as he handled the Ocean Hill-Brownsville crisis, but he was not college president material."<sup>105</sup>

Louise Glover expressed what others, who also did not agree with Vann, were thinking. Previously, when dissenting members felt they had a legitimate position, they kept their opposition somewhat muted. They feared that any show of disagreement would allow the Board to divide and conquer, and the community would end up getting a weakened version of what they wanted and what had thus far been agreed upon. However, when it seemed that the position of the Negotiating Team was jeopardizing the primary goal of a four-year community-based college, the dissenting voices grew more forceful. As these members became more vociferous they were cajoled, coerced and intimidated. Ella Sease described the situation when she said, "Child, it was hot out there!"<sup>106</sup>

Some of the dissident members responded by remaining silent or working in like-minded pairs to help each other. Ms. Sease recalled a time when she was intimidated at the subway station, and Louise Glover drove her to a section of

Brooklyn where she continued her journey by cab. She told the interviewers that without Ms. Glover's help, it would have been very difficult for her to keep attending all of the meetings. "Though this was a tense time in the negotiations, there was enormous dedication," said Louise Glover. "We were at the Coalition office on Lafayette (street) all the time. Whatever it took!"<sup>107</sup>

According to Ms. Glover and Ms. Sease, while the hard work continued, so did the intimidation. "The feeling of intimidation was everywhere," said Ms Glover as she went on to describe a chance meeting she had with Sonny Carson, a member of the Negotiating Team<sup>108</sup> Louise told Sonny, "You better pray to Jesus that nothing ever happens to me on Fulton Street because I'll always believe you did it, and I'm coming to get you! My grandpa taught me how to shoot and I can shoot well!"<sup>109</sup> Louise, a very proper, well dressed and well mannered elderly woman, went on to describe how Sonny listened carefully, looked up at her, and grinned. She ended this story by bringing it up to date and saying, "Till this day if Sonny Carson is on one side of the street and I'm on the other, he will come over almost immediately and ask, 'How are you.' I in turn extend my hand because I ain't mad. I won!"<sup>110</sup>

Dissension in the community became incorporated into the ways in which community members would continue to see each other even after the establishment of the College and throughout the next few decades. Intimidation and

refusal to be intimidated lived side by side as Vann and the Negotiating Team pressed for McCoy to be president and the Board refused to continue the joint sessions after the fiery May meeting.

Concerned that their work over the past few years might turn to naught, a new group calling itself the Concerned Members of the Bedford Stuyvesant Coalition was formed. The group seems to have been spearheaded by Ella Sease, Louise Glover and other concerned Coalition members. Early on a Sunday morning, these community residents got together in the Central Brooklyn Coordinating Council's office to sort out their response to the current impasse. "We didn't even go to church, and when we got to the office that morning we didn't even have a clue as to where we were going."<sup>111</sup>

As she continued talking, Ms. Glover articulated that she was somewhat surprised at the way in which this small group of community activists produced a memo of understanding that would be sent to the Board. She went on to describe the writing of this memo: "I typed it on my little Royal portable typewriter. We had decided to go it alone, so we wrote our own manifesto and CUNY accepted the manifesto."<sup>112</sup>

This group, which became known as the Concerned Members of Bedford Stuyvesant, sent the manifesto to Chancellor Bowker on June 10, 1969, and stated that they did not agree with the inflexible position taken by members

of the Negotiating Team. They went on to say, "Due to the lack of integrity in which community meetings have been conducted, there is no other vehicle through which we can register our total disapproval. Therefore, we demand that the negotiations be resumed immediately, and strengthened with representatives of our majority dissident group."<sup>113</sup> Signatures on the Manifesto included representatives from the NAACP, Brooklyn chapter; the Salvation Army; the Community of Bedford Stuyvesant and Bushwick; the Central Brooklyn Coordinating Council; Bedford Stuyvesant Youth-in-Action; Unity Democratic Club, Bedford Branch; the Brooklyn YMCA; the Inter-denominational Ministerial Alliance; and the Urban League.<sup>114</sup>

Shortly thereafter, Ella Sease, the only women representative on the Negotiating Team rendered a heartfelt plea for a college in the community in a handwritten note to Fred Burkhardt, Chair of the Search Committee. She wrote, "I will not sell out for McCoy only. We need the college for the children. Please, with tears in my eyes for the children, open the negotiating to the community so we can get the college in Bedford Stuyvesant .... Please hear my cry for the children ..."<sup>115</sup> Ms. Sease articulated the depth of feeling and passion that had gone into the hard work to locate a college in the community. Afraid she would lose hold of the dream that had almost become a reality, she proceeded to ask the Chancellor if he had received the petition sent by District 16 to move forward on the college

and if she could bring together community groups that would help move things along.<sup>116</sup> Ms. Sease, as the sole women on the Negotiating Team, sent out a powerful and dissenting cry.

