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# New Negroes on Campus: St. Clair Drake and the Culture of Education, Reform, and Rebellion at Hampton Institute



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# New Negroes on Campus: St. Clair Drake and the Culture of Education, Reform, and Rebellion at Hampton Institute

*Andrew J. Rosa*

As the New Century began . . . more blacks and whites than ever before had lost faith in one another . . . The South, everyone could see, had changed enormously over the last quarter century. Everyone could see, too, that the new order came with heavy costs. *Edward Ayers*<sup>1</sup>

The Negro race needs colleges. We need them today as never before; but we do not need colleges so much that we can sacrifice the manhood and womanhood of our children to the thoughtlessness of the North or the prejudice of the South. *W. E. B. Du Bois*<sup>2</sup>

My experiences as a student at Hampton Institute in Virginia moved me to want to study, understand, and change the odd world of Jim Crow. *St. Clair Drake*.<sup>3</sup>

## Introduction

On March 15, 1925, Walter Scott Copeland, owner and editor of the Newport News *Daily Press*, charged that Hampton Institute was teaching and practicing “social equality between the white and negro races . . . The niggers in that institution,” he wrote, “were being taught that there ought not to be any distinction between themselves and white people.” His observation came from his wife, who was distraught after having seen a performance of the Denishawn Dancers while seated next to a black women in Hampton’s Ogden Hall only two weeks before.<sup>4</sup> Based in Los Angeles and New York, the all-white Denishawn Dancers

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<sup>1</sup>Edward Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life after Reconstruction* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 409.

<sup>2</sup>W. E. B. Du Bois, “Diuturni Silenti,” in *The Education of Black People, Ten Critiques, 1906–1960*, ed. Herbert Aptheker (New York: Monthly Review, 1973), 59.

<sup>3</sup>Benjamin Bowser, “Studies of the African Diaspora: The Work and Reflections of St. Clair Drake,” *Sage Race Relations Abstract* 14, no. 3 (August 1989): 3.

<sup>4</sup>Walter Scott Copeland, Newport News *Daily Press*, 15 March 1925.

toured the world in the early 1920s, bringing back to the United States a form of modern dance and “exotic ballet” inspired by nonwestern cultures of the “Far East.”<sup>5</sup> “Barefoot and barelegged,” they managed to dance their way into the imagination of racial purists in Virginia, who, like Copeland himself, perceived such a scene as offensive, believing it would “surely lead to racial amalgamation” and the “destruction of the Anglo Saxon race.”<sup>6</sup> Rather than endure such a fate, Copeland heeded the warnings of eugenicists Henry Fairfield Osborn, Madison Grant, and Theodore Lothrop Stoddard in saying that he “preferred every white child in the United States were sterilized and the Anglo Saxon race left to perish in its purity.”<sup>7</sup>

In an effort to placate public concern with “the problem of race mixing,” Hampton’s third white principal, James E. Gregg, assured all white Virginians that they had nothing to fear, as there had been “no essential change” in the “principles or practices of the school.” On the night in question, he insisted, the “institute had simply tried to be courteous and fair” to its “white supporters and Negro constituency,” concluding that he could “not imagine that any thoughtful person could advocate the amalgamation of such widely diverse races.” Unconvinced by Gregg’s assurances, Copeland interpreted such acts of civility as a sign of “social equality” and contrary to the “Virginia spirit, our sense of propriety,” and “time-honored customs.”<sup>8</sup> If “gone unchecked,” warned another, “no power on earth would prevent the nigger from entering our homes and marrying our daughters.”<sup>9</sup>

Norfolk’s black newspaper, the *Journal and Guide*, condemned Copeland’s editorials as a “venomous appeal to race prejudice,” and W. E. B. Du Bois, a longtime critic of Hampton’s “vocational curriculum, dearth of Negro faculty,” and “connections to white philanthropy,” considered such a sentiment an affront to “Negro respectability.”<sup>10</sup> Though sharp and swift, the black response could do little to stem the

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<sup>5</sup>For a history of the Denishawn Dancers, see Jane Sherman, “Martha and Doris Denishawn: A Closer Look,” *Dance Chronicle* 14, no. 2 (1994): 179–93.

<sup>6</sup>Copeland, Newport News *Daily Press*, 15 March 1925; Doris Humphrey, *An Artist First* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1972), 40.

<sup>7</sup>Copeland, Newport News *Daily Press*, 15 March 1925; for a discussion of Copeland’s relationship to eugenicists, see Richard B. Sherman, “The Last Stand: The Fight for Racial Integrity in Virginia in the 1920s,” *Journal of Southern History* 54, no. 1 (February 1988): 72.

<sup>8</sup>Copeland, Newport News *Daily Press*, 20 March 1925.

<sup>9</sup>Raymond Wolters, *The New Negro on Campus: Black College Rebellions of the 1920s* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975), 22.

<sup>10</sup>Editorial, *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, 28 March 1925; for Du Bois’s criticism of Hampton, see W. E. B. Du Bois to Miss J. E. Davis, 16 June 1917, W. E. B. Du Bois Papers, 4877/5–886, W. E. B. Du Bois Library, University of Massachusetts; W. E. B. Du Bois, Editorial, *Crisis* 30 (May 1925): 10–11.

legislative tide that had, since the turn of the century, increasingly mandated a system of legal segregation in Virginia based on the preservation of “racial integrity.” Beginning with the railroads in 1900, the shadow of Jim Crow quickly fell over the state, enveloping, by 1918, streetcars, residential areas, hospitals, prisons, and cemeteries.<sup>11</sup> By 1925, Hampton was looked upon as just another site of interracial contact, which needed to be brought into conformity with existing laws if for no other reason than to “relieve white people of the embarrassment of attending public events at Ogden Hall.” After all, as Mrs. Copeland remarked in a letter to Virginia’s governor, E. Lee Trinkle, “this is a white man’s land and God made the Negro an inferior and disadvantaged race.”<sup>12</sup>

For his part, the governor remained detached from the controversy swirling around Hampton in the summer of 1925, maintaining that his office held “no jurisdiction in the matter.”<sup>13</sup> The groundswell of support for legislative action, however, came from outside of government where newspapermen and leaders of Virginia’s Anglo-Saxon Club pressed a young local delegate, George Alvin Massenburg, to introduce a bill in the General Assembly that would uphold “racial integrity” by requiring segregated seating at all public gatherings. In February of the following year, the Virginia Senate passed the “Massenburg Bill” against little opposition; the next month it became law.<sup>14</sup> Though originating with Hampton, the new law was strengthened to apply to the entire state, requiring all places of public assemblage and entertainment adhere to a policy of racial separation on penalty of fines up to \$500.00.<sup>15</sup>

In September of 1927, a young St. Clair Drake left his home in Staunton, Virginia to enroll as a student at Hampton Institute. Once there he encountered a school in revolt against itself and this system of segregation that now mandated black students, many of whom, by this time, had come from outside the South, accept, even on Hampton’s campus, a social order predicated on ideas of black racial inferiority. At issue was the very meaning of higher education for black people and the moral authority of a forwardly thinking white college principal from Massachusetts, who, with the best intentions, walked a fine line between

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<sup>11</sup>Richard B. Sherman, “Teachings at Hampton Institute: Social Equality, and the Virginia Public Assemblage Act of 1926,” *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 4, no. 3 (July 1987): 275–77.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, 281.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup>Sherman, “Teachings at Hampton Institute,” 289–90; for a discussion of the Anglo-Saxon Clubs in Virginia, see J. Douglass Smith, “The Campaign for Racial Purity and the Erosion of Paternalism in Virginia, 1922–1930,” *Journal of Southern History* 68, no. 1 (February 2002): 65–106.

<sup>15</sup>“The Journalism Award Named for a White Supremacist Opposed to Race-Mixing at Hampton University,” *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* 30 (Winter 2000–2001): 82.

the competing expectations of ardent segregationists and a generation of students that insisted on training that would “advance the race.”<sup>16</sup> Though initially met with stiff resistance, widespread condemnation, and severe reprisals, the organized efforts of students to quicken the pace of change begun by Gregg signified the passing of one era, marked by the hegemony of the Hampton-Tuskegee model of education, and the beginning of another reflecting the higher aspirations of black youth, who, in the aftermath of the “Great War,” demanded all the benefits and privileges promised by modernity.

The Hampton Drake entered was a site of racial contestation uniquely informed by black student resistance to the increasing constraints of segregation. His reflection on this period adds a personal dimension to the existing historiography on black education in the South. More specifically, it shows how efforts to modernize Hampton gave rise to an atmosphere of reform and rebellion, which dramatically transformed a culture of education that originated with its founder, Samuel Chapman Armstrong. A student strike and the world it created at Hampton set Drake on a path of social activism characterized, in its earliest years, by his particular commitment to “study, understand, and change the odd world of Jim Crow.”<sup>17</sup> After Hampton, he would carry this into a study of the system of racial segregation in the Mississippi Delta during the Great Depression; Chicago’s Bronzeville in the era of black migration; a postwar society of West Indian and African immigrants in Cardiff, Wales; Ghana in an age of African independence; the Caribbean in the period of federation, and back to the United States during and after the Civil Rights movement. His participant observation of black condition(s) in each of these contexts gave rise to a rich body of scholarship challenging established knowledge and foreshadowing new approaches to the study of race and racism in the modern world. That Hampton planted the seed for a life thus lived is an expressive reflection of the models of intellectual activity he encountered there and the courage shown by black youth collectively aligned against a philosophy of education with roots in the postwar South.

### The History of an Idea

Drake arrived to Hampton at a critical juncture in its history. As he explains, it was a school in the midst of transitioning from a teachers training institute, with a vocational focus, to a fully accredited four-year liberal arts college.<sup>18</sup> Corresponding to a noticeable change in the

<sup>16</sup>Raymond Wolters, *The New Negro on Campus*, 232.

<sup>17</sup>Benjamin Bowser, “Studies of the African Diaspora,” 3.

<sup>18</sup>Wolters, *The New Negro on Campus*, 232.

mood of its students, it was as if, as James D. Anderson observed, the “social and cultural values of ex-slaves,” who struggled to develop “an educational ideology singularly appropriate to their own defense” in the free schools and Sabbath schools of the post-Civil War South, had finally “come into ascendancy” at Hampton.<sup>19</sup> Signaling what Drake saw as the overthrow of “the New England missionary spirit of a previous epoch” by “an ethos more in accord with what Dr. Alain Locke called the New Negro,” this passing of an era at Hampton marked for him a critical break in the culture of black education.<sup>20</sup> The full extent and meaning of this transition, as it proceeded through a series of reforms and a student strike, can only be fully understood against a reading of Hampton’s history and the shifting ideological underpinnings that guided the Hampton Idea since its founding.

Established in 1868, Hampton Institute was the outgrowth of efforts by the American Missionary Association (AMA), in cooperation with the Freedmen’s Bureau, to establish a normal school for the training of teachers from among the population of newly emancipated slaves in the Tidewater.<sup>21</sup> From the view of its missionary founders, Hampton had providential meaning. Virginia’s Eastern shore marked the place where the first permanent British settlement was established, and the school’s mission to “uplift” the freedmen from the “degradations of slavery” redeemed that area where, over a decade later, some “twenty and odd” Africans were exchanged for provisions by a Dutch slaver. To spearhead its efforts in bringing ex-slaves “to know and appreciate” freedom and “all the finer elements of modern civilization,” the AMA turned to Armstrong, whose vow to establish “a school to educate teachers for this race” he believed “a more patriotic, more difficult work than fighting for my country.”<sup>22</sup>

As sub-commissioner of the Freedmen’s Bureau with supervision of “Negro affairs” in nine counties of eastern Virginia, Armstrong became familiar with the educational activities of northern mission societies and developed, according to his biographer Robert Francis Eng, a unique

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<sup>19</sup>James D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860–1935* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 33.

<sup>20</sup>St. Clair Drake, Introduction to *American Diary*, by Enoch Waters (Chicago: Path Press Inc., 1987), xvi.

<sup>21</sup>As early as 1862, educational campaigns in the vicinity of Hampton Institute were begun through the combined efforts of Union military forces, the American Missionary Association, and, eventually, the Freedmen’s Bureau. Hampton Institute was supported for its first five years with funding from the Avery Fund, American Missionary Association, Freedmen’s Bureau, Peabody Fund, and the Land Scrip Fund, the last of which was established by an act of Congress in 1862 for the support of agricultural schools, see L.P. Jackson, “The Origin of Hampton Institute,” *Journal of Negro History* 10, no. 2 (April 1925): 144–47.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, 145.

view of the “grand cause for racial rights.”<sup>23</sup> On being elected by the AMA to lead Hampton Institute in 1867, Armstrong injected himself into the “providential destiny” of race and nation, believing to him belonged the special responsibility of “opening the door for this people, who I dearly love, into intelligence, self-control, manhood and womanhood.”<sup>24</sup> Officially incorporated by the General Assembly of Virginia in 1870 as Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute, Armstrong dedicated himself for the next quarter century to making the school a national force for restoring peace and bringing material prosperity in the South.<sup>25</sup>

As principal of Hampton, Armstrong developed a unique manual labor routine that served as the moral foundation of its teacher-training program and the cornerstone of the Hampton Idea. Establishing farms and small shops on the campus, Armstrong worked his students “long and hard” so that they would come to embrace and teach the “ethic of hard toil” and “the dignity of labor” to masses of southern blacks.<sup>26</sup> Hampton’s curriculum was short in length and did not offer a bachelor’s degree to its graduates. Moreover, a four-year secondary school education was not a prerequisite for admission. In fact, most students who entered Hampton in its first half-century did so with a less than an adequate high school education. Consistent with Armstrong’s philosophy, manual labor was the chief criterion for determining educational excellence, and “the blockheads” or “plodders” the standard by which “all student-teachers at Hampton were measured.”<sup>27</sup>

Hampton’s labor routine, an essential part of its teacher training program, long outlasted the school’s founder, “intruding into every aspect” of Drake’s early educational experience.”The manual labor program served the practical ends of offsetting operational expenses and giving students like Drake an education at little to no cost to their families. As Drake recalled, Hampton’s “primary appeal” for his family was “its widely advertised opportunities to work your way through.” Though milder than the labor experiences of previous generations, Drake met the cost of tuition, room, and board by working as a waiter in the school’s segregated dining hall and “keeping desk” at the segregated Holly Tree Guesthouse. Far from teaching him a trade, this routine represented an ideological force that, as James Leloudis explains,

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<sup>23</sup> Robert Francis Eng, *Educating the Disfranchised and Disinherited: Samuel Chapman Armstrong and Hampton Institute, 1839–1893* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1999), 72.

<sup>24</sup> Jackson, “The Origin of Hampton Institute,” 147.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 147–48.

<sup>26</sup> Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860–1935*, 34.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 34–35.



provided instruction suitable for adjusting black youth to a subordinate position in the southern economy and supported the interests of southern conservatives, who, after slavery's demise, were in search of new forms of external control over black people.<sup>28</sup>

The ideological impetus for Hampton's manual labor program may have originated from what both Anderson and Eng suggest was Armstrong's idealization of his parents' missionary work in Hawaii in the mid-nineteenth century, which he considered a "noble one for a savage race." Like "Polynesian savages," black people, he believed, were "possessed with strange notions" and "had to be most carefully watched over" until they were appropriately civilized, which would require several generations of moral and religious development.<sup>29</sup> Drake remembered how this view persisted in the 1920s among teachers that "believed they were on a 'civilizing mission' and saw as a part of their role the curbing of students' 'natural passions' by maintaining proper decorum."<sup>30</sup> However, rather than believing in the "cognitive deficit of black people," which "implied" they were completely and hopelessly incapable of learning, Drake discerned that this perspective was informed by a conviction that "black people" were just "oversexed and had in-born tendencies toward being lazy." Efforts to "keep the Negro in his place" through proper moral training and a system of social control was the job of Hampton's white faculty, many of whom Drake considered "unqualified to teach" and sympathetic in their views with southern racists.<sup>31</sup>

This view of black people as intemperate and lazy deeply informed the social constraints and disciplinary regime that characterized Drake's early experience at Hampton. As he later observed of his time at Hampton, "the long arm of New England Puritanism" guided the policies governing student behavior and their interaction with one another, as well as with faculty members, administrators, and visitors to the campus. "You could neither smoke nor drink; only seniors were allowed to have girlfriends"; and "on Sundays we were forced to sing "spirituals and plantation melodies." The administration only permitted senior male students to escort female students to and from school functions where faculty and staff closely scrutinized their interactions. Such was

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<sup>28</sup>George Clement Bond, "A Social Portrait of John Gibbs St. Clair Drake: An American Anthropologist," *American Ethnologist* 15, no. 4 (November 1988): 765-66; James Leloudis, *Schooling the New South: Pedagogy, Self, and Society in North Carolina, 1880-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 182.

<sup>29</sup>Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South*, 38.

<sup>30</sup>Bowser, "Studies of the African Diaspora," 5.

<sup>31</sup>One student alleged faculty to be members of the Ku Klux Klan. Robert Coles to W. E. B. Du Bois, 17 June 1928, W. E. B. Du Bois Papers, 4877/25-82.

the case, for example, in Ogden Hall where, during Saturday evening movie showings, “the lights remained on” to “prevent,” as one teacher explained, “any immorality” from taking place.<sup>32</sup>

The success of the Hampton Idea depended on controlling the day-to-day lives of Hampton students and forcing them into submission to the racial structure of authority in the South. As Drake recalled, “the mold of education laid down by Armstrong” did not “emphasize an intellectual life,” but the process of “character building.” Of Hampton’s disciplinary routine, Drake remembered how “the commandant of cadets and his assistants” were all “black; the dean of women, the academic deans, and board of trustees were white.” Of the students themselves, Drake notes that they “were all organized on a semi-military basis. The men” were required to wear “khaki uniforms,” submit to “regular room inspections,” and “march,” in military order, “to lunch, dinner,” and “chapel services.”<sup>33</sup> All students were expected to adhere to this strict moral regime; that many failed to do so is evidenced by the school’s low graduation rates. According to Anderson, Hampton graduated only one-fifth of its students throughout its first half-century.<sup>34</sup> Many of those who did not finish were, as Drake remarked, simply disqualified because they “possessed bad work habits” or demonstrated a “weakness of character.”<sup>35</sup>

Believing “the dull plodder” the “real leader of his people” and black colleges “the stepping stone” to “industrial work,” Armstrong’s successor, Hollis Burke Frissell, proved much more rigid in his views on black education and “the place” of the freedmen in southern society.<sup>36</sup> A native of New York and a graduate of Union Theological Seminary, Frissell was an ordained Presbyterian minister, who, like Armstrong, arrived to Hampton Institute from outside the South in 1880. For thirteen years he served as Hampton’s chaplain, before being made principal after Armstrong’s death in 1893. In this position, Frissell worked to “consolidate industrial training” at Hampton by “raising its work-study program to a gospel that,” as Raymond Wolters argues, “disavowed the higher education of blacks” all together.<sup>37</sup> Admitting only those students that chose to “take a trade,” Frissell’s tenure effectively transformed Hampton from a teachers’ training school into what

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<sup>32</sup> Bond, “A Social Portrait of John Gibbs St. Clair Drake,” 765.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 766.