It then became the time for the dissident group to confront the Steering Committee of the Bedford Stuyvesant Coalition that had until this point represented the voice of the community. A memo signed by Concerned Members of Bedford Stuyvesant was sent to the Coalition steering committee. The memo did not include specific names of the Concerned Members, but they clearly articulated their concern that College No. 7 would not become a reality unless the negotiating team was augmented with other concerned members of Bedford Stuyvesant.<sup>117</sup>

A great deal of political activity was mounted around the new crisis. Everyone was afraid that because of the impasse, the college would be lost to the community. Black politicians in Albany like Sam Wright and Assemblyman Thomas Fortune now became involved urging, "... an acceleration of action on College No.7" and that the coalition be broadened.<sup>118</sup> After meeting with Albany politicians, Julius Edelstien, a CUNY professor and administrator, explained that Assemblyman Thomas Fortune had requested a meeting with the Chancellor, elected officials, and Bedford Stuyvesant organizations.<sup>119</sup>

Evidence of whether there was an official meeting is not available. However, it was clear that groups were forming

outside the original negotiating team in order to remedy the impasse of the negotiations. The college, which according to the community press release, was slated to open in September 1969, was nowhere near opening. In fact, it was unclear if it ever would.

On September 16, 1969, the Board officially acknowledged the impasse in the presidential search and passed a resolution stating, " Since the leadership of the coalition has declined to accept the principles of choosing a president mutually acceptable to the negotiating team and since the only name continuously being presented and insisted upon by the leadership has been and is hereby reaffirmed as being entirely unacceptable to the Board a complete impasse is found to exist".<sup>120</sup> The Board went on to say that the impasse could only exacerbate the present relationship between the Board and the community, and the Executive Committee of the Board passed a resolution discharging the Presidential Search and Planning Committee for College No. 7.<sup>121</sup>

Four months after the impasse and almost sixteen months after the formations of the historic committee consisting of equal representation of the Board and the community, the joint committee was officially disbanded. The Executive Committee of the Board was now placed in charge of all further efforts related to College No. 7. This new committee was mandated to adhere to the creative concepts already in place in regard to College No. 7, and to

immediately begin the search for the new president. However, the community was not officially represented on this new committee. James Oscar Lee, an African American who was a resident of Central Brooklyn, was among the Board members who approved the resolution and, as a member of the Executive Committee, he was now put in charge of the new search.<sup>122</sup>

The new committee of the Board appeared to receive some community in-put from the Concerned Members of Bedford Stuyvesant, but this group did not seem to have voting power or a defined role in the new process. Shortly thereafter, the community offices on Lafayette Street were dismantled, making it clear that there was no longer any official community representation involved in the new search.

It was a sad day in Brooklyn and at CUNY. After having traveled together through uncharted territory together for over one year, the Search Committee's bonds had disintegrated. What had once been a subtle and not so subtle set of interactions between the educational establishment and the Bedford Stuyvesant community had always been tempered by a joint commitment to the larger goal of creating a community-based college in Central Brooklyn. Now the movements back and forth across the "Great Divide" ended. The positions hardened as commitments to political ideologies came to the foreground and the larger goal of the college became subsumed under these ideologies.

Vann and his supporters advanced a clear idea of Black power, community power and community control of the college in terms of the Negotiating Team's choice of president. His side asserted the parameters of community control that were very similar to those that had previously been asserted in the Ocean Hill-Brownsville struggle. To Vann, the college in the community would only be a college for the community if the African American community had the final say in choosing a president.

For the Board, this frozen terrain could not be traversed or negotiated any longer because the community's stance removed all power from the University, where the Board felt the essential responsibility for the functioning of the new college resided. They saw community control as shared and participatory, rather than total, and for them, even this was a radical departure from the way in which CUNY had traditionally operated. In fact, the Board had received a great deal of flack from community groups, alumni, and faculty for their adventurous negotiations with the Bedford Stuyvesant Community.