<sup>34</sup> Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South*, 54.

<sup>35</sup> St. Clair Drake, “Remarks by Drake,” 27 September 1986, Box 6, folder 1, St. Clair Drake Papers.

<sup>36</sup> Wolters, *The New Negro on Campus*, 231.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

Drake maintained was a “vocational one.”<sup>38</sup> The cumulative effects of Frissell’s reforms led the U.S. Commissioner of Education to say that he had ever only “seen one real industrial school and that” was “Hampton Institute . . . a model of education for Negroes in the South.”<sup>39</sup>

Drake considered Hampton’s emphasis on vocational training as “part of a larger effort to ingratiate” the school to “those who believed that blacks should be trained for subordinate positions in American society.”<sup>40</sup> If Armstrong had sought the tolerant acquiescence of the white South in hopes of attracting northern capital into that region of the country, Frissell actively solicited their “friendship” so much so that even Copeland, who later fanned the flames of public sentiment in favor of a racial integrity law, considered him a “true friend of the South.” To Frissell, Copeland explained, belonged “the delicate task of being true to the institution, true to the men and women who supported it, and true to the pupils of the Negro race who came to be educated.” By being true to the “sentiments and customs of the white South,” which held Hampton Institute as a “Northern school on Southern soil . . . sustained by Northern money and conducted by Northern teachers,” Frissell earned Copeland’s strongest praise.<sup>41</sup>

Frissell’s ability to play to the racial sensibilities of white southern elites was matched only by his acumen for attracting financial support from northern industrial philanthropy. In fact, Drake saw this relationship as the school’s most defining characteristic. As he explains, the “New England whites that ran Hampton were very proud of the fact that they had set it up and were able to get money from great railroad magnates.” Hampton’s reputation, Drake concluded, rested on its claim of “having the biggest endowments of any of the other black colleges.”<sup>42</sup> Marking what Anderson identified as a critical shift in Hampton’s history, Frissell’s legacy was based on his ability to bring together the interests of southern segregationists and northern industrial philanthropy around a rearticulation of the Hampton Idea.<sup>43</sup> Following

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<sup>38</sup>St. Clair Drake, “Remarks by Drake,” 27 September 1986, Box 6, folder 1, St. Clair Drake Papers, Arthur Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library.

<sup>39</sup>P. P. Claxton, “A Great Educator,” *Southern Workman* 1 (November 1917): 577.

<sup>40</sup>St. Clair Drake, “Remarks by Drake,” 27 September 1986, Box 6, folder 1, St. Clair Drake Papers.

<sup>41</sup>W. S. Copeland, “A Neighbors Opinion,” *Southern Workman* 1 (November 1917): 610–11.

<sup>42</sup>Bond, “A Social Portrait of John Gibbs St. Clair Drake,” 766.

<sup>43</sup>Claxton, “A Great Educator,” 577; for a discussion of Hampton’s relationship to organized philanthropy, see W. E. B. Du Bois, “Hampton Institute,” *Crisis* 26 (August 1929): 277–78; in 1926, a year before Drake’s arrival, the total endowment of ninety-nine black colleges and normal schools had risen to \$20.3 million, and more than \$14 million belonged to Hampton and Tuskegee, see Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South*, 249.

Frissell's passing in 1917, ex-President William Howard Taft could confidently look to Hampton as that national force of reunion, peace, and prosperity first envisioned by Armstrong a half-century earlier. Speaking as president of Hampton's Board of Trustees, Taft heralded the school as "the solution" to the ever-pressing question of "what was to be done with the Negro." Hampton proved that "the Negro could be economically valuable to the southern communities where most of his race lives and where chances of making progress are very much better than elsewhere."<sup>44</sup> By moving away from Hampton's teacher training moorings, Frissell held back the liberalization of black education. With the coming of Hampton's third white principal, however, change was on the horizon.

### Change Comes to Hampton

Following Frissell's death in 1917, Hampton's Board of Trustees elected to look outside of the school for new leadership, which came in the person of James E. Gregg. A graduate of Harvard and Yale, Gregg spent fifteen years as an "active minister" in Massachusetts, sharing with Hampton's past principals a New England pedigree and "crusading spirit" regarding the education of black people.<sup>45</sup> Like his predecessors, Gregg considered industrial education essential to reforming southern blacks, stating, in a letter to Du Bois, that Hampton should "remain a vocational school" in the service of "training workers of the race." Revealing of a critical rupture with past regimes, however, Gregg also believed that Hampton had to respond to broader social changes taking place in American society after the First World War and reflect, at least in part, the hopes and aspirations of its students, who, as he observed, "possessed a new self-consciousness, a new impatience of their disadvantages, and a new eagerness to get knowledge, skill, culture, wealth, and all else that is suggested by the word 'progress.'"<sup>46</sup> In this regard, Gregg's arrival signified change embodied by a series of bold and pioneering measures he undertook to modernize Hampton.

Gregg's most significant reform involved elevating Hampton from a normal school to a college. This is what made Drake observe of his own arrival to Hampton in 1927 that it was a "school in the midst of transforming itself."<sup>47</sup> Responding to demands by state accrediting

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<sup>44</sup>William H. Taft, "A Man of Poise," *Southern Workmen* 1 (November 1917): 582-83.

<sup>45</sup>Wolters, *The New Negro on Campus*, 226.

<sup>46</sup>Robert Gregg to W. E. B. Du Bois, 20 October 1927, W. E. B. Du Bois Papers, 4877/14-200.

<sup>47</sup>Drake, Introduction to *American Diary*, xvi.

agencies for college trained teachers, Gregg actually began this work before Drake arrived to campus, implementing measures designed to “bring Hampton in line” with other state teacher-training institutions in Farmville, Harrisburg, and Fredericksburg. He persuaded trustees to expand the two-year normal course into a standard four-year program, which granted a degree of Bachelors of Arts in education for the first time to Hampton students. In addition, Gregg introduced a master’s program in school administration to the Collegiate Division, which, by 1927, also included degree-granting programs in the Library School and School of Business.<sup>48</sup> Although, as Drake contends, “emphasis” at Hampton remained “heavily on Booker T. Washington’s philosophy,” these strides to liberalize the school’s curriculum represented a critical revision to the Hampton Idea, which previously made little room for the higher education of black people.<sup>49</sup>

With a view toward transforming Hampton to better reflect the student population, Gregg’s reforms also included desegregating the faculty, becoming the first principal in the school’s history to appoint black teachers to positions in academic departments. “These were men,” remarked one student, “comparable in every respect to Hampton’s white professors”; the “living refutations” of the very idea that “Negroes were intellectually inferior to whites.”<sup>50</sup> Those in this group that most influenced Drake came to Hampton from outside of the South, carrying with them a biting disdain for racial segregation and a genuine concern in the black southern condition. An Afro-Canadian by birth and a graduate of Oberlin College, Nathaniel Dett was a seasoned composer and arranger of black religious and folk music when he arrived to Hampton Institute in 1918 to head the Music Department. Over the course of his two decades at Hampton, Dett founded the Hampton Choral Union, Musical Society, and Choir, all three of which were essential to the fundraising efforts of the school. Moreover, each of these endeavors were expressive of Dett’s interest in using black popular music as the basis for creating more complex orchestral forms, which, according to Wolters, “reflected the sophisticated style and high culture of New Negroes in the 1920s.”<sup>51</sup> Dett’s influence on Drake can

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<sup>48</sup>Gregg’s reforms were significant enough to capture the attention of the UNIA, see “Work that Hampton Institute is Doing,” *Negro World* 4 (November 1927): 2. Du Bois explains reforms as Hampton as yielding to state demands for more college trained teachers, see W. E. B. Du Bois, “The Hampton Strike,” draft of essay as submitted to *The Nation*, 20 November 1927, W. E. B. Du Bois Papers, 4877/82–212.

<sup>49</sup>St. Clair Drake, “In the Mirror of Black Scholarship: W. Allison Davis and Deep South,” in *Education and Black Struggle: Notes from the Colonized World*, ed. Robert Hill (Cambridge: Harvard Educational Review, 1974), 43.

<sup>50</sup>Waters, *American Diary*, 58–59.

<sup>51</sup>Anne Key Simpson, *Follow Me: The Life and Music of R. Nathaniel Dett* (Metuchen, NJ: The Scarecrow Press, 1993); Wolters, *The New Negro on Campus*, 250.

been seen in an early essay he wrote while chief editor of the *Hampton Script*. In response to that “class of Negroes” who, in his view, “wished to slough off the spiritual as a vestige of an unpleasant experience,” Drake called Dett’s efforts to keep them alive “noteworthy” and encouraged the singing of more spirituals at Hampton. Echoing Du Bois’s view in *The Souls of Black Folks* on the importance of rehabilitating the “sorrow songs” in a broader racial struggle for respect and recognition, Drake believed that “the educated classes” as well as “the masses” were coming to “recognize their general worth.” More than fodder for “shows staged for white visitors,” the preservation of this music at Hampton was, in Drake’s view, essential to “building a spiritual life” on campus and engendering a “respect for black culture” among students.<sup>52</sup>

Gregg also invited Thomas W. Turner to Hampton. Arriving from Howard University in 1922, Turner was “the first black person” to receive a doctorate from Cornell University and one of two well-known black botanists of the period, the other being C. Everett Just. As a biology and education major, Drake took classes with Turner and worked for him as a lab assistant. Through this experience he came to know him as “an outstanding Catholic layman,” earning his Garveyite father’s admiration for always “protesting against segregation in the Catholic Church.”<sup>53</sup> In addition to serving as president of the Federated Colored Catholics (FCC), Turner was an early member of the NAACP. While president of the Phoebus, Virginia branch throughout much of the 1920s, he spearheaded voter registration drives.<sup>54</sup> Turner’s “feisty fighting” influenced Drake, offering him a conception of black protest decades before the rise of the modern Civil Rights movement in the South.<sup>55</sup>

The person to “most influence” Drake at Hampton was Allison Davis. “Possessing” what Drake described as “larger horizons than Hampton itself,” Davis arrived in 1926, bearing “the message of Irving Babbitt’s New Humanism.”<sup>56</sup> In the culture wars of the 1920s, Drake remembered how this graduate from Williams and Harvard made a reputation for himself by deprecating, in poetry and prose, the influence of

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<sup>52</sup> St. Clair Drake, “The Singing of Negro Spirituals at Hampton,” *Hampton Script*, 9 (November 1929), 4–7.

<sup>53</sup> Bond, “A Social Portrait,” 766; Bowser, “Studies of the African Diaspora,” 7; Turner’s activities also captured the attention of Garvey’s followers, see “Dr. Turner to Sail for Europe,” *Negro World* 6 (24 August 1929), 3.

<sup>54</sup> Morris MacGregor, *The Emergence of a Black Catholic Community: St. Augustine’s in Washington, DC* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1999), 230–31; Bentley Anderson, *Black, White, and Catholic: New Orleans Interracialism, 1947–1956* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2005), 12–14.

<sup>55</sup> Bowser, “Studies of the African Diaspora,” 7.

<sup>56</sup> Drake, “In the Mirror of Black Scholarship,” 44.

the cultural New Negroes as vigorously as Babbitt condemned romantic writers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In an essay for the *Crisis* entitled "Our Negro Intellectuals," Davis attacked the New York-based black avant-garde scene made popular by the publication of Alain Locke's classic anthology. He criticized the works of Countee Cullen, Claude Mackay, Langston Hughes, and James Weldon Johnson specifically for representing "the most pernicious influence in Negro society." In their allusions to "African jungles," Davis believed they invoked a primitivism that implied "the Negro" as "bestial" and devoid of the "self respect" necessary to challenge and overcome the effects of "slavery and segregation."<sup>57</sup> Revealing of Babbitt's conservative influence on him, Davis called for a more forceful doctrine of moderation and restraint, one that would promote racial respect and recognition and, at the same time, address the economic and social conditions of the black laboring masses. According to Drake, Davis's criticisms were reflective of those black intellectuals who were very self-conscious about what obligations they had to the masses. . . . We, as their students," he maintained, "shared these concerns as members of that tiny college-trained group that had emerged in the sixty odd years that had elapsed since slavery was abolished."<sup>58</sup> While many educated blacks were "running away from the South," Drake remembered how Davis called for black intellectuals to "return to the bosom of the masses." This was, as he explains, "revolutionary talk," "the effects" of which "forced us," as students, "to straighten-up our heads."<sup>59</sup>

Progress in the hiring of black faculty had a transformative effect on Hampton. If, as Du Bois once claimed, Hampton was "a center of . . . an exaggerated worship of white people," the addition of black faculty now meant, according to Drake, that students with "an intellectual bent" had models "around which they could gather."<sup>60</sup> In this universe where white philanthropists were deified by buildings named in their honor, Drake remembered how black faculty "took the position that students ought to learn to use their heads critically, to think, as well as to render social service."<sup>61</sup> As Drake remembered of Davis in particular, he "tried to stimulate young black students to write. He gave magnificent lectures on English literature, and some of us who were

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<sup>57</sup>Allison Davis, "Our Negro Intellectuals," *Crisis* 35, no. 8 (August 1928): 268–69; see also Alain Locke, ed. *The New Negro: Voices of the Harlem Renaissance* (New York: Pantheon, 1925).

<sup>58</sup>St. Clair Drake, "Remarks by Drake," 27 September 1986, Box 6, folder 1, St. Clair Drake Papers.

<sup>59</sup>St. Clair Drake, "In the Mirror of Black Scholarship," 44.

<sup>60</sup>W. E. B. Du Bois to Miss J. E. Davis, 16 June 1917, W. E. B. Du Bois Papers, 4877/5–886; Drake, "In the Mirror of Black Scholarship," 43.

<sup>61</sup>Drake, "In the Mirror of Black Scholarship," 43–44.



majoring in other fields took all of his courses that we could because he was a breath of fresh air." Throughout his time at Hampton, Drake took courses with Davis in "advanced nineteenth century English literature" and was exposed to the "latest critical literary theory." He read Babbitt's *Rousseau and Romanticism* and came to believe that "college educated Negroes" needed to "live among the people of the South in building up an atmosphere of scholarship and culture."<sup>62</sup> Replacing the Baptist fundamentalism of his father, New Humanism became Drake's "philosophical rudder" and Davis his principal intellectual influence.<sup>63</sup>

Reflective of his awareness of broader cultural and political currents in the era of the New Negro, Gregg also worked to enhance the learning environment of Hampton by encouraging the teaching of courses in black culture, literature, and history; establishing programs in "black and African studies"; organizing campus-wide "essay contests" on such topics as "The Ideals of Negro Poetry" and "The Value of the Study of Negro History"; launching the West African Student Union; and presiding over the *Southern Workman's* publication of some sixty articles on Africa. Drake's own awareness of an Afro-American intellectual estate mobilized around "setting the historical record straight" was made possible within this context. "While I was at Hampton," he recalls, "I read Du Bois' columns in the *Crisis*" and became familiar with the works of "an illustrious group of black intellectuals," who, it seemed to him, "all taught at Howard."<sup>64</sup> In striking contrast to past regimes where labor was routine, Gregg's reforms exposed Drake to new currents shaping black thought.

Over the course of his four years at Hampton, Drake served as president of the student government, ran the college chapter of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, played on the soccer team, and served as editor of the *Hampton Script*. As editor of the *Script*, he came to "learn" what "a powerful force the press was for progressive change" and took to heart "the advice of friendly professors" that pointed out to him their "concern for the proper use of language and format . . . if our ideas were to win a hearing in high places."<sup>65</sup> Drake's own ideas were informed by his increasing awareness of the black condition behind the "cotton curtain." As he explains, "it was not until I visited Tuskegee as a representative of the student council that I first experienced the Deep South's segregation, which impacted Booker

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<sup>62</sup>St. Clair Drake, "Students Answer Professor," *Crisis* 37, no. 10 (October 1930): 337.

<sup>63</sup>St. Clair Drake, "Remarks by Drake," 27 September 1986, Box 6, folder 1, St. Clair Drake Papers.

<sup>64</sup>St. Clair Drake, "Remarks by Drake," 27 September 1986, Box 6, folder 1, St. Clair Drake Papers; Bowser, "Studies of the African Diaspora," 7.

<sup>65</sup>Drake, Introduction to *American Diary*, xvi.



T. Washington.”<sup>66</sup> In contrast to the “mild system of segregation in Virginia,” Drake’s brief sojourn into the state of Alabama in the age of Scottsboro opened his eyes to a more entrenched system of Jim Crow, held together by anti-black violence and intimidation.<sup>67</sup>

Drake’s awareness of segregation was shared by a generation of students, who also arrived to Hampton during this period. Reforms initiated by Gregg to transform Hampton into a college served to also grow the school’s student population. Whereas past regimes drew from poor agricultural regions in Virginia and neighboring states, Gregg’s efforts to elevate the academic rigor of Hampton’s curriculum was dependent on attracting a larger number of students from outside the South. As one such student remembered of this period, there was “about one thousand students, all in my age range,” coming “from about thirty states and several foreign countries in the Caribbean and Africa.”<sup>68</sup> Of this number, over four hundred arrived from outside Virginia well prepared for advanced academic study at the collegiate level.<sup>69</sup> In the diversity of their regionalisms some were distinguished as the children of a rising black urban middle class, many of whose reputations on campus were fixed to the accomplishments of their families. There was John Spaulding, the son of Charles Spaulding, founder of the North Carolina Mutual Life Insurance Company. A longtime supporter of the NAACP and “a paramount figure in the world of business,” Spaulding was once held up by DuBois as a model of black potential.<sup>70</sup> John Sengstacke was also Drake’s contemporary. The nephew of Robert Abbott, Sengstacke was heir to a publishing empire that included the *Chicago Defender*, the nation’s leading black newspaper at the time.<sup>71</sup> Corresponding to a moment when over sixty percent of the student body was female, Drake also encountered Dorothy Maynor, who later became “an internationally known concert singer.” According to Drake, Maynor was a close friend of Peter Mbiyu Koinange, one of several African students at Hampton.<sup>72</sup>

African students arrived to Hampton through an integrated network of industrial philanthropy and mission schools. As Waters

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<sup>66</sup>Bond, “A Social Portrait of John Gibbs St. Clair Drake,” 763.