A group of concerned City College alumni voiced serious questions about the level of community involvement, and sent a letter to the Board asking that the University refrain from sending the mandate for College No.7 to the State Board of Regents until there was a public hearing on the matter.<sup>123</sup> The University faculty was also concerned with the negotiations, and drafted a document entitled,

"Discussion of the Legal Authority of the Board of Higher Education in Relation to the Establishment of a Special College No.7." These faculty members highlighted the legal role of the Board in all searches and the limitations placed on all other groups participating in such activities. They felt that the precise role of the special committee for College No.7 had to be clearly delineated, and its activities must take place within the framework of an informal community delegation.<sup>124</sup>

The *New York Times* was also among those who voiced concern. It suggested that the College was too community-based and that this would make it "... difficult to distinguish between the College and the community."<sup>125</sup> On another level, some Brooklyn community residents had voiced concern that a community activist who chaired the negotiating team had voiced what were perceived as anti-Semitic remarks in the newsletter of the African American Teachers Association. It was unclear if these allegations were true or not, yet what was clear was that there had been both pressure and concern by residents of the city, alumni, and members of the University about the Board's activities surrounding the new College. Even if these voices did not directly affect the Board's decision, they certainly buttressed the new position of the Board. Politics won! What this meant was that when negotiations became difficult and tense, whoever had power asserted that power, and the

prospect of creating a new and unconventional entity in CUNY was lost.

Unofficially, however, a community group of concerned Brooklyn residents continued meeting with members of the Board on an ad hoc basis, thus allowing the Board to feel they were honoring their commitment to community participation. Yet, the exact role of the concerned community group and the exact role of the manifesto in the negotiations were not clear. There seemed to be no official documentation or archival material to suggest that they played an official role in the final stages of creating College No. 7. Yet they were consulted on college issues.

Ms. Glover describes how she and the Concerned Members of Bedford Stuyvesant were asked by Dr. Lee, Chair of the Executive Committee of the Board, to review and comment on the resumes of three applicants for the position of president of College No.7.<sup>126</sup> Community members now acted as advisors to the Board's Executive Committee rather than as equal partners in the creation of College No.7. Several months later, Dr. Richard Trent was appointed president of College No.7, effective March 1, 1970.<sup>127</sup>

Those in the community who did not agree with the Board's decision sent a series of letters to the Board and to Dr. Trent himself. Al Vann's telegram to Chancellor Bowker asserted that the Board was perpetuating colonialism by choosing a group in the community with which the Board

was willing to work. Vann asserted that the Board chose those, "... it (the Board) wishes to deal with ... who will do their bidding."<sup>128</sup> Vann demanded that the Board insure community participation through a process of popular election.<sup>129</sup> Letters were also sent directly to Dr. Trent urging him not to accept the appointment because "...Your acceptance of the appointment will only throw our community into a more chaotic state."<sup>130</sup> Despite the letters, Dr. Trent accepted the presidency.

*Part III*

**Medgar Evers College  
Is Born**

In March 1970 Dr Trent began to operationalize plans for College No.7. He formed an Ad Hoc Committee of community residents with which he would work. It is not clear how many members of this committee were from the Concerned Community group that had emerged in 1969 and worked with Dr. Lee on the Presidential Search Committee. However, the members of this newly formed Ad Hoc Committee for College No.7 included community activists and politicians, many of whom worked on the College after the Negotiating Team had been disbanded.

Thomas Fortune and Shirley Chisholm were among the community members who came to the first meeting with Dr. Trent in March 1970 where they discussed the name for the college. This Ad Hoc Committee received official approval as the community's representatives who would work with the president to define the newly established college. At this first meeting, members considered Martin Luther King as one possible choice for the College's name, and they also discussed enlarging the committee to include community activists like Louise Glover and Ella Sease, as well as representatives appointed by Fredrick Burhardt, Chair of the CUNY Board of Higher Education. On March 16<sup>th</sup>, Burhardt selected James Oscar Lee, Luis Quero Chiesa, and Minneola Ingersoll to serve on the College Committee.<sup>131</sup>

The Ad Hoc Committee would meet every month with President Trent, and was responsible for keeping the

community informed of the developments regarding the College. It was also charged with overseeing the hiring of faculty and administration and defining the curriculum. At the second meeting of the Committee, John Enoch, representative of the Bedford Branch of the YMCA, was elected acting Chair of the Committee.<sup>132</sup> A sub-committee was formed to look at and discuss the professional degrees to be offered at the College, and at the May meeting, the Committee approved the former Brooklyn Preparatory High School located on Carroll Street in the Crown Heights section of Brooklyn, as the first site of the new College in Central Brooklyn. Chairperson Enoch also established a by-laws committee that would clearly define the membership and function of the Ad Hoc Committee, and the Committee's relationship to the University's Board OF Higher Education and the President of the College.<sup>133</sup>

On June 22, 1970, the Board approved the name of Kings College, and on June 30, 1970, the name of the Ad Hoc Planning Committee was changed to the Community Council of Kings College of The City University of New York.<sup>134</sup> (It is this Community Council - with, of course, a changing membership - that is still functioning at the College today.) However, in July, 1970, the Community Council was informed that there was a small college in Ossining New York with the name of Kings College; therefore, they would need to find a new name. The members compiled a list of

suggested names which included, T. McCann Steward, Medgar Evers, Charles Drew, and Weeksville.<sup>135</sup>

According to Louise Glover, the Community Council felt concerned that the Board might choose a name that would not be in keeping with the community's wishes, so the Community Council took action. Ms. Glover describes meeting at a local McDonald's restaurant where several members talked about possible names for the college. Later, when she and some of these members were on their way to an NAACP meeting in upstate New York, they agreed to advocate for the name of Medgar Evers, the slain Civil Rights leader who had been head of the NAACP chapter in Mississippi.<sup>136</sup>

At the August 28 meeting of the Community College Council, the name Medgar Evers was agreed upon, and on September 28, 1970, it became the official name of what had formerly been known as College No.7 in Central Brooklyn. It was also announced that President Trent had received a letter from Governor Rockefeller officially approving the College as a four-year CUNY institution.<sup>137</sup> This letter confirmed the Board's earlier vote in 1969 that recreated Community College No.7 as a four-year institution of CUNY. Though it had taken over six years of hard work by community activists, Medgar Evers College was finally acknowledged by CUNY and the State of New York.<sup>138</sup> The slain Civil Rights leader's name would help define the mission of the College and convey the message that a

college born in struggle would remain committed to the struggle for social justice.

Following a year of meetings, hiring staff, defining the curriculum a small pilot group of students entered the College in the summer of 1971. In September 1971 the College formally opened its doors as a four-year CUNY institution in the Crown Heights community of Brooklyn in a combination of owned and rented facilities.<sup>139</sup>

In creating more opportunity for Black and Latino students, CUNY endorsed new admission standards. As an experimental college in an urban community, Medgar Evers College was an open admissions college where a special "drop out program" designated for 200 CUNY "dropout" students would be located. These students would be provided with a second chance for a university education, and through this new CUNY program housed in the College, the University would be able to identify factors associated with "dropping-out." It would then develop and evaluate measures to counteract these factors. The University believed that, "This identification and evaluation during the early stages of open admissions would provide the University with information that would prove helpful in the further development of the program."<sup>140</sup> From its inception, the experimental nature of the College included working with a student population, many of whom were under-prepared and were, for the first time, being given a chance to attend a CUNY school. The College in turn was to develop new ways

of working with the students in order to expand opportunity and ensure excellence.

In the early years the role of the Community Council was extensive. As an official body of the College, it chose sites for the College, worked on curriculum, and explored possible new degree programs in Library Science and Inner City Studies. It also examined resumes for faculty and administrators, and investigated the possibility of establishing a day care center. The stated purpose of the Community Council was to provide community support for the administration and assist with the development of the College. While the institution of a community council as an official arm of a public institution was unique to Medgar Evers College, it operated differently than originally envisioned by the Negotiating Team in 1968. Yet the involvement of the community in defining the College remained unique in CUNY and an important and distinguishing feature of the College.

In March 1971, the Board approved several new BA programs, including a BA in Teacher Education, Inner City Studies, a BS in Accounting, and an AAS in the Sciences with a medical option in Nursing. These programs, which would become the backbone of the College, fulfilled the College's primary mission as had been envisioned by the founders, that is, to provide professional studies in fields that enriched the community. The Board of Higher Education, in approving these programs, documented the City's need for

well prepared elementary teachers trained to work with inner city children. The Education and Nursing programs were to be innovative in that the Education Program would pilot the use of performance criteria, and the Nursing Program would, "specifically be directed ... to nurture the well."<sup>141</sup>

Though the old Brooklyn Preparatory High School in Crown Heights was the initial space for the College, additional space was rented in other Central Brooklyn locations to house the growing student population. In 1972, a BS Degree in Nursing was approved to articulate with the already established AAS degree, and new programs were continually added in these early years. By 1973 these included a BA in Psychology and a BS in Biology to prepare students for professional studies in Dentistry, Medicine and Psychology.