<sup>67</sup>Bowser, “Studies of the African Diaspora,” 5–6.

<sup>68</sup>Waters, *American Diary*, 62.

<sup>69</sup>Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South*, 273.

<sup>70</sup>David Levering Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: A Biography of a Race, 1868–1919* (New York: Henry Holt, 1993), 202.

<sup>71</sup>Waters, *American Diary*, 62; also see Marybeth Gasman, “Swept Under the Rug? A Historiography of Gender and Black Colleges” (working paper, Graduate School of Education, University of Pennsylvania, 2007), 7–10.

<sup>72</sup>St. Clair Drake, “Mbiyu Koinange and the Pan African Movement,” in *Pan-African Biography*, ed. Robert Hill (Los Angeles: African Studies Center, University of California, 1987), 167.

recalls, "there was Sumner from Sierra Leone, Caluza from South Africa, Kagwa from Uganda, and Koinange from Kenya."<sup>73</sup> Drake considered Koinange as particularly important in the hagiography of African independence. Described by Drake as "second only to Jomo Kenyatta" in "prestige" and "influence," Koinange arrived to Hampton from a mission school in Kenya on a scholarship from the Phelps-Stokes educational commission. The son of a Kikuyu chief, Koinange's presence at Hampton sensitized Drake and other students to Kenya's problems under white settler rule. From Koinange, Drake specifically learned about the land struggle among the Kikuyu, the effects of which "made" him a "partisan in the African's struggle for getting the land back." Drake also learned of Koinange's intentions of returning to Kenya to establish a Teachers College modeled after Tuskegee, an endeavor for which he "promised" to make him dean.<sup>74</sup>

In the same way that Koinange "stimulated" Drake's interest in African affairs during this period, Drake believed that sustained contact with African Americans at Hampton may have had played a role in steeling "the resolve of African students to struggle for independence in their own homelands." Arriving to Hampton less than a month before the student strike, Koinange, according to Drake, "saw black students close down a powerful educational institution." The idea that "vigorous nonviolent pressure" could effectively force change was one, Drake believed, not lost on Koinange and other Africans at Hampton.<sup>75</sup> More than this, Hampton was an important site of Black Atlantic convergence, marking Drake's earliest direct contact with African people. In the decades following his graduation, Drake would move with Koinange through multiples spheres of black intellectual and political consciousness in England, Ghana, and Kenya. Given the history of Hampton Institute's early regimes and their relationship to colonial governments in Africa in the 1920s, the irony of this critical period of Diaspora making was that it was underwritten by missionary and industrial philanthropy.

Though differentiated by their regionalisms and class status, this generation of students acted in one accord in calling for even greater reform at Hampton. With the support of only a few black professors, they aggressively pushed back against the rigid strictures of segregation that spilled over onto the campus in the aftermath of the racial integrity law with a view toward pushing forward reforms begun by Gregg. While progressive compared to his predecessors, however, Gregg's effort to modernize Hampton and, at the same time, placate segregationist interests? in Virginia would ultimately expose the limits of his reforms,

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<sup>73</sup>Waters, *American Diary*, 62.

<sup>74</sup>St. Clair Drake, "Mbiyu Koinange and the Pan African Movement," 161-70.

<sup>75</sup>*Ibid.*, 165.

setting him on a collision course with the students he worked so hard to bring to the school. As with several other black schools in the South during this period, change in the name of “progress” would exact a cost from Hampton, the extent of which only became apparent after Drake arrived to campus.

### Growing Pains at Hampton

In his autobiography, Enoch P. Waters described traveling as a student on a train to Hampton Institute. A native of Philadelphia, Waters had never ventured south of Maryland and was unprepared for what occurred en route to Hampton.

I was surprised . . . when . . . the conductor came through the coach where I was seated, tapping me on the shoulder and telling me to take my baggage and move to the next car forward . . . I had been Jim Crowed . . . And before I could recover from this first shock, I was Jim Crowed again, this time on the ferry to Fort Monroe.<sup>76</sup>

On his arrival to Fort Monroe, Waters continued on a bus hired by Hampton to transport students to campus. On arriving, Waters went to overturn this practice on the Delaware Road Line. Believing the conductor had exceeded his authority Waters formally submitted a letter of complaint to the railroad, stating that he was “an interstate passenger” for whom “federal regulations didn’t require racial segregation.” Waters was well aware that the law he had been subjected to . . . was “a Virginia law,” applying only to “passengers traveling from one point to another within the state.” Armed with this information, he refused to acknowledge any law that would “render” him “inhumane or objectionable.” In the absence of a fitting restitution, he “spread the word” to other Hampton students to “pledge themselves . . . not to observe the law” segregating passengers on the “Delaware Road Line.” When a group of students, led by Waters, refused to give up their seats in the “whites only” section of the train on a return trip to campus after the Christmas holidays, the conductors responded by simply removing entire carloads of white passengers so as to neutralize the effects of this protest. Of such a maneuver, Waters simply exclaimed, “we were again outwitted by Jim Crow!”<sup>77</sup>

Waters’ act of resistance reflected the courage black students displayed in directly confronting segregation in the South in the 1920s. As Drake remembers of this period, “there was a general mood of protest

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<sup>76</sup>Waters, *American Diary*, 56–57.

<sup>77</sup>*Ibid.*, 56–57.

and impatience” that translated into a willingness on the part of students to change these outworn traditions.<sup>78</sup> The byproduct of reforms begun by Gregg in the late 1910s, these were young men and women that enrolled to Hampton in record numbers. As Wolters notes, most were high school graduates, who expanded the college division from twenty-one in 1920 to over four hundred by 1927.<sup>79</sup> Coming mostly from outside the state, they soon made clear to Gregg that the Hampton Idea, no matter how mild, would not long prevail in the era of the New Negro.

Corresponding to the widening of Jim Crow across Virginia, Hampton students increasingly experienced the “mold” of education first “set down” by Armstrong as sinister in its intentions.<sup>80</sup> They did not see, nor care to understand the extent to which Gregg had reformed Hampton. In their eyes the Hampton Idea remained unchanged from its past, serving as a reminder, as Du Bois once claimed, for why “colored men of education do not like Hampton Institute.”<sup>81</sup> Moreover, if racial integrity laws in the state were bound up with the eugenicist movement, then, as Drake explains, students at Hampton were deeply aware of the social implications of this racial logic. On reflecting on the state of anthropology in the 1920s, Drake, for example, remembered how he and many of his peers at Hampton “resented the idea of a white man . . . measuring students’ heads, to check under their arms with a color top, and to ask questions about the skin color of their parents and grandparents, and to inquire how ‘white’ or ‘Indian’ the family traditions claimed they were.” As Drake explained, “we radicals” were hostile to those ideas most closely associated, in our minds, with paleontology and anthropometry . . . They seemed “extremely racist” and “we (Hampton students) were firm believers in ‘Progress.’”<sup>82</sup>

Though Gregg was far from the architect of the Hampton Idea, its persistence in this climate of race consciousness made him vulnerable to attack. This was especially the case with student perceptions of Hampton’s longstanding disciplinary regime. Placing blame for its continuance squarely at his feet, one student reported to Du Bois that “Dr Gregg and all of his co-workers have spent more time in trying to teach the Negroes their places . . . than they have in trying to give them an education that would make them men and women capable of facing the

<sup>78</sup> Bowser, “Studies of the African Diaspora,” 6.

<sup>79</sup> Wolters, *The New Negro on Campus*, 231.

<sup>80</sup> Bond, “A Social Portrait of John Gibbs St. Clair Drake,” 766.

<sup>81</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois to Miss J. E. Davis, 16 June 1917, W. E. B. Du Bois Papers, 4877 5–886.

<sup>82</sup> St. Clair Drake, “Mbiyu Koinange and the Pan African Movement,” 165; St. Clair Drake, “Reflections on Anthropology and the Black Experience,” *Anthropology and Education Quarterly* 9, no. 2 (1978): 90–91.

world and its great problem.”<sup>83</sup> Despite his best efforts to modernize Hampton, Gregg was viewed, by the very students he sought to attract, as a symbol of the past, sharing with his predecessors, as Drake particularly believed, a genuine commitment to “character building among Negroes.”<sup>84</sup>

Most in Drake’s generation believed Gregg and his administration had failed to recognize that Hampton was no longer a school for “docile elementary students” but for young men and women who, “believing they could think for themselves,” demanded respect, recognition, and greater independence for intellectual and social pursuits.<sup>85</sup> Adding further insult to injury, in the aftermath of the Messenberg Bill, Hampton began more fervently than ever to adhere to laws governing segregation at public institutions within Virginia. Sites of potential interracial contact on campus, namely the school’s guesthouse, theater, and cafeteria, were all segregated spaces. As Du Bois argued, such conditions served to only “insult” a “twice insulted people . . . No other civilized group in the world,” after all, “is asked to accept such personal insults in their own homes, schools, and social life as Hampton demanded of its Negroes.” Such a proposition, wrote Du Bois, was as “monstrous” as it was “insulting.”<sup>86</sup>

Following the public controversy that erupted around the performance of the Denishawn Dancers in Ogden Hall, Gregg expended considerable energy in protecting his academic reforms by appeasing those interests upon whose satisfaction the survival of the college depended.<sup>87</sup> In public statements, Gregg expressed his continued faithfulness to the school’s founding mission as “a vocational institution for Negro youth,” and assured all concerned that Hampton’s “distinctive place of highest usefulness was that of a professional and technical college.” As principal, he promised “not to forsake any of the characteristics that made Hampton famous in years gone by” but cultivate among students “a wholesome respect for hard work and hand skill, as well as for character, moral fitness, trustworthiness, and dependability.”<sup>88</sup>

In hopes of avoiding future controversies like that resulting in the Messenburg Bill, Gregg took the initiative to “bar the public from attending social and cultural events” at Hampton without his expressed permission and instituted a “fine of ten to thirty-five dollars for any

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<sup>83</sup>Wolters, *The New Negro on Campus*, 248.