The vision and energy evident in the first few years became compromised in the 1975 -1976 economic and political crisis in CUNY. Under President Trent, the College lost its senior college status and became a community college with six baccalaureate programs, an unusual hybrid which caused a great deal of confusion among students and the Community. Questions were raised about the meaning and worth of a Baccalaureate degree obtained from a community college. While the degree granting privileges at Medgar Evers College did not change, the mood and energy shifted. The deal made between the Board and the College's administration angered the community, faculty and

students. It seemed to them that the long struggle to make Medgar Evers a four-year institution had been forgotten. Additionally, CUNY, for the first time in its more than one hundred years of serving New York City, imposed tuition at the University in spite of student and faculty protests.

The Medgar Evers College student body, which at this time was comprised mainly of African Americans and a few Latino and Caribbean students, was politicized, as was the faculty and staff. A new energy surfaced in response to this crisis. Medgar Evers faculty and students acted in conjunction with faculty and staff from around CUNY to fight the imposition of tuition and the proposed changes that would be made to several of the Colleges within CUNY. There were many demonstrations by the College community, including a take-over of the Board of Higher Education (BHE) buildings as well as a sit-in on the East River Drive.

In spite of this political activity, tuition was imposed on CUNY students, and Medgar became a two-year institution with four-year programs. The long hard struggle by the community representatives - in the body of the Negotiating Team - was reversed. Angered that President Trent had compromised the intent of the founders, many began to rethink the original struggle over who should be president of the College. Perhaps Al Vann and the other community members who thought similarly to him were right to believe that the central issue in obtaining a college for the community involved choosing a president who demonstrated

a belief in community control rather than someone who had been put in place by the Board of Higher Education. These faculty and community activists argued that the Board's choice for president had, in fact, jeopardized the integrity of the College community and the vision of the founders. It was most evident in the compromise over four-year status. Medgar had become the only CUNY College to accept community college status while many of the other CUNY schools gained back their original status. In addition, while other CUNY units had quality day care facilities, the lack of day care facilities at Medgar Evers increased the anger of the largely older female student population.

These contradictions and concerns hovered over the College for the next five to six years. It was, therefore, not surprising that in April 1982 differences between President Trent and a popular Dean of Administration erupted into a full-scale uprising. Students were consistently angry at the President and his administration. They had numerous complaints ranging from their perceived mistreatment in administrative offices to their concern over the lack of Black Studies at the College. Fueled by this anger, students took over the President's office and drew up a list of demands that were later submitted to the Board. These demands included: the removal of President Trent; the renewal of senior college status; the creation of Black Studies and Women Studies, and an Honors program; funds for an

expanded library; the creation of a Women's Center; and the development of day care to help the 75% female population.

Perhaps, the greatest betrayal (felt by everyone) was that the President had accepted community college status. Even though the College was allowed to keep its Baccalaureate programs, this change in status was a betrayal of the many years of struggle by the community for a senior college. It also meant that the College would receive inadequate funding that often resulted in inferior physical conditions, a lack of technology, and an increase in the number of adjunct faculty. President Trent was castigated for selling out the College and the Community, ignoring the needs of the students, and fostering his own self-interest at the expense of the founders' dream of a four year community controlled college.

The student takeover, which was supported by some faculty, staff, and community members led to the establishment of the Student, Faculty, Community Coalition to Save Medgar Evers College. "The Coalition," as they became known, made it clear that they wanted a president who understood the mission of the College and insisted that they were willing to continue the struggle begun eighteen years earlier. Many of the original community members who were associated with the negotiating team to establish the College, including Al Vann, Jitu Weiusi, and Job Mashiriki joined hands with the students, faculty and staff to wage this new battle.

Once again Medgar Evers College would make New York history. The formation of a coalition between students, staff, faculty and the community to accomplish the goal of removing a college president set a precedent. Furthermore, the threat of police removal of Coalition members from the President's office, which might have lead to violent confrontation, forced the Coalition to engage renowned lawyers William Kunsler, C. Vernon Mason, and Randolph Scott McLaughlin to help them. The lawyers took the case before the Brooklyn Supreme Court, and the Coalition gained a historic victory that granted them the right to remain peacefully in the President's office. The students were elated, as were the other members of the Coalition. The courts had recognized their right to protest. The protest and the take-over of the President's office lasted 110 days, and besides the successful removal of the president, the Coalition subsequently gained the victory of establishing a day care center in what had been his plush office. That day care center, named the Charles Romaine - Ella Baker Child Care Center after a deceased popular science professor and a Civil Rights activist respectively, still exists to date.

The 1982 graduation was also without precedent. Held at the Brooklyn Academy of Music without the deposed president, the graduation was presided over by the Student, Faculty, and Community Coalition. Many students, faculty and staff wore African inspired attire while others wore traditional caps and gowns. The graduation was attended by

CUNY administrative representatives and prominent members of the Black Community. Graduation speakers spoke of the need for Medgar Evers to remain wedded to the community that it serves, and for the students and graduates to continue to "give back" to the community. The graduates, faculty, and community representatives marched out of the Academy auditorium to the tune of *Living on the Front Line* by Eddie Grant, instead of the traditional *Pomp and Circumstance*.

Like most coalitions, the Student, Faculty, Community Coalition was a tenuous group. Friction developed when some of the more conservative faculty became critical of the Coalition's demands that went beyond the removal of the President. These faculty members argued that continued confrontation with the Board would hurt the College. The Coalition prevailed, however, and their continued struggle proved fruitful when the College developed a women's center and a day care center for the children of the largely female student population. Both institutions remain a significant part of the College and greatly benefit our current student population. The resolution of the rest of the students' demands, including senior college status, would only begin to materialize when a new president was in place.

Immediately following the removal of President Trent, Dr. Dennis Paul, a faculty member at the college, was appointed Interim Administrator by CUNY while a search for a permanent president was implemented. He remained at the

College from 1982-1984 when Jay Carrington Chun II was selected as the second president of Medgar Evers College. Chun's tenure at the College was short lived. Within three years President Chun was asked to resign and was replaced by Dr. Leo Corbie who became the Acting President until 1989 when, after an extensive search, Dr. Edison O. Jackson was selected president.

Though four-year status was still not granted, the College continued to offer Baccalaureate degrees while remaining a community college, and this hybrid situation hurt the College both financially and in terms of the community's perception of it. The College received less money than other senior colleges in CUNY, and many people felt that students who graduated from a community college with a bachelor's degree would not receive the same respect as those students who graduated from a senior college. Many in the College community felt that it was ridiculous and racist for CUNY to keep the College's two-year status while "allowing" it to offer Baccalaureate degrees. With this issue on the front burner, there was an intensification of political activity around four year status and tuition hikes.

The 80's were an energized, creative, and tumultuous period in the College's history. It was a period which gave rise to a decade of strong cultural programming that included the College and community-based Kwanzaa celebrations; anti-apartheid programs and activity; the establishment of an annual Tribute to the Ancestors of the Middle Passage;

the Melanin conferences; international travel and study; the extension and elaboration of Black History and Women's History month activities and more.

The College grew to become an intellectual and cultural force in Central Brooklyn. *Dr. Betty Shabazz*, the widow of Malcolm X, was Dean of Institutional Development and Outreach and Professor of Nursing. She brought speakers and funds to the College, and her dynamism meant that the College's impact as a cultural and political center of Black life would expand. Other important initiatives like the International Cross-Cultural Black Women's Studies Institute brought together community activists, students, workers, and faculty from around the world. The Institute, whose information headquarters is located at the College, held conferences at different international sites, including England, Hawaii, Costa Rica, South Africa, Panama, and Japan. The National Black Writers Conferences brought prominent writers like Derek Walcott, Gwendolyn Brooks, Henry Louis Gates, Quincy Troup, Sonia Sanchez, Amiri Baraka, Walter Mosley, Bebe Moore Campbell, Terry McMillan, and others to the College and became a major event for both Black writers/intellectuals and the College.

Under the third and present president, Edison O Jackson, there was a shift in the student population. The College began servicing a predominantly immigrant population from the Caribbean, as compared to the predominately African American population of the previous

decades. The nineties brought a less political and decidedly more career oriented student population to the College, and the political activism of the previous decades became muted. Many of the intellectual, cultural and community programs initiated in the 80s continued, and initiatives like the newly funded Africana Resource Center, which brought Black leaders and intellectuals like Molefi Asante, Cornel West, Bernice Johnson Reagon and Lonnie Greunier and which did outreach in the schools of the Community, were promoted. Study Abroad programs were encouraged, and the faculty developed summer study opportunities for students that included study in countries like Brazil, England, and France.

The new president, Dr Edison O. Jackson galvanized the College community's energy toward the ongoing struggle for senior college status. Dr. Jackson, who helped to stabilize the College, built upon the efforts of the many who came before him, utilized personal vision, commitment and excellent work with New York's Black and Puerto Rican Caucus, other City and State elected representatives, and the Board to have four-year status reinstated. In July 1994 Medgar Evers College once again became a senior college within CUNY, though it would continue to be plagued by inadequate funding.