<sup>84</sup>Bond, “A Social Portrait of John Gibbs St. Clair Drake,” 766.

<sup>85</sup>Wolters, *The New Negro on Campus*, 248.

<sup>86</sup>W.E.B. Du Bois, “Social Equality at Hampton,” *Crisis* 30 (June 1925): 59–60.

<sup>87</sup>Wolters, *The New Negro on Campus*, 252.

<sup>88</sup>*Ibid.*, 239.

person who . . . refused to sit in separate seats.”<sup>89</sup> By instituting these measures, he hoped to ensure the public that Hampton would remain an “institute” in every sense of the word and discourage any social mingling of the races under circumstances which could, as he believed, “lead to future embarrassment on either side.”<sup>90</sup> Gregg’s stance did not rest well with Drake’s generation at Hampton for whom the sting of segregation, wherever it existed, engendered a deep sense of racial disrespect. Moreover, despite strides made by Gregg to modernize the curriculum, his inability to completely break free from the past numbered his days as principal and, more importantly, complicated his legacy as the school’s “great reformer.”

### The Hampton Student Strike

In response to these conditions at Hampton, students struck on October 9, 1927, less than a month after Drake arrived. At issue, according to Drake, was Hampton’s “largely white faculty and administration. In Drake’s opinion, they still “believed” they were on “a civilizing mission among Negroes in the South.”<sup>91</sup> They simply could not see that the New Negro spirit had finally arrived to Hampton. In fact, “a general mood of protest and impatience had set in among black students across the South in the 1920s”. Writing for *The Nation* soon after the outbreak, Du Bois rejoiced in saying “the same wave of revolt against impossible conditions that has already aroused students at Fisk, Howard, Lincoln, Shaw, Johnson Smith and other institutions has at last reached Hampton Institute where it has been long overdue.” To many from the outside looking in, it surely seemed as if the “New Negro” had finally “arrived” to the South. In the very least, Du Bois observed, it suggested that “the Hampton Idea” was finally “breaking down by its own weight.” Gregg’s “yielding” to demands for more “college trained teachers” had brought forth “college men who were doing some thinking for themselves.” Gone forever from the scene, Du Bois concluded, were the “docile teachers,” who were “expected to know their place and not be contaminated by college ‘ideals.’”<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>89</sup>“Hampton Bars Public from Its Stadium,” *Hampton Daily News* 15, 3 December 1926.

<sup>90</sup>Wolters, *The New Negro on Campus*, 236.

<sup>91</sup>Bowser, “Studies of the African Diaspora,” 5.

<sup>92</sup>Drake mentions the Hampton strike in the context of other strikes at black schools in the South, see Bowser, “Studies of the African Diaspora,” 5; W. E. B. Du Bois, “The Hampton Strike,” draft of essay submitted to *The Nation*, 20 November 1927, W. E. B. Du Bois Papers 4877/82–212; see also Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South*, 263–70.

Ogden Hall is of particular importance; this was the place where the idea for the Messenberg Bill was born in 1925. Less than two years later, it was the context for a black response to the racial strictures of Hampton, which were informed by the caste-enforcing system of Jim Crow in Virginia. As Drake explains, it was a moment that spontaneously gave rise to a movement, which was long in coming.

It happened innocently enough one Saturday night... when the seniors, who were sitting in the back of Ogden Hall with their girlfriends, demanded that the lights be turned off. They started singing, 'Lights out, lights out,' and the dean of women, who was a white New England woman, came around and said, 'What's all this disorder about?' The seniors wanted to know why the lights were on. She said, 'Because I understand there has been immorality going on back here'... The students got up and stalked out... At noon Sunday, Principal Gregg came to the dining room expecting to hear the Lord's Prayer. Instead, he discovered students singing 'Oh freedom, oh freedom, over me yet, before I'll be a slave I'll be buried in my grave and go home to my Lord and be free.' When the students refused, for a second time, to sing spirituals during a visit from Sir Gordon Guggisberg of the Gold Coast, Gregg took measures to punish the offenders.<sup>93</sup>

The act of "turning on the lights" in Ogden Hall violated a long-standing privilege that allowed for seniors in the Academic Department to take young ladies to certain evening exercises. Never before in the history of this tradition, reported Du Bois, was ever a "complaint made regarding inappropriate conduct among students." Even "if lovemaking and necking actually did take place, he argued, "is there any institution in the United States... where such things did not occur?" This was not just a matter of improper protocol, which, as he discovered, required that notification of all policy changes go through Hampton's Student Council. Instead, it was interpreted as a "direct insult" to the student body, and "especially to the womanhood of the Negro race."<sup>94</sup> However, the litany of student demands that soon followed did not rest on this incident alone. Instead, student petitions embodied a revolutionary fervor to break free from the past and transform Hampton into a reflection of their collective desires. Bound together in nonviolent action, students set their sights on finally overthrowing the Hampton Idea.

Following the outbreak of the strike, students began bombarding Du Bois's office at the *Crisis* with letters requesting him to send an

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<sup>93</sup>Even though Drake maintains that the strike did not raise any sharp questions about segregation, it did constitute a response to the widening of segregation in Virginia as evidenced by Gregg's policies, see Bond, "A Social Portrait of John Gibbs St. Clair Drake," 765–66.

<sup>94</sup>W. E. B. Du Bois, "The Hampton Strike," draft of essay submitted to *The Nation* 20 November 1927, W. E. B. Du Bois Papers, 4877/82–212; see also W. E. B. Du Bois, "Hampton Students Strike for Justice," W. E. B. Du Bois Papers, 4877/22–237.



“investigator” down to the school and translate its meaning to the larger public. Identified simply as “A Student Onlooker,” one student believed that by so doing, Du Bois would be instrumental in helping to “free us from the clutches of the white man’s almighty dollar.”<sup>95</sup> Another frantically declared, “we the students have been wronged, wronged, wronged! Yesterday we struck. No inspection, no church, no grace at dinner. At chapel we refused to show off before some Governor from Europe . . . The whites are bewildered . . . We have a strong committee of twenty bold, honest, upright men pleading for justice, justice, justice.” He ended by telling Du Bois that “we must stick” and to “let our mothers, fathers, and race know.”<sup>96</sup> As Robert A. Coles, one of the leaders of the strike, proclaimed, “Hampton’s new students possessed ‘a Du Bois ambition’ that would not mix with a ‘Booker T. Washington education.’”<sup>97</sup> In Du Bois, they all believed they had a sympathetic ear.

In the hours that passed since their public display of disobedience, students made their demands known. Of the some sixty-four grievances sent to Gregg and his administration was, as Drake remembered, the call for the hiring of “more Negro teachers” and administrators, higher academic standards, the termination of “racist, abusive, and unqualified faculty,” student representation in school governance, an end to Hampton’s disciplinary regime, and a “general amnesty” for all those involved in the strike. Seeing the “lights on” policy as a particular insult, they also called for its termination.<sup>98</sup>

In a letter sent out to all parents, Gregg offered his synopsis of events, the voice and tone of which reflected his trivialization of the strike and his less than sincere effort to address students’ demands. Deliberately distorting events leading up to the strike, Gregg stated that it all began with students’ “dissatisfaction with the lighting in Ogden Hall at a moving picture show on Saturday evening.” This was followed by their “refusal to admit the inspecting officer in James Hall,” the boys dormitory, and “not participating,” with the exception of the choir, in “the singing of hymns at morning and evening chapel services,” though as Du Bois was mindful to point out, “they did recite the Lord’s Prayer.” The following day Gregg reported, “over four hundred students “absented themselves from the classrooms and shops.” Unconvinced of the strike’s independent inertia, Gregg alleged that most students must have been “under threat and intimidation by others.” Of the demands,

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<sup>95</sup>A Student Onlooker to W. E. B. Du Bois, 13 October 1927, W. E. B. Du Bois Papers, 4877/22–239.

<sup>96</sup>A Loyal Hamptonian to W. E. B. Du Bois, 10 October 1927, W. E. B. Du Bois Papers, 4877/22–238.

<sup>97</sup>Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South*, 274.