During this same period, the College lived under the constant fear that the economic problems of CUNY and the CUNY-wide cuts would be felt the hardest at Medgar Evers,

still the only college in CUNY that had a predominately Black faculty, staff, administration and student body. According to many, Medgar seemed to remain the stepchild of City University. It was perhaps due to political savvy and recruitment efforts of the President and his administration, and the continued commitment and resolve of the community (as shown in the Black and Puerto Rican Caucus of New York State Assembly), as well as the diligent work of an outstanding and committed faculty and staff that the College not only survived the fiscally lean years of the nineties but also increased its student population and eventually got approval for two new buildings.

With maturity, the old fire and turmoil, which had characterized the earliest years of struggle and the opening of the College, grew less evident. This was definitely a period of stability for the College. The community, as represented through the Community Council (a standing committee in the College), continues meeting monthly, yet it functions mainly to generate scholarship money and political support for the College. The Council maintains a voice within the College's governance through elected seats on the College Council (the governing body of the College) though the community's influence and power is not as evident as in the founding years. Additional support for the College comes through the Black elected officials that have continued to assist Medgar Evers by sponsoring a number of

college based community programs, including the Center for Law and Social Justice and the Caribbean Research Center.

By the mid-nineties, there was a new energy devoted to academics within the College community. Work commenced on developing the new Interdisciplinary Studies program (which would house Black Studies and Women's Studies), revising curriculum, developing more rigorous entrance and program requirements in the Education Department, enhancing skills programs, and an intensive Freshmen Year Program. New BA programs in such areas as Math, Environmental Science, English, and Liberal Arts, among others were encouraged. Today the College has 18 Baccalaureate Degree programs, a nationally accredited Business program, an approved Nursing program, and a nationally accredited Education program.

Most recently, the dream was brought forward by the College's groundbreaking ceremony for its' new building. On a bright sunny June morning in 2004, the Jackie Robinson band could be heard in all the blocks surrounding the College, as elegantly dressed community members, faculty, students, staff, and CUNY administrators milled around with prominent politicians as they ate a sumptuous brunch, laughed, talked and reminisced. It had been thirty-three years since the founding of the College and everyone had gathered for the much awaited ground breaking ceremony. Two new buildings would be constructed with state of the art technology. Those who had struggled with so little for so

long were finally getting the much needed space and technology. It was clearly a joyous day!

The Governor of New York had come to mark the occasion, as had City Councilman, Al Vann, a major figure in the founding of Medgar Evers College. Other community activists and residents were present, as were faculty and staff who had been there from the earliest days when energy to build a college in the community often demanded round the clock commitment to new ideas. People came from as far as Massachusetts and as close as Crown Heights. They knew they had to be there for this momentous occasion when finally there was evidence that the disparate buildings would become an enlarged urban campus with two new state of the art buildings. The College had come a long way from its earliest days when faculty and students wandered the many religious institutions of Central Brooklyn to attend class. Medgar Evers College, which had been a dream in the minds of community residents, had come of age.

Under the leadership of Dr. Jackson, the College entered a period of significant growth, and began promoting teaching excellence through its Carter G. Woodson Award and its newly established Center for Teaching and Learning. Workshops for faculty development and mid-winter conferences on teaching and learning were encouraged, as was exploring new ways of working with and encouraging students through mentorship programs, the nationally

acclaimed Freshmen Year Program, and the Black Male Development and Empowerment Center.

The College, an important and integral part of The City University of New York, has a special place in Central Brooklyn. It is a college that is designed to be of the community and for the community; it is a College that addresses some of the central social concerns facing higher education in the United States, including poverty, racism, inequality, and immigration.

Of course, questions and concerns remain as community members, faculty, and students wonder whether Medgar Evers College will ever receive parity with the rest of CUNY, and whether it will truly embody the image of Medgar Evers, the man. Only time will tell whether the College will continue to move in the direction envisioned by the community that fought so hard to establish it or whether it will become someone else's dream.

Most people agree, however, that the College has come a long way, and that it has produced some of the finest graduates that the country (indeed the world) and local community have ever had. It is the graduates who remain the real testimony of the meaning and purpose of the College. The College has graduates who have become certified teachers, lawyers, surgeons, pediatricians, nurses, United Nations program developers, computer technologists, elected officials, prominent artists, social change workers, business people and more. Many of the graduates have

returned to their communities to make a difference despite the difficulties they have faced. They are the ones who carry forth the dream of the founders. In fact, the story of the founding of the College tells only a small though very important part of the entire story of Medgar Evers. The stories of the students and how they arrived at the point of graduation (or in some cases did not arrive at the graduation point) are a significant part of the College story too. It is the uniqueness of the entire story, that is, the College history, the stories of the students, and the power of a community that must inspire all who enter the doors of the College to continue to bring the dream forward. More importantly, the expansion of the College and the success of many of its graduates offer proof of what community struggle and community participation can bring forth, and they are shining examples of what the struggle for access, social justice and excellence in the tradition of Medgar Wiley Evers, the man, really means.

## *Part I*

### **Endnotes**

1. In several memos from the Chancellor and the Board of Higher Education, and in several articles in *The New York Times*, the community of Bedford-Stuyvesant is referred to as a "slum". See memorandum and articles in Bowker Files, CUNY Archives and select *New York Times* articles such as M.A. Farber, "City University Will Build in a Brooklyn Slum; Community College to Rise in Bedford-Stuyvesant," *The New York Times*, 2Feb. 1968, 32.

2. "No Nonsense Education; Albert Hosmer Bowker," *New York Times*, 26 July, 1963, p.23.

3. At this point, the newly formed City University consisted of the following four senior colleges: City, Brooklyn, Queens, and Hunter College. City College, the first of the CUNY schools, began in 1847 and over the next century, each of the other senior colleges and the three community colleges developed into separate schools that would, in 1961, become the City University of New York. Under Chancellor Bowker, additional senior colleges, included John Jay, Richmond, Lehman, York, Medgar Evers, and Baruch. The additional community colleges,

included Hostos, La Guardia, New York City Community College, Borough of Manhattan and Queensborough.

4. Vann, Al. "Medgar Evers College," Table I, N.D. p.15. (this pamphlet has been lost and no copies can be currently located).

5. Ella Sease, interview, June 2000.

6. Louise Glover, interview, June 2000.

7. Membership list appeared on letterhead entitled, "The Central Brooklyn Coordinating Council Inc: Building a Better Bedford-Stuyvesant," Louise Glover Archives.

8. "A Beach Is A Beach, A College A College," *Long Island Star Journal*, 24 Jan. 1964, p.6.

9. Charles G. Bennett, "Planner Opposes Site for College," *The New York Times*, 21 Jan. 1964, p. 31.

10. Ibid.

11. Memorandum, "To All Members, " from Dr. Gloster, M.D., President, Brooklyn Coordinating Council, Feb. 4, 1964, Louise Glover Archives.

12. Ibid.

13. Ibid.

14. Chancellor Bowker to Mayor Lindsay, 29 Jan. 1968, Bowker Files, CUNY Archives. We do not hear about this commitment directly until 1968 when Bowker refers to this commitment in the above cited letter to Mayor Lindsay.

15. Conference flyer, One Day on the War on Poverty in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Louise Glover Archives, 21 Oct. 1964.

16. Louise Glover, interview, June 2000.

17. Memorandum, "To Administrative Council" By Chancellor Bowker, Jan. 31, 1967 in Minutes, Board of Higher Education, 27 Feb. 1967, pp. 59-60.

18. Title VI, Section 601, of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 stated that Federal Funds could be withdrawn from public institutions that were segregated/refused to desegregate. The Higher Education Act of 1965 provided more money for schools and these funds were only allocated to desegregated institutions. The U.S. Department of Justice was now authorized to file discrimination suits and the Office of Education developed guidelines for school desegregation. By the mid-1960s the federal government was exerting pressure on all educational institutions to become integrated. This had a profound effect on CUNY.

19. Memorandum, "To Administrative Council," by Chancellor Bowker, 31 Jan., 1967, in Minutes, Board of Higher Education, 27 Feb. 1967, pp. 58-9.

20. "Undergraduate Ethnic Census", Office of the Vice Chancellor for the Executive Office, CUNY, Fall, 1967.; Memorandum "To Administrative Council," by Chancellor Bowker, 31 Jan, 1967 In Minutes, Board of Higher Education, 27 Feb., 1967. p. 58, records figures for 1966 and these 1966 figures are the first time we see evidence of this ethnic data.

21. "Undergraduate Ethnic Census", prepared by Office of the Vice Chancellor for the Executive Office, CUNY, Fall 1, 1967, Bowker Files, CUNY Archives.

22. Ibid.

23. Ibid., pp. 4 & 6.

24. Ibid., p. 12.

25. Peter Khiss, "Sociologist Predicts Increasing Negro Militancy," *The New York Times*, 15 Oct. 1967, p.76.

26. Minutes, Board of Higher Education, 27 Nov. 1967, S294-96 and "A Proposal for the Establishment of Community College No. Seven," 28 Nov. 1967 p.14, Bowker Files, CUNY Archives.

27. Ibid.

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# Medgar Evers College

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