<sup>98</sup>Bond, “A Social Portrait of John Gibbs St. Clair Drake,” 766; Wolters, *The New Negro on Campus*, 267.



he simply remarked that most were “not of great importance, impracticable,” and “without merit.” In a show of conciliation, however, Gregg promised to consider them on condition students returned to class.<sup>99</sup>

Agreeing to suspend the strike on Gregg’s promise to give their grievances a fair hearing, students returned to class. The following day, having consulted with the Board of Trustees, he returned with his decision. Without addressing any of the students’ demands, Gregg only promised to pursue a course of action that would “prevent a reoccurrence of disorder.” He assured that “young women” and “new students,” the last of which included Drake, “would not be held responsible for acts of deliberate subordination”; those students who “absented themselves from classes and work routines” would be “put on immediate probation until the Commandant of Cadets determined their satisfactory conduct and right of spirit”; finally, those “ringleaders,” guilty of “inciting others to insubordination” were to be “immediately expelled.”<sup>100</sup> As Drake recalled, “the administration’s insistence upon expelling the leaders of the strike” forced “a second strike, with the slogan ‘Not a one of us goes!’ We insisted,” he explained, “the amnesty of the leaders.”<sup>101</sup>

With the resumption of the student strike, Gregg took draconian measures by closing the school down and sending students home. “Explaining that the work of the school could not be carried on with students who are disorderly and lawless,” the principal made it clear that “Hampton wanted no students save those who gave evidence of their sincere purpose to cooperate with officers and teachers in maintaining peace, order and the mutual friendliness without which the school could not be successful.” While promising to reopen the school in a month’s time, Gregg notified the students that they would have to reapply for admission and sign a loyalty oath swearing their obedience and cooperation toward these ends. Altogether, over four hundred students went home, sixty-nine received suspensions, and hundreds more were placed on probation. Of the twenty students who made up the Protest Committee, four were expelled. In Wolters view, the last group represented the “most talented” of Hampton’s senior class.<sup>102</sup>

In the aftermath of the strike’s repression, Roger Laws and Robert Coles, two of the four alleged student “ringleaders” that were expelled

<sup>99</sup>James E. Gregg to Parents and Guardians of the Strike, 14 October 1927, W. E. B. Du Bois Papers, 4877/22–235; W. E. B. Du Bois, “The Hampton Strike,” draft of essay submitted to *The Nation*, 20 November, 1927, W. E. B. Du Bois Papers 4877/82–212.

<sup>100</sup>James E. Gregg to Parents and Guardians of the Strike, 14 October 1927, W. E. B. Du Bois Papers, 4877/22–235.

<sup>101</sup>St. Clair Drake, “Mbiyu Koinange and the Pan African Movement,” 169.

<sup>102</sup>James E. Gregg to Parents or Guardians of the Students of Hampton Institute, 14 October 1927, W. E. B. Du Bois Papers 4877/22–35; Wolters, *The New Negro on Campus*, 256–57.

by Gregg landed at other institutions. However, their road back to school was not without difficulty. James L. Buck, the disciplinary dean at Hampton, who was accused by some of having membership in the Klan, informed Laws specifically that his inability to adjust to the "Hampton way" made him an undesirable candidate for re-enrollment. Citing what he considered as Laws' "destructive influence" on other students, Buck, like Gregg, remained unconvinced of the strike's "independence of spirit."<sup>103</sup> Failing in his efforts to return to Hampton to complete his senior year, Laws secured admission to Virginia State College on condition he repeat junior year due to the absence of classical courses on his transcript.<sup>104</sup>

Citing his father's insistence that "he apply elsewhere," as well as his own unwillingness to "receive the rebukes and humiliations that lied in store for him" should he return to Hampton, Coles decided against seeking readmission. However, in his efforts to enroll elsewhere, he was denied admission to three institutions. Although Coles excelled in his coursework, served as president of eleven student organizations, and was captain of Hampton's football team, he was unable to get a single member of Hampton Institute to "vouch" for his "character." As he informed Du Bois, "when schools write for my credit, Hampton readily sends out a letter of dishonorable dismissal," stating that "I am a suspicious character . . . Seemingly Hampton has," he informed Du Bois, "taken a difficult stand toward us . . . and is willing to give us no opportunity to make good." Though eventually landing at Virginia Union University, on condition he serve a short probationary period so as to "determine the true state of his character," Coles was indelibly impacted by the strike, doubting, as he informed Du Bois, that "students sensed the real value of our sacrifice or knew the suffering inflicted on us through hardship."<sup>105</sup>

Despite their effort to finally overturn the Hampton Idea, students failed to draw widespread support from parents, alumni, faculty, and several black newspapers. In fact, outside of Du Bois and Davis, the last of whom, as Drake notes, was the only faculty member to "support the students," most blacks and whites endorsed Gregg's handling of

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<sup>103</sup>J. L. B. Buck to Roger Laws, 13 April 1928, Du Bois Papers, 4877/25-898; for suspicion of Buck's membership in the KKK, see Robert A. Coles to W. E. B. Du Bois, 17 June 1928, W. E. B. Du Bois Papers, 4877/25-82; students claim of Klan membership among faculty and staff at Hampton also were expressed in student demands, see "Hampton Students Strike For Justice," W. E. B. Du Bois Papers, 4877/22-237.

<sup>104</sup>Roger Laws to W. E. B. Du Bois, 22 June 1928, W. E. B. Du Bois Papers, 4877/25-898.

<sup>105</sup>Robert A. Coles to W. E. B. Du Bois, 17 June 1928, W. E. B. Du Bois papers, 4877/25-82.

the affair, condemning outright the actions taken by students.<sup>106</sup> The *Baltimore Afro-American* criticized strikers for allegedly “placing more emphasis on social relations with coeds than upon a liberal education,” and a *Savannah Tribune* editorial denounced what it described as “a growing disposition among young folks nowadays to disrespect constituted authority.” In contrast to its bold denunciation of Copeland and the climate that gave way to a racial integrity law in 1926, the *Norfolk Journal and Guide* insisted that such a display was demonstrative of “ingratitude” among “Negro youth who were,” as another reporter maintained, apt to “look a gift horse in the mouth.”<sup>107</sup>

Adding to this chorus of rebukes, the Alumni Association expressed unanimous support for Gregg’s actions, seeing such measures as “essential to maintaining discipline at Hampton.” From his office at Tuskegee, Robert R. Moton, head of the Alumni Association, wrote that “Gregg has handled the situation most wisely and I have no doubt but that things will work out satisfactorily.”<sup>108</sup> Even Turner, who Drake admired for his “feisty fighting” on behalf of social justice, dismissed the strike. In a letter to Du Bois, Turner charged him with being “aloof from the pedagogical world, which makes it easy for you to identify certain student agitations with your adult ones.” Taking issue with Du Bois’s criticism of parents and the Alumni Association, Turner called his analysis “reckless” and “ruthless,” stating that he himself would rather “be with the construction gang than with the wrecking crew.”<sup>109</sup> Echoing Gregg’s own criticisms of the *Crisis* editor, whose ideas, he alleged, were at odds “with verifiable facts,” Turner was simply dismissed by Du Bois, believing that he, like most “colored teachers at Hampton,” was duly “warned against sympathizing with the students.”<sup>110</sup>

Among the voices of support for Gregg none rang louder than those of the parents, who, as evidenced by the words of one distraught mother, gave their unquestionable allegiance to the principal.

Please read this note to my son and tell him not to send me anymore telegrams unless signed by you. Mr. President, I am a hardworking woman

<sup>106</sup>For a discussion of Davis’ role in the strike, see St. Clair Drake, “In the Mirror of Black Scholarship,” 43–44.

<sup>107</sup>Editorial, *Baltimore Afro-American*, 22 October 22, 1927, 6; editorial, *Savannah Tribune*, 27 October 1927, 3; editorial *Indianapolis Recorder*, 29 October 29, 1927, 2; editorial, *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, 22 October 1927, 2.

<sup>108</sup>Wolters, *The New Negro on Campus*, 264.

<sup>109</sup>Thomas W. Turner to W. E. B. Du Bois, 6 December 1927, W. E. B. Du Bois Papers, 4877/24–765.

<sup>110</sup>James E. Gregg to W. E. B. Du Bois, 12 November 1927, W. E. B. Du Bois Papers, 4877/23–1218; see also, W. E. B. Du Bois, “The Hampton Strike,” draft of essay submitted to *The Nation* 20 November 1927, W. E. B. Du Bois Papers 4877/82–212.

with an invalid husband and I am not a young woman, but trying to work and give my boy an education . . . I mean for him to be governed by you and only you, for I do not know what my boy is raving about and I don't want to know, but want to keep him in school, the place and the only place I mean to send him.<sup>111</sup>

This support for Gregg drew the very life's blood from the student strike, returning the moral authority at Hampton to a principal who was beholden to forces opposed to "the higher education of Negroes" in the South. Even Du Bois gave into defeat, observing in his final analysis of the strike, that, "slowly the students are drifting back. Their parents for the most part have joined with Dr. Gregg and the Hampton faculty to bend them into submission. The strike has thus failed and the compelling heroes at Hampton are free to proceed with the Hampton Idea."<sup>112</sup>

### The Hampton Strike, a Postscript

Though victorious in battle, Gregg and his administration eventually lost the war. With most of the students back on campus, save for those few who were expelled, Hampton's Board of Trustees began to implement many of the student demands. Although Drake continued, in later years, to refer to "his Hampton" as a "vocational school," the last of Gregg's many reforms to liberalize the curriculum were finally implemented at the end of his second year.<sup>113</sup> With increasing enrollment in the college division, Gregg took the last step toward transforming Hampton into a college by no longer accepting students who had yet to complete a basic high school curriculum. In addition, he disbanded the trade school program first begun by Armstrong and expanded under Frissell.<sup>114</sup> In a shocking turn of events, however, the Board of Trustees also asked for Gregg's resignation in 1929, as well as that of the Disciplinary Dean and Commandant of Cadets. Citing continued unrest between the faculty, administration, and students, the Board of Trustees found it in the best interest of Hampton University to move forward without its "Great Reformer." Though not specifically given as the reason, the Board was clearly concerned with the expressed resentment of students toward the "very policies and social philosophy that underlay the recent endowment campaigns."<sup>115</sup>

<sup>111</sup>Mary Brown to James Gregg, 24 October 1927, W. E. B. Du Bois Papers, 4877/89-314.

<sup>112</sup>W. E. B. Du Bois, "The Hampton Strike," draft of essay submitted to *The Nation* 20 November 1927, W. E. B. Du Bois Papers, 4877/82-212.

<sup>113</sup>St. Clair Drake, "In the Mirror of Black Scholarship," 44.

<sup>114</sup>See Wolters, *The New Negro on Campus*, 231.

<sup>115</sup>Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South*, 274.

Responsible for liberalizing Hampton's curriculum, Gregg's moral authority as principal eventually did disintegrate under the "weight of his reforms." For a generation of New Negroes, who, as Drake remarked, "closed down a powerful educational institution," his departure was prophecy delivered. In his final letter to Du Bois as leader of the strike in 1928, Coles wrote, "if Gregg, Major Buck [Disciplinary Dean], and Major Washington [Commandant of Cadets] should resign, then Hampton would be a better Hampton."<sup>116</sup> Gregg's resignation was, many students believed, the final nail in the coffin of the Hampton Idea in their journey toward the realization of that long awaited "better Hampton."

Gregg's departure prepared the way for President George Phenix, who, in the *Hampton Script*, announced a "new era" at the school. Serving as vice principal under Gregg, Phenix was elevated from within. Described by Drake as "a heroic pioneer for the race," Phenix "restored peace" at Hampton.<sup>117</sup> In the three years following the student strike, Drake flourished, principally as the beneficiary of reforms first implemented by the embattled Gregg. Most importantly, he came under the influence of black professors, who, like Turner and Davis, demonstrated for him that scholarly pursuits and political commitments did not have to be mutually exclusive endeavors. The prosperity of the 1920s and its demise by the decade's end also informed Drake's increasing concern for the condition of the black masses, first assuming, as his task at Hampton, their defense against an intellectual elite who held them and their institutions in contempt. In response to a series of articles published by Arthur P. Davis (no relation to Allison Davis) in the *Crisis*, Drake exhibited traits that were revealing of how he sought to "function as a campus radical" in the years following the student strike.<sup>118</sup> In an article entitled "The Negro College Student," A. P. Davis berated the low quality of students and the impoverished state of education at black colleges throughout the South. The "Negro college student," he said, "was inferior compared to his northern counterpart. He studiously avoids hard work, never writes original papers upon any subject for the pure love of scholarship," and "abhors English, detests science, and hates mathematics." Referencing the wave of strikes at Hampton, Fisk, and Howard, Davis dismissed the "rants and raves" of students for greater "rights and privileges" as trivial and "misdirected." What they needed more than "greater liberties" to "smoke, dance, and play cards" was the opportunity to "develop specific aims and purposes" that would

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<sup>116</sup>Robert Coles to W. E. B. Du Bois, 17 June 1928, W. E. B. Du Bois Papers, 4877/25-82.

<sup>117</sup>St. Clair Drake, "A Student's Tribute," *Hampton Script* 12 (September 1929): 3.

<sup>118</sup>St. Clair Drake, "Reflections on Anthropology and the Black Experience," 91.

reconnect them to “a grand old body of pioneers in Negro scholarship” essential to formulating “true philosophy of learning and living.”<sup>119</sup> Speaking specifically of Hampton, Davis proffered the lack of academic preparedness among black students as the consequence of particular “attitudes” that were “hung over” from “the old trade school idea of education,” which, in his view, was a “contagious doctrine” that “ensnared” them in “the coils of practicality, materialism, and low academic achievement.”<sup>120</sup>

While such criticisms resonated with demands made by black students in 1927, they did not wholly ring true to the poststrike environment Drake experienced at Hampton. With the passing of an era, Drake recognized a very practical purpose for Hampton in “building up an atmosphere of scholarship and culture” in the South. For “the race” to succeed, he argued, a mastery of the “fundamentals” of life was necessary.<sup>121</sup> In a letter to Du Bois, Drake wrote that “Davis’s attempt to typify the Negro college student without analyzing him” had “its limitations” to “understanding” the larger social world that determined their degree of “preparedness for college.”<sup>122</sup> Southern society, with its history of slavery and Jim Crow segregation, was the culprit for the state of black youth and Hampton was best suited for their advancement. In Drake’s mind, “a scholar” was “not made by the institution alone, but by the world and institutions outside of the school.”<sup>123</sup> Change in these conditions rested, in part, on the commitment of black intellectuals to return to the South and render service among the masses. This was the major lesson Drake learned from his experiences at Hampton in the era of the student strike.

## Conclusion

Drake once said, to believe the call for reform at Hampton was peculiar to his generation is to believe that “the strike was over the lights being left on in Ogden Hall.”<sup>124</sup> As Anderson suggests, the Hampton Idea has always had its detractors, especially among students, who were, on occasion, prone to “question the relevancy of this philosophy to

<sup>119</sup>Arthur P. Davis, “The Negro College Student,” *Crisis* 37, no. 8 (August 1930): 270–71.

<sup>120</sup>Arthur P. Davis, “The Menace of Education,” *Crisis* 38, no. 8 (August 1931): 269–70.

<sup>121</sup>St. Clair Drake, “Students Answers Professor,” *Crisis* 37, no. 10 (October 1930): 337.

<sup>122</sup>St. Clair Drake to W. E. B. Du Bois, 10 August 1930, W. E. B. Du Bois Papers, 4877/33–93.

<sup>123</sup>St. Clair Drake, “Students Answers Professor,” 337.

<sup>124</sup>St. Clair Drake, “Remarks by Drake,” 27 September 1986, Box 6, folder 1, St. Clair Drake Papers.

the interests and aspirations of the Afro-American South.”<sup>125</sup> What distinguished Drake’s generation from previous ones, however, was that they represented the first and most significant organized challenge to the Hampton Idea from within Hampton itself; a unified and resolute group who, en masse, refused to accept their racial inferiority, or bow to symbols of segregation they encountered on the campus and beyond. Like Drake, many rode the crest of a rising tide of black militancy, which was uniquely formed by the promise of democracy after World War I, urban migrations, the warfare of the Red Summer, the nationalism of Marcus Garvey, the race consciousness of New Negro intellectuals, colonialism in Africa, expansion of the NAACP, and the proliferation of the black press. On their arrival to Hampton, they joined other black students from across the South in an effort to make black postsecondary schools more suitable to their own aspirations, hopes, and expectations.

In the 1920s, black youth in the South criticized the relationship of black schools to industrial philanthropy, demanded curriculum reforms, and chafed under the heavy weight of disciplinary regimes, labor routines, and a host of compulsory rules intended to govern student behavior and social interaction. Their frustrations with a culture and philosophy of education that was rooted in the hegemonic racial logic of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century led to a wave of protests and strikes. Against the constraints of segregation, and even popular opinion within the black community itself, students endeavored to make these semiautonomous spaces truer reflections of their collective desires. Deviating from the perspective of an Afro-American mainstream, Du Bois framed this wave of black student unrest as the reflection of a broader struggle for racial respect and recognition in the era of the New Negro.

In Drake’s own life history Hampton represented a critically discursive space where ideas of race, racial uplift, class, and education were revised, interrogated, challenged, and eventually overturned through the meaningful interaction between black faculty and students. It was black professors at Hampton that first moved him to want to study, understand, and change the odd world of Jim Crow, and a cosmopolitan group of students that sensitized him to the diversity of the black community. As a site of convergence between African and African American students, Hampton was where Drake first encountered a contemporary Africa. From Africans themselves, he developed an awareness of struggles against European colonial rule well before he chose Africa as his special field of study as a graduate student in anthropology at the University of Chicago in the early 1940s, or became active in a political

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<sup>125</sup> Anderson thoroughly documents a consistent pattern of discontent across Hampton’s early history, see Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South*, 33–78.



movement led by self-described Pan African intellectuals like George Padmore, Kwame Nkrumah, and Du Bois after the Second World War.

As a scholar who was deeply committed to a life of activism, Hampton first showed Drake the possibility for effecting progressive change in society through participating in movements based on organized, non-violent direct action. This was a lesson he would carry into a number of social movements over the remainder of his life. Decades before writing *Black Metropolis* with Horace Cayton, Drake moved through the spatially segregated environment of Hampton Institute much as he did the all black community of Bronzeville in Chicago's Southside. Like the spatially separate black life world, Drake first experienced Hampton as a community formed by collective desires and racial constraints, illuminating, in a final analysis, its place in his later formulation of a social theory of a black community.

Finally, in reflecting on his time at Hampton, Drake makes scant references to the presence of black female students. His silence, however, serves as a reflection of the hypermasculine, race conscious space that was Hampton in the 1920s. Since the student strike was largely motivated in defense of black womanhood, their invisibility in Drake's memory is especially striking given that they constituted the majority of the student body population. As Leloudis explains of black schools in North Carolina, women were essential to putting reforms into effect in the classroom as "they too refused to grow indifferent or discouraged to any of their rights and placed education at the center of a much broader contest over race, justice, and citizenship in a democratic society."<sup>126</sup> In this sense, while Drake's story adds to the existing historiography on black education in the South, it also advances new questions and topics for future research.

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<sup>126</sup>Daniel C. Thompson discusses gender demographics at black colleges during this period, see Daniel C. Thompson, *Private Black Colleges at the Crossroads* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1973), 49–58; Leloudis, *Schooling the New South*, 180–81.